CHOICE
Participation at the international architectural competition for the urban development project of Vabaduse Square/ town Rakvere/ESTONIA

Mihaela Ioana Agachi¹, Octav Olanescu², Vlad Rusu³

Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning, 72-76 Observatorului street, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

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Abstract

The City of Rakvere/Estonia has organized an open international architectural competition for the design of Arvo Part's Hall by reconstruction of Rakvere’s St Paul's church (nowadays sport venue) and planning the surrounding area called Vabaduse Square (Freedom Square).

Our team participated with a project with the entry name CHOICE. We focused on making a new urban identity for Vabaduse Square, which should, at the same time, emphasize the main qualities of the site, of the town, in the existing circumstances. We proposed a continuous space for music and cultural events, variable, fluctuating, to give a chance to everybody to make its CHOICE in a large scale of convenient occasions (for an event or another, at a chosen time, regardless the number of participants) in both urban and architectural approaches.

We conceived the extension of St.Paul’s Church to assure a total flexibility for the desired activities and open possibilities for the improvised ones. The entire building can be used as a whole, or can be divided in independent parts, each one with different time schedules, different entrances, and different users. We have chosen an austere expression for the inside and outside appearance of the building, in agreement with the austere Lutheran image of the church. Like in a church, the main importance is focused on light and verticality, as an optimistic aspiration for a bright future. A reversible relation both in the urban and in the architectural space, like “mirror in mirror” (the title of one of Arvo Part compositions), summarizes our approach.

Rezumat


Choice (alegere) este titlul pe care colectivul nostru l-a ales pentru denumirea proiectului cu care am participat la acest concurs. Am realizat o nouă identitate urbana pentru piata Vabaduse, bazandu-ne pe evidențierea și punerea în valoare a principalelor trasaturi specifice locului, orașului, circumstanțelor existente. Propunere noastra a constat în crearea unui spațiu continuu pentru muzica și evenimente culturale, variabil, fluctuant, pentru a permite tuturor utilizatorilor posibilitatea de a opta (CHOICE) pentru abordarea dorita a spațiilor (indiferent de dimensiunea grupului de participanti, de alegera facuta pentru un eveniment sau altul, de momentul ales).

Pentru extinderea Bisericii Sf. Paul am conceput un spațiu continuu, flexibil ce asigura posibilități multiple de diversificare atât a activităților necesare, cerute prin tema concursului, cat și unor alte evenimente, improvizatii ad-hoc. Intreaga constructie functioneaza atat ca un spațiu total, cat si

¹ phd architect, associate professor, head of the department of urbanism, mihaela.ioana.agachi@arch.utcluj.ro
² phd candidate architect, octavolanescu@yahoo.com
³ phd candidate architect
ca spatii diferentiate, cu programe diferite, intrari diferite, utilizatori diferiti si concomitenti. Am optat pentru o expresie arhitecturala minimalista atat in interiorul cladirii cat si in exteriorul ei, in concordan
ta cu austera imagine a a bisericii luterane. Asemnator spatului bisericii, principala attentie ne-a fost indreptata spre accentuarea luminii si a verticalitati, sugerand astfel o atitudine optimista cu speranta intr-un viitor stralucit. Demersul nostru a urmarit crearea unei relatii reversibile intre spatii urban si spatiiul arhitectural, ca “oglinda in oglinda” (titlul unei melodii compuse de Arvo Par).

Keywords: urban design, cultural events, new identity, choice, continuous space, convenient occasion, static, dynamic, porch, hierarchy, rhythm, minimalist language.

1. Introduction - description of the competition theme.

This paper is the illustration of the project proposed by the team from the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning, T.U. in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, in the international architectural competition for the design of Arvo Part’s Hall by reconstruction of Rakvere's St Paul's church and planning the surrounding area called Vabaduse Square (Freedom Square).

The requirements of the competition theme where one side to restore the noble nature of the Vabaduse Square (planned at the beginning of the 20-th century as Rakvere’s main square) due to the public buildings which are situated here: the kindergarten - currently a Steiner school, the German secondary school - currently a dental polyclinic, the Estonian secondary school and the St.Paul’s Church - currently a sport hall. On the other side, the St.Paul’s Church, the work of the important Estonian architect Alar Kotli, erected in 1940, must be restored and extended with the Arvo Part’s Hall, a concert hall for 400 people. The church/concert complex with the annex and the reorganization of Vabaduse Squar would make Rakvere an”excellent place for organizing concerts and would facilitate the enlivening”/2/ of the cultural and educational life of the town.

2. Basic concept.

MOTTO: SPACE is like MUSIC. MUSIC and SPACE are endless. MUSIC and SPACE means movement. You can hear and see different aspects of the existence depending the distances put between and the direction of the approach. The controlled movement is like the gamut for music, it creates rules for behaviors and impressions. Perspectives, frames, surprises (sequences) can be appropriated as a matter of CHOICE you make in your movement/1/.

THE CONCEPT:
To make a new identity to an urban space/building means to develop the existing circumstances, to emphasize their main qualities. Main qualities of Rakvere Vabaduse square:
- static, classical composition, homogeneous architecture of public buildings by scale and rhythm
- „Rakvere’s nobility centre ... open to the sun and air”/2/;
- the „optimistic atmosphere that focuses on a bright and clean future”/2/;
- the slope of the soil;
- end perspective to convergent streets and park alleys.

Main qualities of St. Paul’s Church:
- symbol of Estonia’s freedom;
important work of the Estonian architect Alar Kotli/2/ (outstanding importance in the architectural history of Rakvere as well as Estonia);
- a distinctive character in the surrounding urban space (urban landmark).

Main quality of the cultural life in Rakvere:
- the Arvo Part Festival, -the most significant cultural event of the town in the international context.

THE ATTITUDE:
We propose a continuous space for music and cultural events, variable, fluctuating, to give a chance to everybody to make its CHOICE of the approach desired, in the desired team, in a desired purpose, at the time desired, in a large scale of convenient occasions.
We propose a continuous space from outside to inside, from top to bottom, from dark to light, from static to dynamic, from monumental to friendly, from hidden to exposed, from historicity to contemporaneousness.
We use in that purpose a lapidary, minimalist language, inspired by the calm, classical urban and architectural surroundings and by the mystic minimalism that characterize the works of Arvo Part. A reversible relation both in the urban and in the architectural space, like, “mirror in mirror”, summarizes our approach.

3. The public space .

The public space proposed means CONTROLLED MOVEMENT.

Because the huge scale of the existing Vabaduse square, we divided it in different spaces, appropriated to convenient occasions.

Figure 1 – Proiect - aerial view of the Vadabuse Square

At the top of the slope we organized the CULTURAL SQUARE (Fig. 1), a plain surface, facilitating open-air events and performances, in front of and expanding the spaces of the new multi-functional public building (The Arvo Part Hall).
An artesian water fountain, surrounded by a half recessed area to allow sitting places, mark the intersection of the axis of: Vabaduse Street and Tuleviku Street, articulating also a “water way” to the “future public building”.

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This cultural square, underlined by public buildings on three sides, is the official side of Vabaduse Square, contains also different sculptures (in front of the Polyclinic to animate this closed building). At important events, this Cultural Square can occupy all the space bordered by the Polyclinic, the Secondary School and Arvo Part Hall.

Emphasizing the slope, THE STEPS: moving up and down people sitting, laying down, singing, jumping, skating. This friendly area is underlined / protected by alignment of trees next to Voimla and Vabaduse streets. A descending view to the “future public building”, situated along the Koidula Street, brings closer both spaces, engaging common activities. The “water way” finishes in a rectangular fountain, a calm surface to reflect the building in front of it, or to refresh the tired legs of pedestrians in hot summers. (Fig. 2).

TWO GREEN AREAS give chances to privacy for dwelling houses. They remove the inconvenient relation between garages and other back spaces with Vabaduse square. In the same time, these green areas hidden entries to an underground two level parking serving the entire square. We increased the distance between Voimla Street and the dwelling houses, in order to develop the green area in this part of Vabaduse Square, modifying the line of this street.

We amplified the impact of the existing buildings bordering Vabaduse Square, reducing the distance of their perception by introducing smaller landmarks – fountains, sculptures, trees, in order to graduate and enrich the perspectives. We interrupted the huge open perspective from the secondary school to the park, placing the “future public building” along Koidula street. The passages proposed through this building to the park emphasize the impact and the scale of the World War II Memorial. The long perspective to War of Independence Monument is divided by the
green area and the alignment of trees creating different frames for its perception. (Fig. 3)

Figure 3 – Vabaduse Square Site Plan

Figure 4 - Cross Sections - Vabaduse Square and the new Arvo Part Hall.
The Arvo Part Hall, extending St.Paul’s Church, continues the alignment of this building and complete the Voimla Street front side. Its austere porch open the entire space of the multifunctional public building to the cultural square, proposing a democratic connection between inside and outside. An open “yard with sculptures underlines the porch and creates a descendent perspective to underground art happenings. A pedestrian path connects the secondary entrance of the building to Kindergarten Kaur. (Fig. 4)

In concordance with the “optimistic atmosphere” of Vabaduse Square, we proposed the use of solar colors for pavements; stones in different ochre nuances cover its surface and create a harmonious relation with the trees. Bronze sculptures erect here and there to animate the spaces. We tried to balance a reasonable ratio between mineral and vegetal surfaces, in agreement with all seasons.

4. Arvo Part Hall architectural design

We conceived the extension of St.Paul’s Church using, like in music, a leitmotif:

THE PORCH, a succession of pillars.

Figure 5 – Main entrance in Arvo Part Hall – the porch view from the square.

We chose it because of its transparency and rhythm. A porch separates spaces and at the same time unifies them, makes hierarchies but establishes friendly connections. It is an open but protective space. Its scale gives significance to a space, from representative and imposing to cozy and intimate. It can have different depths; it can inspire rhythm for openings (windows and doors) and it is also a strong landmark.

We conceived the extension of St.Paul’s Church like a CONTINOUS SPACE.

We chose making the CONTINOUS SPACE to assure a total flexibility for the desired activities and open possibilities for the improvised ones. The entire building can be used as a whole, or can be divided in independent parts, each one with different time schedules, different entrances, and
different users. The ground floor (Fig. 6) is designed to surprise and to inform about everything can happen in this building. A symphony of spaces is revealed from the main entrance (from Vabaduse square). The impressive space, the opened hall, is announced from outside by the great porch and by the half hidden yard with sculptures. Light, space and richness of images gladdens the eye and the important surprise is to rediscover inside the St. Paul’s Church. The image of the church accompanies the visitor at each floor, offering different perspectives. At this floor, a continuous space connects the small concert hall (introduced in the church in a mobile system that allows the alternation of

![Figure 6 - Ground floor]

performances with the celebration of the religious service) with the balcony of the big concert hall, the art gallery and the music shop. A continuous movement is possible in case of big events, but at the same time each space can be closed and has its separate entrance. Lateral, near the art gallery
we organized an entrance for small musical events performed at the third floor, in the Arvo Part music room (like a rise in a church tower, a spiral staircase and an elevator assures independency for different time schedules).

In the basement, a foyer for the big concert hall offers opportunities for art events and continued with the yard with sculptures can stir up the attention of people passing the square.

The big concert hall is located here, in order to assure a perfect acoustic of high level, in accordance with the contemporary exigencies, and preferring not to occult the space of the church. At the same time, this level offers a wonderful ascendant perspective to the Church.

We organized also, on two levels, the necessary technical spaces, at the heights of -3.50 (Fig. 7) and – 4.50 (Fig. 8).

Figure 7 - First Underground floor (-3.50)
Figure 8 - Second Underground Floor (-4.50)

The upper levels: the first (Fig. 9) and the second (Fig. 10), organize the practice rooms for dance and choir, the cafeteria room, spaces for exhibitions in connection with the balcony of the church and the loggia that opens this part of the building to the Vabaduse square. Fluent platforms, stairs, elevators assure the continuity of the space, accessibility, flexibility for different uses, offering permanently original images of the church. These spaces can be also accessed from the lateral side directly by a separate entrance assuring opportunities for different time schedule programs.
At the top, the third floor (Fig.11) exposes the “Small Temple” as an important landmark of the Vabaduse square and of the city, lodging the Arvo Part music room, with its intimate and exclusive access. An open terrace and an open galleria expand the small music room to the square and to the city; from here we can see the roof and the towers of St.Paul’s Church and a large panorama to the square, the park and the city. Long mobile benches allow also here open air performances.
Figure 10 - Second Floor
Figure 11 - Third Floor
Opposite to the main entrance, “in the back”, all levels contain the rights annexes for the services deserving all main functions: offices, restrooms, rooms for musicians and musical instruments, near the service area, as we can see in the description of the spaces contained by each level and near the secondary entrance.

We chose an austere expression for the inside and outside appearance of the building, in agreement with the austere Lutheran image of the church. Like in a church, the main importance is focused on light and verticality, as an optimistic aspiration for a bright future.

Noble materials, marble for pavements, plastered white walls and big glass openings (windows and doors) assure a serene image for the internal spaces. We proposed the same treatment of the surfaces in the restored church as in the new building, in order to make a pacific path for users, to assure the coherence of the interior of the whole building. All the concert halls are conceived as “wood worlds” (protection for acoustic reasons).
The big porch of the main entrance and all the exterior walls and pillars are covered with bricks of the same color as of the church walls.

A lapidary but reach in details world, an atmosphere of calm and peace dominates the external image (Fig. 13 - Facades).

Figure 13 - Facades

Figure 14 - Interior and exterior views of Arvo Part Hall.

We chose this minimalist style/4/ as a very contemporary tendency of today/5/, specific for our
times and in agreement with the surrounding area and the sentiment that inspire the mystic minimalism of Arvo Part music. (Fig. 14)

5. Short description of technical aspects: the construction system.

The construction system is a simple one: reinforced concrete for pillars, beams and floors, brick covered concrete walls and/or bricks walls, wood used as acoustic protection. We proposed also wood frames for windows, and wood made doors, like in the restored church. We preferred the utilization of construction materials with good maintenance possibilities (wood, stone, concrete, glass). All materials proposed are also of high thermal efficiency.

6. Conclusion

Each international architectural competition is a good opportunity for the interaction of different attitudes and approaches of thinking and making architecture. Depending on experiences and on special needs specific for each lieu and representing the desires of each collectivity, the proposed themes are always a challenge for participants. Put in an inedited situation, the participant should anticipate not only the right answer for solving real needs but also to think and understand in a totally different cultural background, the way of developing prospective attitudes. For such reason, these competitions are very good opportunities also for real researches in the field of architecture and urban design. Our project proposes an open, flexible urban and architectural solution for hosting very diverse cultural events, a contemporary space which rehabilitates the unfinished Vabaduse Square, transforming it in an open cultural site, revalorize and reestablish the initial function of the beautiful St. Paul’s Church.

7. References