IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering

PAPER • **OPEN ACCESS**

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To cite this article: Lena Mantziou 2019 *IOP Conf. Ser.: Mater. Sci. Eng.* **471** 072046

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Museum Cluster as Urban Defibrillator

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Abstract. In the 21st century, the regeneration and expansion of cultural areas, based on sustainability, memory preservation and aesthetics, is considered to strengthen the international presence of the city. This study focuses on museum clusters and explores their involvement in the evolution of the city. The urban design of museum clusters redefines the public space and potentially enhances the social, cultural and economic development of the city. The radiance of a museum cluster springs from the material and intangible values both in the museum content and in the urban and architectural environment. A museum cluster is engraved in the collective consciousness as an innovative site for knowledge communion and culture, as a special quality element of the city.

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, we are becoming all the more aware of the importance of the cultural sector for the citizens' well-being. City authorities develop strategies, which invest in culture and are aimed at creating a city with a modern, competitive and innovative profile. Museums as a means for urban regeneration**,** as well as the formation of museum clusters are amid the tools for such a revitalization.

Reshaping the city profile through the creation of emblematic architectural projects is continuously attracting new investors but also tourists. Culture attracts economy. Culture is influential, therefore it transcends the walls of buildings hosting it, and it is diffused in the wider urban tissue, ameliorating transportation connections, infrastructures and the quality of life in the cities. This paper focuses on the relation of the urban museum with the city, [1].

2. Museum Cluster

Historically speaking, the museum as an institution is an important cultural and economic element in western society. The museum as a public building enjoys a specificity, particularly complex as regards its connotation and its presence in the city. Over the centuries, museum architecture showcases the interactive relation between the evolution of societal institutions and material shells hosting them.

The urban museum is a particularly critical topic for modern urban culture. Its layout and design is part of the construct of collective consciousness. Planning to have new museums built does not only reflect the intentions of respective institutions, but it falls under the strategic masterplan for urban development. The urban-specific museum planning redefines public space and it potentially reinforces social, cultural and economic development.

Nowadays, the new strategies for economic and urban regeneration through culture incorporate cultural clustering programmes, which in turn foster museum networking and museum concentration in an area. Many cities across the globe are trying to create museum clusters aiming at the upscaling of the public urban space and the economic defibrillation of the city. Creating a conurbation, whose core

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is set up of adjacent museums with shaped free public spaces in between, usually requires large-scale interventions in the urban environment.

The vision for a museum cluster as a material and intangible entity is not a conception of our times, since it had already been depicted in the basic plan for Washington D.C. in 1792, known today as the L'Enfant Plan. (Figure 1). Pierre Charles L'Enfant conceived for the capital city centre of the American Nation a vast symbolic space with vistas and public buildings, which covers the entire area from the Capitol in the east up to Washington Memorial in the west on the Potomac river, where it intersects with the White House axis. Today, the National Mall is a unique symbol of the American democracy, brim-full of monuments and museums, it is the national park with open spaces and enchanting view, it is the gathering place and a *flaneuring* location for the citizens, and concurrently the national political scene, [2] (Figure 2).

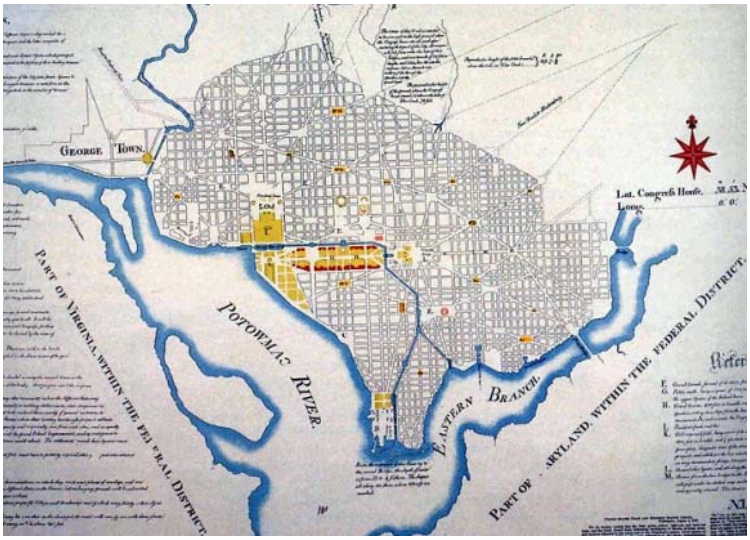


Figure 1. L'Enfant Plan for Washington D.C. 1792



Figure 2. The National Mall, Washington D.C., diagram L. Mantziou

In Europe, the first monumental buildings of the 19th century, established and built to operate as museums, were part of larger scale urban planning interventions. Glyptothek, designed by architect Klenze (1816-1830), was the first building of a "trilogy" in Königsplatz in Munich, delimitating its northern fringe, [3].

Altes Museum, designed by architect Schinkel (1823-1830), opened its doors as the first public museum in Berlin. Its location on the island of the river Spree, facing the palace and adjacent to the cathedral, is a signal of the core for education, art, political power and religion. A few years later, the idea was shaped to upscale a previously commercial area located to the north-west, into a "sanctuary dedicated to art and science". In the course of time, *Museumsinsel* became a unique complex of museum buildings of urban and architectural quality. The exceptional value of the whole relates to the implementation of a grandiose project: a critical moment in the history of urban planning, bearing testament to the evolution in museum-specific approaches, hosting collections of paramount importance, which trace the development of civilizations through the centuries., [4, 5, 6] (Figure 3).



Figure 3. MuseumSinsel, diagram L. Mantzio

Investing in culture for the development of a modern metropolis is eloquently reflected in the case of the divided city of Berlin. After the Second World War, Museumsinsel was cut-off in East Berlin because of the wall. The plans for the new cultural centre of Kulturforum, in the destroyed quarter of Tiergarten symbolised the growth and vitality of Western Berlin. In 1945, the new plans by Scharoun for the area featured the concept of the urban landscape as an aesthetic protestation in contrast with the monumental spirit and solemnity of the previous concept in Speer's plans. The free layout of elements, proportionate to a natural formation, replaced axiality and parallel lines. Gradually, St Matthew's Church Quarter developed into a Kulturforum, attracting into the area high-level cultural institutions such as Berlin's Philharmonic (1963), Neue Nationalgalerie (1968), Neue Staatsbibliothek (1978), and thus it has played a major role in the city's post-war history.

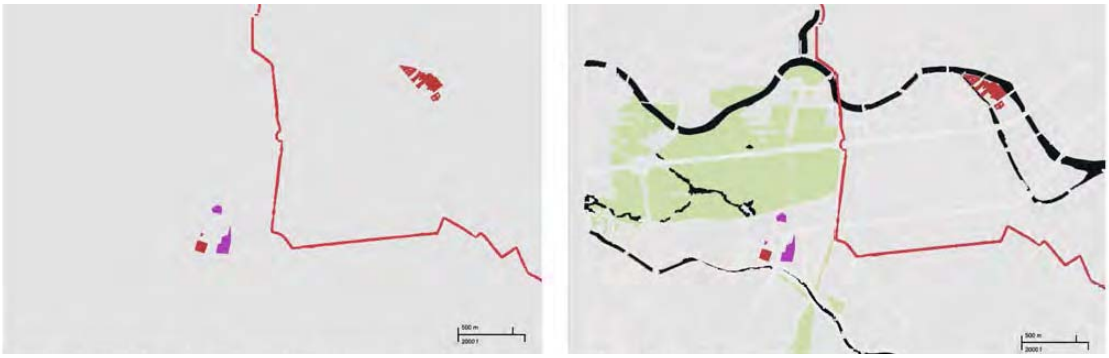


Figure 4. Berlin, Kulturforum – Wall – Museumsinsel, diagrams L. Mantziou

In 1965 Malraux pointed out that the cities hosting art treasures develop into new pilgrimage sites, presaging the explosive growth of cultural tourism after the turn of the millennium.

In the aftermath of May 1968, the deep cultural change was reflected in 1977 in the construction of a museum complex in the city centre of Paris, the Pompidou Centre, also known as Beaubourg, designed by architects R. Piano, R. Rogers, and G. Franchini. In an era of little importance attributed to architectural heritage, Beaubourg, a building of gigantic dimensions with its futuristic shell, was an anti-institutional cultural machine, unique but non-elitist. Beaubourg did away with the monofunctional, inward-looking museum paradigm, and it opened up to new functions and users. The relation of the museum with the city and the citizens was expressed via the inclined entrance plaza, the element of transparency, the big diagonal exterior escalators leading directly into the restaurant with a panoramic view over Paris. The cultural supermarket, which is still attracting crowds of people, changed the idea about the previously cold inaccessible monuments into popular places for societal and cultural exchange, woven into the heart of the city. Beaubourg, overflowing with people and offering high-impact activities, reveals the power of a museum to change and to rejuvenate the city, to create new flows and centres, [7].

In the 1980s, the then French government focused on fostering culture, via the construction of buildings and the shaping of spaces in order for the wider public to come into contact with cultural activities. The objective of the Grand Louvre proposal was to modernise the functions and the facilities located into the bowels of the gigantic traditional building, add-on ample new spaces, and interconnect the museum with the city centre effectively. The design by architect I. M. Pei, respectful to the historical character of the palace, the arrangement inside the palace, as well as the existing urban tissue, proposed the main interventions to be made beneath the main Courtyard (Court Napoléon). A vast subterranean network, a new city with a foyer area, accesses to the exhibitions halls, shopping arcade, restaurants, conference rooms, extensive parking spaces, and connections with public transportation was created beneath the main Courtyard, situated between the two wings of the palace. In 1989, the impressive glass pyramid was inaugurated, which serves both as an entrance to the museum and as a descent into the illuminated subterranean city. The Louvre Pyramid soon became a landmark of the city of Paris, and of the blending between art and business, of the controversial combination of cultural heritage and trade, [8].

The historical axis of Paris starts at the Louvre, running through the Arc de Triomphe and ending up to the Grande Arche de la Défense. Two symbolic monuments serve as landmarks at the extremities of this Historical Axis: The Louvre Museum and the Business District of the Grande Arche de la Défense, (Figure 5.). The intention to establish a correlation between the contemporary monument of entrepreneurship and the museum is mirrored in the architectural design of the Arche, which is slightly turned as to the Historical Axis, a turn which is proportionate to the one of the Louvre at the other extremity of the Axis.

The cultural clustering project in the city of Paris soon extended along both banks of the river Seine, with the Institut du Monde Arabe, Musée d'Orsay, Grand Palais, Petit Palais, Louvre, Jardin des Tuileries, Palais Royal being the most important museums, (Figure 6). According to the new spatial

planning arrangements, the city centre of Paris was shaped into a vast hearth, safeguarding and promoting world heritage. Ever since, it attracts even more visitors. Paris heralded the future development of the "city of museums" phenomenon, a global trend already.

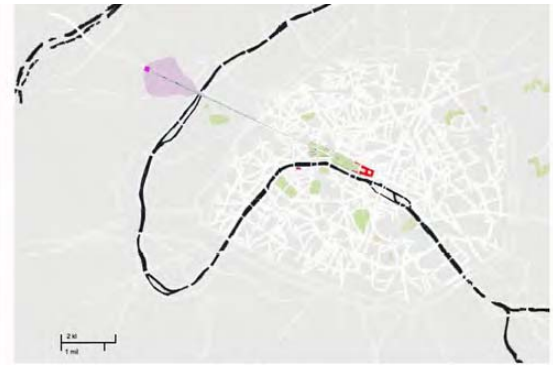


Figure 5. The historical axis of Paris



Figure 6. Paris. Museums along the river Seine

Towards the end of the 20th century, a strategy was put forward, namely to valorise material reserves, based on sustainability, memory preservation and aesthetics. Recovering, reusing and reoccupying valuable building shells, renders the citizen's familiar with the material and immaterial values of cultural heritage. Safeguarding these traces and in doing so, enhancing historical memory, becomes a critical matter in terms of redefining humanity for posterity.

In the 21st century, the modern museum is promoted as a significant event for the city, whether it is about newly built units, or the revitalisation of existing valuable building shells, which are reconstructed for the housing of museum collections. The role of a modern museum in the society and culture overall brings together very different functions in the same place. The multifunctionality of a museum has an impact on the adjacent urban space and it attributes to the museum a special urban role. The museum develops relations with its environment, activates urban renewal and, quite often, scales up urbanisation. Nevertheless, urban and societal change do not necessarily bring about positive implications in the museum surroundings. Development, even culture-driven, may cause disruption, an increase in nuisance due to the influx of visitors as well as an increase in prices. From an urban point of view, planning the construction of a museum presupposes the study of the constituting parts of the urban tissue, awareness raising as to the profile and the history of the host site, blending vanguard with status quo.

3. Results and discussions

Areas of increased concentration is the number of museums and cultural spots and monument sites in general are engraved in the collective consciousness as unique places. The museum cluster constitutes a special form and serves a special function within the city, it can be considered as a specialised separate urban unit, incorporated in a larger city. The two separate elements, which shape this relation between the museum cluster and the city, are the quantity and concentration in cultural content buildings, which become visible through the continuity in the space occupied.

Naming part of the city "Museum Cluster" does not merely reflect a function, but it signifies the recognition of the specific characteristics and quality of the site. The radiance of a museum cluster springs from the material and intangible values both in the museum content and in the urban and architectural environment. A museum cluster is engraved in the collective consciousness as an innovative site for knowledge communion and culture, as a special quality element of the city as regards the cultural function it hosts.

For most cities, the creation of a museum cluster was not clear from the start, but it became fully-fledged in the course of time and challenges coming along. Through the various moments in the development of a city, the living organism of high concentration in cultural and societal content

institutions in one location stood out. The long period for its constitution, which often exceeded the time spam of a century, is characterised by sequential and big changes in perceptions of museum shells and urban planning. As a result of this process, the museum cluster is often present in the city as an accumulation of many different parts, deprived of morphological and structural unity. Such a diversity is likely to hinder the perception of the whole. Each museum cluster is a spatial system with its own characteristics, offering a special experience to the citizens. By adding the dimension of culture, museum clusters change the typology of urban spaces, and form a new centrality and monumentality.

Toponyms, such as Museumsinsel in Berlin, Museumplein in Amsterdam, Kunstareal in Munich, Louvre in Paris, National Mall in Washington, Museumsufer in Frankfurt, Museum Quarter in Vienna, Parkway Museum District in Philadelphia, Museum Mile in New York, Park Museums in Copenhagen, DomPlatz in Cologne, the Grande Promenade in the open museum in Athens, characterise specific spaces and showcase the "unique and universal relation between a specific place and the existing constructions therein" [9-10], (Figure 7).

The place-name is evidence of the fact that each area is specified through its location, namely its topographical dimension, historical characteristics and physical presence. A critical parameter is the location of the museum cluster in the city, because it impacts the way it integrates in public life and attracts visitors. The adjacency with the primary elements of the city is of paramount importance: the historic inner-city, the monuments, green areas, the road network, the aquatic element, topographical particularities.

4. Conclusions

Internationally, big museum complexes are considered to be innovative sites for knowledge communion and tourist cultural destinations. Nowadays, the regeneration or the expansion of cultural-profile areas is of the highest importance in terms of the international presence of the city, its cultural status, its economic growth, the enhancement of its special national and historical profile.

Museum clusters are part and parcel of the city evolution, redefine the concept of the public sphere, and reflect the transition from public institutions to the public space. Amid this social change together with the peak in cultural tourism, the urban dimensions of the museum become predominant. The public space is becoming the critical mediator - catalyst between the museum and the city. Many museum clusters connect multiple networks, and they develop into impressive urban gestures, thus creating the city of museums as a cultural and educational landscape in the new city scale.

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