

Free Space

This proposal, submitted for the new House of Arts and Culture in Beirut, tries to establish freedom in a lot of different ways: the freedom to cross the site and the building in all different directions and to integrate the building in the urban context; the freedom to interact for the different functional layers of the building through two escalators that penetrate the entire building from the groundfloor to the Roof Garden; the freedom of the floor plans through a construction that does not require any column; and the freedom to use the performance and exhibition areas through adaptable spaces.

Free Crossing

The functions of the new House of Arts and Culture are simply layered on top of each other. The 12m high groundfloor contains the Performance and Conference Hall, the Cafeteria and Commercial Spaces, and the Reception and Information Areas. The first floor includes the Work and Training Rooms, the Cinematheque, and all the Administration Rooms. The second floor incorporates the Documentation Centre and the Exhibition Spaces that are both directly connected to the Roof Garden, where exhibitions can be opened or extended, where people from the library can take their books and read, or pursue all kinds of other activities organized by the new House of Arts and Culture. The Parking, the Technical Rooms, and all the Miscellaneous Spaces are located underground. The entire façade surrounding the groundfloor can be pulled and opened up completely and therefore allows a free crossing of the building in all directions, integrating and connecting the entire building into its urban context.

Free Interaction

All floors are penetrated by two connected escalators that transport the visitors smoothly from the groundfloor up to the Roof Garden, establishing a free interaction between all parts of the building. The escalators can be seen as the engine that activates the entire building, as a machine for artistic and cultural production. The visitors using the escalators float through the different functional layers, becoming an integral part of all its activities. Due to its transparent character, the building allows pedestrians outside views of the inside of the building from all directions. Therefore, the visitors, the artists, and the people outside of the building are continuously interacting with each other, as everybody can see each other almost all of the time. The escalators make an exchange between all parts of the building possible and enable cross-utilizations of all spatial resources, which will provoke and ensure artistic and cultural discourses throughout the entire building.

Free Plan

The construction of the entire building is based on steel truss constructions. Because of the truss construction, all the floors will be completely without any columns thus allowing for the possibility of complete free floor plans, meaning that the floor spaces are free to be configured into rooms without concern for the supporting structure. Only the three underground floors that contain the Parking, all the Technical Rooms, and the Miscellaneous Spaces, including the storage rooms, are constructed using a standard column grid. One room's high truss is enveloping the entire first floor and a second truss surrounds the Roof Garden. Those two truss constructions are connected and carried by two vertical cores that are constructed with concrete, and the two other trusses that envelope the escalators. The truss constructions around the escalators and the concrete cores bring the loads of the building down to the ground, where they are captured by large columns and carried further down to the foundation.

Free Use

As the entire groundfloor can be seen as one 3000m² large open, freely accessible and completely flexible space, it can be programmed and configured for all kind of functions and organisations. The groundfloor functions as a direct extension of the surrounding urban space as well. Nevertheless, an area of around 1000m² has been located in the center of the groundfloor for the use of different configurations for the Large Performance Hall. Six different configurations are shown in the diagram in order to illustrate the broad range of possibilities from standard theatre configurations to completely free organisations of multiple small theatres. All configurations can also be built using surrounding walls to create a theatre that delivers exceptional acoustics for demanding opera performances, for example. If no theatre is needed, all the facilities and materials such as seats, or rigging lofts can be dismantled, transported down using the two large lifts, and stored in the huge storage spaces underground.