

Urban Objectives:

The project's main feature is its openness. The building mass is minimized at ground floor level and growing with every additional floor. The result is a huge open shaded plaza in its northern part which creates an inviting gesture and a highly attractive plaza. This plaza, the so called Art Plaza is oriented towards Beirut's city center and invites artists, visitors and the population alike. The Art Plaza is conceived as a completely free space without boundaries. The slope rising towards the south of the site creates a natural boundary of the plaza to the noisy highway.

Architectural Objectives:

The project investigates on the possibilities of interactivity between the building, its visitors and the population in general. The most important feature is the inviting gesture the House of Arts and Culture has to have in order to become a social communication place, where culture can be exposed and creativity fostered. This is why we believe that an art production plaza (containing all workshops) at ground level as proposed is the best way to reach this goal. The Art Plaza is the place where artists meet visitors and the public. All sorts of spontaneous meetings can happen there, an informal place where creativity can be encouraged and the society gets involved and influenced.

A simple circulation system allows moving easily between the different parts of the program, exhibition space underneath and performance halls above.

Architectural Expression:

The House of Arts and Culture is conceived as one single design object. The effect is a sculptural building which follows the esthetics of a mushroom with a minimal footprint at ground and growing building mass on top. As most of the building's program is accommodated in the lateral parts of the natural slope and the underground, the building mass seems relatively small and allows the already mentioned inviting gesture. Detached from traditional models, it is undeniable that the architectural expression of the House of Arts and Culture is located in the context of what is happening at the beginning of this new century in contemporary architecture!

Spatial organization:

The building is organized in three parts; a Performance Space, an Art Production Space and an Exhibition Space. Its organization works in horizontal layers. The “Art Production Plaza” at ground level (containing workshops, the library, lobby and restaurants) becomes the most important part of the House and invites visitors to learn more about the process of art and to participate in it. The main building volume (containing all theaters, the cinema, the cinematheque and the administration) is shaped by a huge mushroom structure with a minimum footprint at ground level and a growing footprint in higher levels. The third part is completely underground and contains the exhibition areas, technical rooms and parking.

Sustainability:

The distribution of program and the structure in form of a huge mushroom which generates a completely shaded plaza, make the House of Arts and Culture undeniably a sustainable project. As most of the circulation and public spaces are located underneath the shading roof, the Art Plaza becomes a comfortable and attractive outdoor area all year around. Heat gains or losses in the building will be minimized, considering the fact that most of its architectural program is attached to the ground or underneath it.

Technical solutions:

The building’s unique architectural expression demands special technical solutions. The most interesting part in this will be the mushroom structure. Conceived as a system of concrete trusses, the structure must be able to support the entire building weight. Concerning the façade, use of modern technologies is necessary; gladded with metal panels which have a reflective character, the building façade is conceived as a big screen where art but most important the process of art and its production will be projected at every moment.