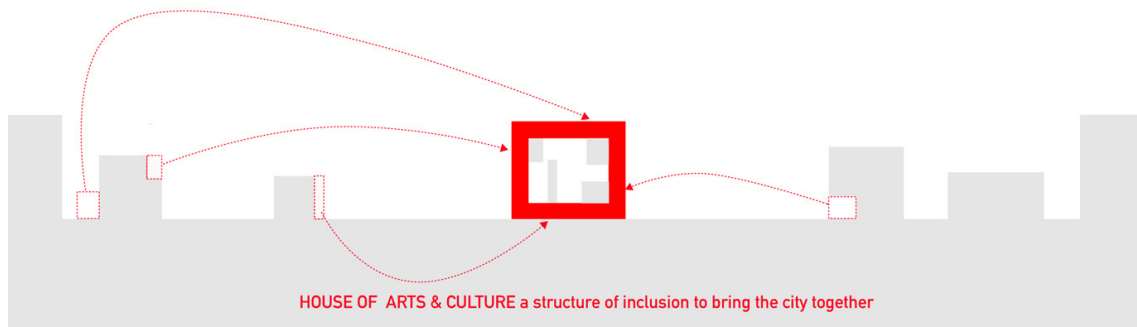


HAKAWATI - THE HOUSE OF ARTS AND CULTURE, BEIRUT

Before the appearance and the diffusion of cinemas and of mass media the Hakawati was the main form of entertainment in Arabic-speaking countries and most notably in Lebanon. The Hakawati was a storyteller who thrilled his audience with a story, rhythmically determined by a stick held in his hand, his sole prop to sustain the attention of his public. The Hakawati performed from a wooden stage usually located outdoors in familiar cul de sacs, at street intersections or in cafes which turned into shared spaces for conviviality and camaraderie. The Hakawati was the spontaneous messenger moving throughout the city, he was a key-figure in stimulating social cohesion and in activating a public space for all.

The social and spatial fragmentation Beirut has been undergoing, as a consequence of the civil war and of dislocating forces of urbanization, calls for a renewed Hakawati in order to resurge the rich cosmopolitan culture of the city and to celebrate its vitality.

In modern times the House of Arts and Culture is recovering the role of the missing Hakawati and transforming the city into his stage. The House of Arts and Culture is a dynamic, receptive and interactive hub for the celebration of culture on a local and international level. It is a clear reference as well as an itinerant meeting place in open dialogue with the city. It is a multifunctional platform that breaks through the walls of a “white-box” institution and engages with the urban realm.



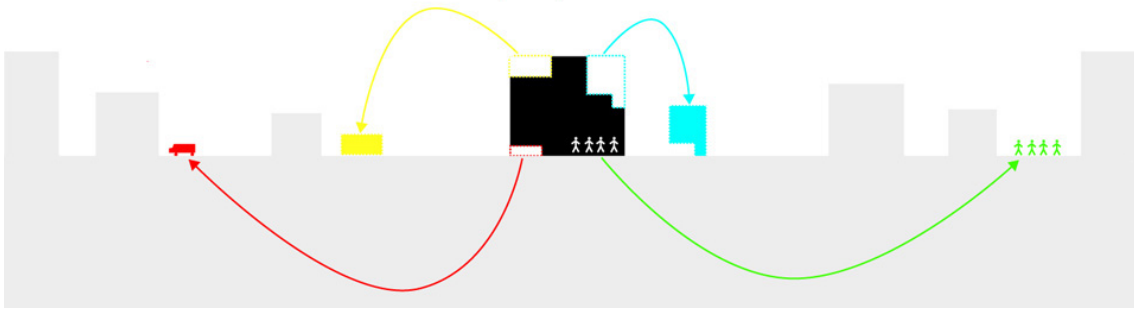
CONTEXT

The House of Arts and Culture is located at the fringe of the CBD of Beirut. The highway is creating a clear border, not so easy to trespass. It belongs to the downtown, which despite its ambitions, doesn't yet play a central and leading role in the city itself. There is instead a tendency of decentralization of all the urban functions in the various city quarters, manifesting themselves as micro-centralities.

How can the House of Arts and Culture transcend a city and become an interface between the downtown and those micro-centralities?

How can the House of Arts and Culture function as a fluid playground for pluralism and interaction, as a vibrant space for all?

A STAGE FOR ARTS & CULTURE a public agora in constant deconstruction and reconstruction



CULTURE CARRIER – HAKAWATI

The House of Arts and Culture is the **Hakawati** that takes advantage of its central position on the threshold of the city centre and spreads temporarily its cultural program throughout the city. It is a dynamic organism that extends *hors limites* its multiple antennas and uses the city as a stage. Its structure constantly deconstructs and reconstructs in order to relocate its diversified cultural program - such as exhibitions, concerts, screenings, performances, festivals, etc. - in parking lots, abandoned buildings, public gardens, left-over infrastructures throughout the entire city and even further. The Hakawati makes use of three types of culture carriers to spread its program in the city: super light, light and medium.

It sends out its *super light culture carriers* in disguise: cultural ambassadors wearing backpacks and pushing trolleys covered with a concrete pattern fabric. They provide information about the program of the **Hakawati** and are used for spontaneous actions in the public realm.

Special initiatives are dislocated throughout the city by means of *light culture carriers*: trucks adorned with curtains. Their purpose is to bring medium-scale events far out in the city and to reach out to a diverse public. They also function as mobile communication and documentation tools (mobile libraries), rehearsal spaces, artistic workshop spaces.

Large scale events, however, need a proper stage scenario offered by the city through the installation of *medium culture carriers*: temporary structures consisting of multicolored scaffolding. They are flexible and can take various shapes according to the event. They function as urban leeches by exploiting existing vertical, horizontal or sloping surfaces and by enhancing a location's main features. But these itinerant temporary structures "Culture carriers – Hakawati", return as cultural catalysts, record the city vibes, look into its belly, and analyze its lively and vibrant moods.

The **Hakawati** needs this energetic drive from the city and offers itself to Beirut as a public plaza for pluralism. By means of a public forum, an open platform for participation and empowerment, the **Hakawati** involves, three times a year local cultural operators in the discussion and decision-making of its cultural strategies and plans. The forum, located on the ground-floor, consists of three rings: the first ring is for the appointed people of the Hakawati and the second ring is for the cultural operators in Beirut. The larger ring is for the normal audience which can attend the gatherings and interact through various media, such as radio, blogs etc. Nevertheless the forum is always an inclusive place to encounter, interact and exchange views, ideas, and experiences.

The **Hakawati** is a comfortable, welcoming space which hosts a diversified program by fostering

new forms of culture as well as bringing forth the rich Lebanese cultural heritage, i.e. the vernacular culture at its highest level. It attracts renowned international artists as well as the local artistic scene by activating an open source program. **Hakawati** is an embracing permanent festival for the celebration of the cultural vitality of the city.

THE HOUSE OF THE HAKAWATI

Hakawati is a shelter for all forms of culture, from the city and abroad, and for many kinds of inhabitation: it is a long stretched carpet that makes you feel at home.

A spiral ramp system leads the visitors throughout the building to experience various scenarios from the public area to the experimentation area, and from there to the performance and contemplation areas up to the top floor. The ground-floor of the **Hakawati** is an extension of the public space. Professionals in the cultural and artistic field and the normal public can join and attend open discussions in the forum, can choose to visit exhibits in the small exhibition space, can enjoy a coffee in the cafeteria or can just pass by to inquire about general information and upcoming events. They can moreover linger in the bookstore or choose to go directly to the rooftop through two scenic elevators. From there they will have a 360-degree view of the city with the option to visit the sky garden, and enjoy the shade and a pleasant meal in the restaurant. Furthermore in the evenings they can join the club, or they can watch a retrospective of Jean-Luc Godard in the cinema.

The ramp stretches out gradually to the upper level by hosting the experimentation and production area and it metaphorically resembles the juxtaposition of a series of carpets, turned into concrete. The breeding ground of the **Hakawati**, hosting workshop spaces, laboratories and the cinémathèque, are equally accessible for a visit. This floor is also accessible for the temporary structures - the trucks and the scaffolding - to come back.

Continuing to walk up to the third floor, visitors can experience the festive atmosphere of the performance area in which the big and small performance halls are embedded. These spaces can be used as separate halls or become a large experimental performance space, completely flexible. Carpets and pillows turn the adjacent space into a warm ambiance suitable for rest and relaxation, or can be used as a stage for an informal show. For a more active gathering there is also a foyer and a bar.

Reaching the fourth floor is an ultimate experience for contemplation. Visitors can enjoy a unique panorama through glass walls contouring the larger exhibition space - which can be darkened by means of curtains – or could instead immerse themselves in the silence of the library.

Curtains are a recurrent aspect in the Hakawati. They wrap up the exterior of the building, partition the interior in intimate or more open spaces, contribute to exalt the out-of-weight feeling to the structure.

Hakawati is not just a house of arts and culture, but is a receptor and stimulator for knowledge and culture in Beirut. Instead of an imposing iconic building, it is a multifunctional structure able to

merge with the city and to listen to its urban voice. It is a free space for pluralism, multiple encounters and interactions. It is a real center for the celebration of one of the most lively cultures of the middle east.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Energy efficiency: In the design process special interest is given to energy efficiency of the building. By optimizing the sun-shading of the facades it is possible to minimize the solar radiation in summer and maximize it in winter. In winter this leads to natural heat gains to warm up the building. In summer the sun-shading facilitates a cooler inner climate and minimizes the cooling load. By integrating heating / cooling pipes in the concrete construction the thermal mass of the construction will be activated. Activating the concrete reduces the cooling load, cost- and energy efficiently, to an absolute minimum and provides a comfortable inner climate. Natural ventilation is used to cool and ventilate the building in mild periods. The usage of natural ventilation is regulated according to measurements taken from the outside air temperature. Additional Air-conditioning units provide sufficient fresh air and facilitate climate control per room. Heat pumps will efficiently generate chilled water in summer and heated water in winter, which will be used to activate the concrete structure and condition the air in the air-conditioning units. The heat pumps run on sustainable electricity which is generated by solar cells on the roof.

Structure :The structural design of the building is a concrete main-structure shaped by concrete walls (500mm thick) in the facades. In the 2 open corners these concrete walls work as cantilevers for transferring the loads to the foundations. The main-structure is stabilized by a couple of concrete cores placed in strategic locations. The top level is a stiff box with a sub-main structure made of concrete walls and storey high steel truss girders spanning between the concrete walls in the façade, and supported by the concrete cores. The floors and staircases beneath the box are suspended from the main load bearing-construction of the top level. The floors in the building are designed in situ poured concrete and for the large spans pre-stressing of the floor is necessary. The huge main structure with the suspension columns is an advantage for the structure in the parking since only the cores are running through the parking. So the columns in the parking can be optimally positioned to take up less space. The structure of the parking will be an in situ poured concrete skeleton with columns, walls and floors.

Materiality: The outside walls are cast in concrete. They take the form of giant monolithic curtains. Specific soft mould will be implemented to explore several fabrication methods creating randomness by repetition and the potential of a soft and smooth finish. There wavy profile provides extra stiffness to the walls of the building. The use of a specific glass curtain system together with a double layered textile curtains, one to control light, one for varying acoustical conditions(contemporary music) provide flexibility , transparency, and enhance the openness by blurring the borders between inside and outside. A subtle dialectic between the house and the city starts to emerge.