

# Urban Planning Aspects of Museum Quarters as an Architectural Medium for Creative Cities

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**Abstract.** Since the second half of the 20th century, urban environment has experienced significant transformation. Splash of interactivity, bottom-up initiations with development of creative sector of city economy and participatory planning, irretrievably changed the attitude to the urban medium. One of the most intensively growing field – creative industry – provided cities with numerous cultural clusters, which boosted urban economic development and social cohesion. Supported in many cases by gentrification and revitalization, these processes brought renovation of brownfield and more comprehensive approaches to urban design. Understanding of the economic benefits made city managers start an active promotion of creative clusters and their intensive integration into urban life, involving the main museums and cultural institutions. Thus, a new type of cultural clusters – Museum Quarter - appeared. Holding the position of cultural flagman in the historical heart of the city, Museum Quarters (MQs) pretend to take on an important role both in urban planning structure and in social life. Furthermore, such role usually has strong influence on the surrounding districts, in a positive or negative way. Although basic principles are still applied for all types of cultural districts, the phenomena of “Museum Quarters” due to the complexity of planning, operating and maintenance issues, stepped far above basic cultural clusters, requiring substantially new attitude to the planning of such urban entities. Five clusters were chosen for this study: MQs in Vienna, Berlin, Amsterdam, Copenhagen and the currently developing project in Budapest. The main purpose of this paper is to elaborate the principles for the practical implementation of Museum Quarters by the definition and classification of their specific urban planning aspects. The complexity of target object – Museum Quarter - and its multi-level relationships with the whole city, require from the research interdisciplinary approach and methodology of systemic-structural analysis. The typology of different MQs - identifying specific and common features – is based on studies of urban grids and architectural characters. The critical observation and comparison of the socio-political background and the traditional and modern understanding of museum environment helped to define some crucial misconceptions in interpretation, such as the widespread attitude to the Museum Quarter as a museum building, not as a part of urban medium, causing documented obstacles to development. Consideration of drawbacks and advantages, as the results of this study, showed potential of Museum Quarters as new models of urban environment for smart-governed, economically and socially sustainable contemporary city life.

## 1. Introduction

The explosion of the creative industry in the European urban development and strategic planning from 1970<sup>th</sup>, supported by gentrification and different bottom-up cultural and business activities, made significant impact on the life of contemporary cities. [1, 2] Intensive appearance and productive functioning of cultural quarters in brownfield boosted economic growth and urban regeneration. [3]



Increased interest of business, city managers and average residents in cultural field did not pass by big museums and state institutions, pushing them to become more economically independent and customer oriented. Parallel tendency of open-air exhibitions, strong social demand on interactive process and realization of limited opportunities of the “white cube” exhibition space, made museums understand the strongest necessity of not only a new format of representation, but also a new way of self-positioning in the city and society. [4] Networking and physical openness into the surrounding, with active grab of the adjacent territory, let museums to establish strong identical entity, visible and powerful unit in the urban cultural grid. The concept of the “Museum Quarter” became a comprehensive and reliable solution, with deep roots in history. For example, the opening of the Altes Museum under the reign of Friedrich Wilhelm IV, marked the start of the Museumsinsel Berlin - a 'sanctuary of art and science' in 1830. [5] While, the Austrian Minister of Science Erhard Busek for the first time referred to the new developing area in Vienna as to the “MuseumQuartier” in 1989. [6] Nowadays, such institution as a Museum Quarter (MQ) directly influences the cultural status of the city, tourist attractiveness and international image.

It is worth mentioning that in comparison with brownfield cultural districts, Museum Quarters have some strengths. First of all, MQs present cooperation of high level museums - national institution - with world famous collection, “must see” listed in tourist guidelines. Secondly, such state level institutions are usually located in the heart of the city, removing the question of accessibility (relevant for the brownfield cultural clusters). Thirdly, historical status of many museums as a built heritage, gives additional advantage making site valuable for the city, almost automatically well maintained and suitable for the achievement of the national cultural purposes.

At first sight, everything seems naturally prepared for the successful operation, with all factors for the involvement of stable public and private investments. However, among more than 20 operating or actively developing Museum Quarters in Europe, only few could be named as truly successful practices. Difficulties appear right in the beginning, as the definition of the “Museum Quarter” looks similar to the traditional “Museum”, while unique urban character, spatial features and institutional specifics are often left overlooked. [7, 8] Current research is aimed at consideration of different examples of the MQ as new models for city environment through the prism of urban planning, architectural and socio-cultural studies.

## 2. Methodology

Materials of the local MQ archives and libraries show historical proofs for the set hypothesis. Onsite observation, interviewing of employers and MQ creators gave particular qualitative data. Quantitative research provided numbers for objective comparison, including percentage of different functional zones, built-up area, number of cultural and business institutions, relevant economic data. [1-3, 6, 7, 9] Aiming to understand the whole city structure, comparative analysis of current city maps was made. It includes the study of night space photo of selected cities, mapping of cultural institutions and links between them. According to the complexity of the research object and its multi-level relationships with the whole urban structure, the method of systemic-structural analysis has been implemented. As a result, elaborated typology of different spatial models of museum quarters in the urban structure (with observation of economic and socio-cultural influence) let us conclude drawbacks and advantages of the MQ, particularly relevant for the development of contemporary cities.

## 3. Urban studies

Concentration on the urban studies is crucial for the current research. Analysis of the spatial character aims to clarify practical aspects of the creation of MQ as an urban space, with division between only architectural and more complex urban planning issues. Thus, one of the most important hypothesis should be proposed from the beginning. **Museum Quarter is not a museum building**, [1, 7, 9, 10].

Physically, a museum, as a building, consists of exhibition halls, storages, restoration labs and additional offices. It operates by such definitions as an object-exhibit, visitor and staff, room, corridor, wardrobe, WC, etc. While, Museum Quarter is a complex urban entity, operating by such definitions as

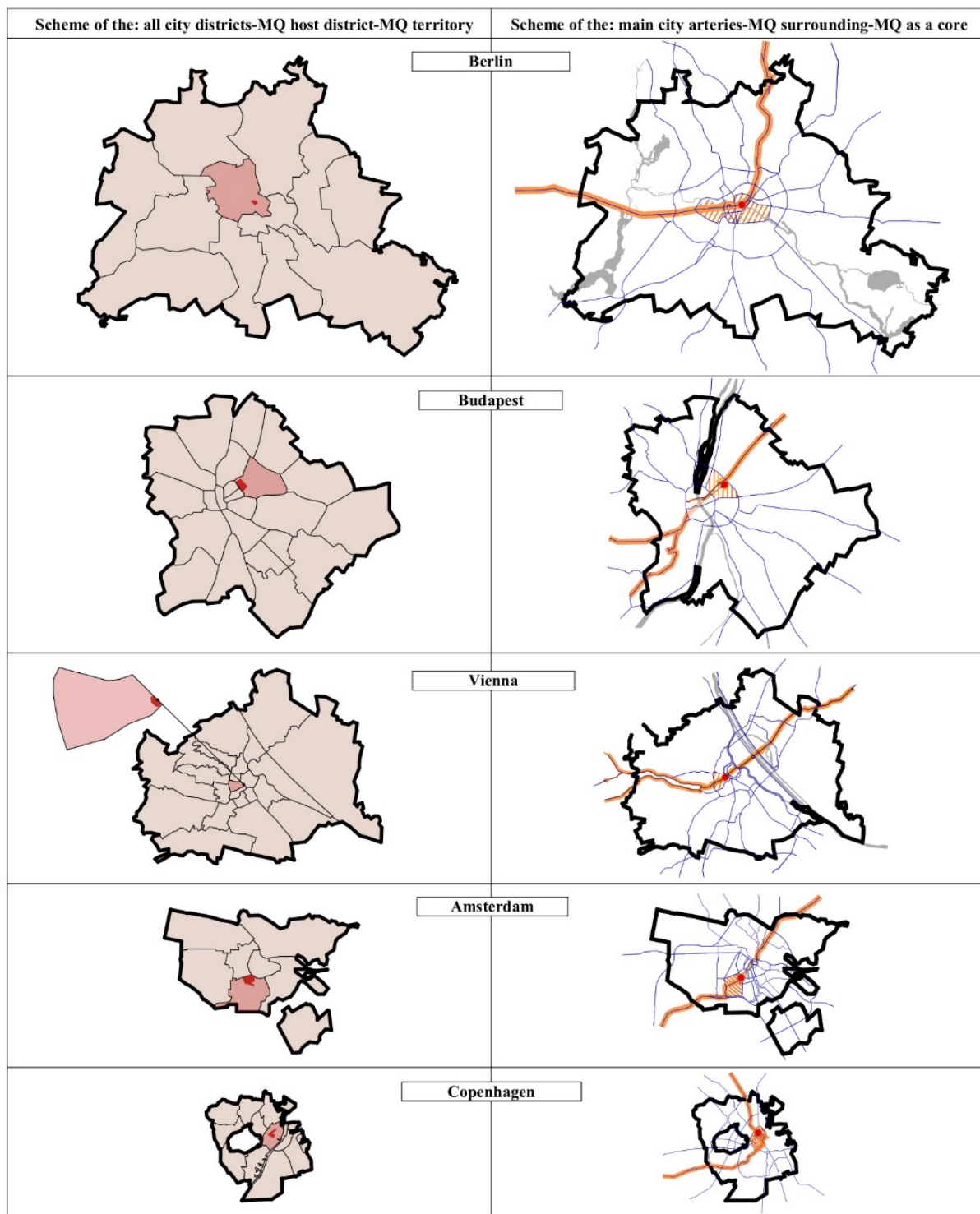
an urban interior, intermediate space, medium, surrounding. MQ consists of local district's residents and other citizens as guests. It is formed by buildings, streets and squares, transits, transport and pedestrian zones, parking slots, loading zones, public and private areas, greenery, etc.

It hosts big scale public movements, experiences seasonal changes, political regimes, social unrest and urban transformations related to them. Only on condition of careful understanding of differences in these two big phenomena – MUSEUM and MUSEUM QUARTER, the following step of urban research can be conducted. Thus, the Museum quarter's urban influence might be studied in the following zooming order (from wide urban scale to more detailed local scale): MQ as a pattern in the urban grid; MQ as a spatial-architectural model; MQ as a complex of consciously designed urban spaces.

### *3.1. MQ as a pattern in the urban grid*

Positioning of Museum Quarters in the urban grid significantly influences their development. Within current research, the most common tendencies were revealed:

- MQ is always placed on the most important city directions, close to the historical core (presenting type of “second phase” planning – stage following after the completion of the inner historical town), very often concluding one of the main urban axis, which connects important suburban highways, main internal transport corridors and the heart of the city. (Figure 1)
- Museum Quarter as a kind of urban-cultural core, becomes a constructive element in the urban planning chain. Such chain usually consists of the main urban axis and intermediate cores – historical centers, squares, public area, and transport hubs.
- Being part of the city center, the MQ strongly influences neighbouring districts, attracting business and improving the quality of life. For example, development of the MQ in Vienna brought prosperity to the surrounding 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> residential districts, gradually filled in by dozen private galleries, outside temporary exhibition spots (glass containers, facades, etc.) and other cultural institutions. Parallel reconstruction of the Mariahilfer Straße (an urban axis which links historical town with the train station) into shopping and pedestrian zone, concluded massive urban renovation. Similar process happened in Amsterdam, where museums' surrounding neighbourhood “Museumkwartier” was developed around the main cultural institutions as a part of Amsterdam South Borough. This residential district presents also prosperous shopping area, touristic and cultural environment, offering wide range of services (museums, galleries, boutiques, hotels, restaurants) with the most densely population and the highest income per household of all city boroughs. [11]
- Connecting many cultural institutions, the MQ can provide mental and physical net, which literally covers the city. Creation of special routes (or tourist ways) offers a smart system of city exploration, when the main and secondary transits help define intensity of movement and density of the built environment and human's masses. For example, developed inside the MQ in Amsterdam, the tourist walks provide artificially organized ways to discover thematic sides of the quarter. (Figure 2) The same concept exists in Vienna, where special guided tour explores the internal life of the Quarter 21 – an institutional umbrella and workspace for around 50 initiatives and organizations [12], which constructs some kind of circulatory system of the whole Vienna Museum Quarter.



**Figure 1.** Positioning of the MQ among the city districts and on the main urban axis



**Figure 2.** Amsterdam Museum Quarter walking tours [13]

### 3.2 Museum Quarter as a spatial-architectural model

Due to the typology, developing within the current research, MQ spatial models can be divided into several types: “Independent core”, “Neighbourhood”, “City Network”, and “Urbanized nature”.

The model **“Independent core”** predicts concentration of all or most of the components (museums, cultural institutions, related services) on the one territorially isolated site. It can be literally river island (Berlin Museum Island) or the high density building block with internal yards (Vienna Museum Quarter). The main features are: a clear physical border, external perimeter and internal open space. It is a holistic unit, which even when cooperating with the city, still remains relatively autonomous. In the intermediate spaces of such urban block specific system of links is developing. Firstly, it includes physical links - internal passes, private routes. Secondly, it produces social links – between local residents or employees, which gradually construct sustainable community. Such links, as internal net or intangible skeleton, ensure clear allocation of the MQ as an independent cell in the planning structure, connected with the city by emotional and physical bridges. Thus, strong links between the site and the city are maintained (providing interaction and joint development) and, at the same time, the integrity, independence and relative security are retained. [14] Due to the proximity of the planning structure to the traditional museum, such MQs present the primary type of classification. However, considering Berlin, some difference from the basic “Independent core” type should be mentioned. Although, Museum Island is an independent spatial block, institutionally it belongs to the wider network – Berlin State Museum System – which like an umbrella includes 4 more cultural clusters. This net spreads around the whole city and constructs specific urban-cultural links along the main traffic arteries. Thus, Museum Island in Berlin can be partly referred to the typological model – “City network”, considered below.

The second type of the MQ spatial structure is the **“Neighbourhood”**. This is a literal neighbourhood of several institutions, where big museums create a magnetic field, gradually attracting new small galleries, cultural centers and SMEs. For example, in Amsterdam’s “Museumkwartier” (and also in Munich “Kunstareal”), such small members make up more than half of the whole MQ community [15]. Museum Quarters of the “Neighbourhood” type do not have clear boundary. Museums and galleries are free placed in a spatial proximity to each other, within few city blocks. It provides delicate penetration into the urban medium, gradual and natural filling of the district by exhibition facilities and

small business, thus strengthening ties within the museum quarter, as a community. As a result, the city receives cultural and artistic environment, friendly and open to new interventions, and on the other hand, sufficiently dense and rich museum structure with robust communications system. [16]

The third MQ type, mentioned above regarding Berlin, is the **“City Network”**. It has features of two previous structures, but is characterized by much more complex relationships. The clearest example is the Museum Embankment (Museumsufer) in Frankfurt-am-Main, which includes above 30 museums. More than half of them are located on the 2 sides of the river bank. The concept of Frankfurt Museumsufer implies the unification of all city museums into one net with interpretation of the river as an identification element. Thus, if the round walk in the Amsterdam MQ (or Munich) takes about 1.5-2 hours, by virtue of the spatial proximity of all museums, the situation in Frankfurt differs radically. The MQ structure presents scheme of the main core (embankment) and 3 diverging rays. The longest one is about 14 km long, and leads almost to the suburban area. This shows, that the boundaries of the MQ “City Network” are not defined physically (as in “Independent core”), but maintained institutionally. Due to such blurring borders, the prospect of the creation of an interior space is lost (in comparison with Vienna or Berlin). Thus, even the integration into an urban medium goes delicately, the identification of the MQ as an independent urban structure is not possible. Therefore, the “City Network” presents rather institutional cooperation, than urban unit. However, despite the less degree of density, well-developed visual identity and navigation can still influence environment, providing high level of urban design.

The fourth type of Museum Quarters is called the **“Urbanized nature”**. It presents several museums situated in a park, with the size of the territory similar to the type “Neighbourhood” (few building blocks). However, location of museums in a park brings many difficulties. The requested density and vibrancy of urban life is hard to reach due to the necessity to keep percentage of green area – significantly missing element for modern city centres (as in case of Copenhagen “Parkmuseerne” or Budapest “Varosliget”). [17] Museum buildings in a park, also experience strict regulation for new constructions, distance from the main public transport hubs, questions of security. Different types of the environment, with more official atmosphere of museums and freer, sporty character of parks, require careful division of zones and can significantly influence planning structure. Additional attention should be given to technological aspects and appropriate infrastructure, specific solution for separation of the transport and loading areas from pedestrian routes, green fields and playgrounds, careful scheduling of events, service procedures, etc.

Therefore, one of the relevant questions here is a clear understanding of the role and position of the Museum Quarter in the city when the territory of the site is overlapping with the territory of the park. Omitting detailed description of particular aspects, in this “green” context, the main definition should be remembered. Museum Quarter is not an open-air museum. Museum Quarter is not a combination of buildings placed in the park, grabbing percentage of its greenery. Then, what is a Museum Quarter? A Museum or a Park? A Quarter! ... or “A District”; of the natural and cultural heritage in the city. For example: Latin Quarter, Jewish quarter, Business or Fisherman district, Museum Quarter. In case of conscious placement of such quarter in a park, the revision of all functions should be done, since the combination of such two elements produces the third substance. However, success of this “new urban live being” fully depends on the smart and strategic operation, with multidisciplinary and high technological attitude both towards cultural and green environment.

### *3.3. MQ as a complex of consciously designed urban spaces*

Based on the proposed hypothesis of consideration MQ as not a museum, but as a quarter, it is necessary to discuss basic elements of formation for such quarter. The forte of MQ as an urban element is in the most intermediate space, which exists “in between” buildings. This intermediate space includes backside of buildings with loading zones, promenades along a side façade, local transits such as covered walkways, arcades, underpasses or roundabout galleries, showcases, terraces, balconies, roofs, as also stairs, forums, lawns, small architectural forms, specially designed street furniture, consciously organized viewpoints inside and perspectives from outside. For example, in the Berlin Museum Island,

one of the exhibition spaces is planned in the Archaeological Promenade – basement level pathway, which physically and thematically connects 4 museums, supporting the whole concept and giving particular spatial experience. (Figure 3)



**Figure 3.** The Archaeological Promenade in the Berlin Museum Island connects 4 museums [18]

In Vienna, the system of outside passages presents additional thematic exhibition spaces – Music, Graphic, Literature Passages, which connect open courtyards, while still stay as not the interior, but more intermediate spaces with well-organized and world famous, but public street art. (Figure 4)



**Figure 4.** Thematic passages of the Vienna MQ (Photo by the author)

One of the important aspects is a navigation system. Graphic identity and visual communication can give huge advantage in promotion of events and in organization of rational movement around the site, provoking curiosity. Info tables, posters, city lights, advertisement of one museum event on the walls of another museum building, banners along the main passes, bridges, and public routes may significantly influence MQ urban image, supporting stable attendance. (Figure 5 a,b)



**Figure 5.** a) Chinese tourists and Locals cyclists passing by flags of the Museum District (Parkmuseerne), placed in surrounding streets in Copenhagen; b) Series of billboards with advertisement of the Concert Hall (which left behind the walking pedestrian) are placed on the way to the Reijksmuseum in Amsterdam and serve as a visual connection of different Museum Quarter institutions [19]

#### 4. Socio-cultural impact

Looking back to the history we can stand, that spreading usually on a big open territory, museum quarters provided citizens with meeting places in a huge scale, asserting itself as the main core of the city, hosting political and social demonstrations as for example on the Museumplein in Amsterdam, Museum Island in Berlin or Konigplatz in Munich Kunstareal (particularly due to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich regime, and later “The Sixteen Principles of Urban Design” in GDR, 1950-1955) [20, 21] However, such big open territories of the city center being crowded in few days per year, most of all time left useless and even abandoned, becoming a serious issue for urban designers and planners. Thus, huge open space of the Berlin Museum Island, right in the heart of the city, besides demonstrations, served just as a parking area. Fortunately, due to the principles of the 21<sup>st</sup> century urban design, such empty inhabited “white spots” on the city map tend to disappear, becoming more developed and better used territories, providing high quality urban environment and, by this, even preventing some social unrest. (Figure 6, 7)



**Figure 6.** Massive public demonstration in front of the Old National Gallery and Berliner Dom on the site of the Museum Island, Berlin [22]



**Figure 7.** Massive Parade of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich, demonstration of taxi drivers and cyclists in front of the Reijksmuseum in the Museum Quarter, Amsterdam [23]

For example, organization of the open space in MQ Vienna plays a crucial role for the prosperity of the quarter. The site of the MQ Wien receives 4 million visitors per year [24]. It is noteworthy that among these visitors, not everyone aims to visit any museum or cultural institution, but rather enjoy the urban medium and social life. (Figure 8)



**Figure 8.** A group of youngsters, listening rap in the space of the MQ Vienna (Photo by the author)

Different sport facilities and playgrounds support this statement by diversity of temporary functional content of the Museum Quarter in Amsterdam. (Figure 9)



**Figure 9.** Temporary Skate Park, basketball court and ice ring in front of the Rijksmuseum on the site of the Museum Quarter, Amsterdam [25]

The lack of such urban function brings visual emptiness and hinders the development. Big territories between museum buildings covered just by green lawns and used only in warm weather, stay totally empty in cold seasons. Traditional architecture of museum buildings, with the main front- and technical back façade (with loading zone, garbage bins, cargo transport), further complicates the situation. This issue is particularly relevant for MQ in parks (Budapest and Copenhagen), where surrounding museum greenery has lack of landscape design and such fields do not appropriately realize the function of public space, staying rather abandoned, and used maximum for walking of dogs.

All these examples of social use of Museum Quarter territory let to make first conclusion. Traditional Museum can be described as a place for collection, education and display of exhibits. However, MQ has another focus. Thus, the following definition can be proposed: **“Museum Quarter is an institutionally governed, specially designed urban area, devoted to the professional network, gathering of citizens and provision of particular events for community interaction and display of the urban life, within art and cultural context”**.

## 5. Results and discussions

The first attempt to describe “Museum Quarter” as a definition, along with all mentioned urban, architectural and socio-cultural aspects, let us stand some serious misconceptions in interpretation, inherent to any traditional “museum-oriented” attitude to the Museum Quarter. Thus, the following statements of the current research can be proposed: Museum Quarter is not a guaranteed solution for all urban cultural issues. It cannot be considered as a panacea for contemporary art life, but it may be used as a catalyst for urban development. [8, 26] To become such catalyst Museum Quarter needs to perform not as a strictly protected heritage, or “canned artefact”, but as an urban medium for vibrant aliveness. Such atmosphere goes beyond the usual cultural institution inside of the building, and requires wider scale of urban cultural environment. Furthermore, functional filling of this environment requires from museums substantial transformation - from “museum as a storage” to “museum as a creative industry”. Undoubtedly, the products of such industries can differ. However, as for every industry, one interesting feature should be mentioned. Sometimes, not the very content, but a smart promotion becomes the secret of success.

Consideration of MQ typology and noticed misconceptions help to list several drawbacks and advantages, important for the successful development of the Museum Quarters. [2, 3, 9, 17]

One of the key features of the MQ is a concentration of the main cultural institutions in one spot, which provides strong network and centralised, easily maintained system. However, centralization and common management can gradually, and even consciously, evolve into strictly limited censured governance, where members have to follow regulated program without any way for flexibility. Such case has even more chance to appear under the state initiation, usual for many Museum Quarters, at least at their beginning stage. This disadvantage, expressed in some kind of **monopolisation**, can negatively influence development of the site from not only cultural point of view. It leads to delayed and outdated decisions for urban renovation, decreasing attractiveness of the site for small and medium business. To

avoid such scenario, clear role for each institution should be defined. It includes: the status of the particular institution within the site; degree of independency and financial relationships with MQ umbrella; particular rights for use of shared territory and implementation of new constructions; program thematic (to prevent conflict of interests), etc.

Another negative aspect has very similar root, caused not by institutional management, but by more spatial character. The issue is that concentration of the whole cultural potential on the one territorial unit leads to the **lack of development in the remaining parts of the city**. This is compounded by the fact that in most cases Museum Quarters are located right in the heart of the city. Their strong position and well developed surrounding infrastructure automatically magnetize all stakeholders, depriving other parts of the city of any development opportunities due to the uncompetitiveness.

The interesting paradox appears when these two disadvantages are considered from tourist position. On the one hand, centralization may help to attract visitors to the site and increase economic benefits (as all target objects are gathered in one location, which significantly save time). On the other hand, an average time for visit of one site is 2-3 hours, while visit of all museums concentrated in the MQ may require more than one day. Such long stay in one place is usually unacceptable for regular tourists wishing to visit as many sites as possible. Thus, Frankfurt model of more than 30 museums with shared ticket, but spread around the city, may become a solution, giving opportunity to visit MQ and explore big urban territory at the same time.

The third disadvantage can be described as a **degradation of the museum environment**, caused by too intensive transformation from “preservation and education” to “business and entertainment”. To avoid this situation, conscious definition of the roles and delegation of responsibilities should be done from the very beginning. Thus, for instance, even Amsterdam Museum Quarter includes dozen of cafes, restaurants, hotels, the world’s most exclusive fashion, jewellery and other luxury shops, presenting cooperation in a BIZ model (business improvement zone). With the total amount of 270 entrepreneurs, the district is not promoted as a business cluster. [27] Business here plays a secondary supporting role, while culture is promoted as a constructive element of urban prosperity. That is why a priority is absolutely consciously given to museums as a flagman and image makers for the site.

As it was concluded above, Museum Quarter, in its basic idea, usually consists of cooperation of several museums and cultural institutions, plus additional services. Even though, some of members can be national institutions with state funding, the percentage of business presented on the site should strive for the predominance of profit oriented institutions and SMEs [28], following the principles of “Neighbourhood” type. Such situation can provide flourishing self-empowered live being. State funding, in this case, can be accepted, but with limited amount. Relative financial independency also protects MQ from the state censure. As a result, the first advantage can be achieved: **economically sustainable and profit oriented institutional network, build within a cultural field**.

Even if the territory of the MQ can be quite limited, the surrounding district (with cultural institutions, parallel services, well designed urban medium and positive image) automatically attracts specific type of residents – culture related intelligence and others seeking for fashionable or prosperous atmosphere of life. Here, two aspects should be mentioned: 1) when the territory is developed into the high level urban life spot, only really operating companies and investment into habituated flats (not apartments) should be carefully moderated, to maintain vibrancy and aliveness of the place; 2) museums should play role of the flagman, providing upscale events and promoting exhibitions. Crucial aspect of this promotion is not an exhibition per se, but the experience, which visitors can get as inside of the museum as in the whole area of MQ. It is important to consider in advance: not museum buildings aim to gather thousands of visitors each day, but the whole area of MQ as a complex. Thus, **strong well-being core in urban structure** becomes the next advantage.

Easy access, interesting and well promoted events, full range of services, comfortable urban design and vibrant atmosphere should aim to attract local citizens, with consideration of tourism only as a side effect. However, such local oriented concept does not exclude intensive tourist promotion of the site and work in international context with multilingual communication. Only place which is truly loved by

locals may be durably sustainable. Only place, truly loved by locals, will be highly attractive for tourists. Therefore, performance of the **Museum Quarter as a tourist hub** is also among the advantages.

## 6. Conclusion

Main urban planning principles of the MQ show the need for establishment of absolutely new urban-socio-cultural-business model of development. Careful study of common misconceptions can help to avoid many obstacle as for already existing Museum Quarters, as for those which are under development. Consideration of general advantages and drawbacks aims additionally clarify potential strengths and possible challenges of particular MQ in global and in local context. Study of the comprehensive multi-layered structure plays here crucial role. Thus, the following conclusion can be done. The success and long term sustainability of any Museum Quarter fully depends on a clear understanding of the very nature of the MQ phenomena. Museum Quarter is not a simple territorial or institutional union of several museums, but their active collaboration, with organization of parallel services, intensive openness to the urban medium and interaction with very mass consumer. It is noteworthy that “mass consumer” of the Museum Quarter does not necessarily has to be a visitor of museums. As a result, comparison of positive and negative practices allowed to confirm the relevance of the creation of Museum Quarters for urban prosperity. Under the strategic and smart operation such entities may provide exact benefits for planning structure, social, cultural and economic well-being of contemporary cities.

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