

EVALUATION DIPLOMA PROJECT

Student: Stephen Apolonov
Project: "Maříž Center for the Past and Future"
Ústav: Prostorového plánování, 15121
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Opponent: Klara Doleželová
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Introduction:

The following review is based on the timely submission of a portfolio, poster and models in accordance with the submission requirements and the assignment. This review also gives some consideration to the progress of the project during proposal development. Although the portfolio is relatively complete, it is missing a copy of the assignment.

Generally, the design proposal for the "Center for the Past and Future" sensitively reflects on the complex cultural heritage layering of this specific place, embracing the 'Genius Loci'. The proposal also looks forward, with clarity, restraint and humility; not as a prediction of things to come but an invitation to learn from the past and respect the future. The rather impressionistic hand drawing / water colors on brown paper are an ambitious attempt to develop and share these ideas; although somewhat naive, they are worthy and heartfelt efforts.

Portfolio:

The author has decided to represent his work with mixed media including both hand drawings and digital drawings with a clear distinction, the hand drawings are used largely to communicate ideas and design intentions and the technical aspects of the projects are communicated with technical drawings. The author has also decided to use brown paper to print the portfolio on. Although these decisions greatly complicate the process of preparing the portfolio and posters, the decision is grounded in a sensitive understanding of the place and clear intention of the character of the proposal.

The portfolio would benefit with more annotations and textual descriptions to explain the meaning of what is being described. This sparseness of annotation is rather pervasive in the portfolio. And leaves silent many thoughtful aspects of the proposal. More coordination between graphic and textual description would greatly enhance the explanation of the process and final process.

Models:

Two models were submitted, one at a larger scale depicting the larger context and the other a more detailed massing model including the primarily interior space organization. These models help explain some of the critical spatial qualities of the proposal.

Analysis:

The analysis portion of the documentation offers some particularly valuable insights at a variety of scales; from the transnational scale with the traditional route between Prague and Vienna to the location of historic site elements. Although this background has significance reflected in the development of the design proposal, it is not summarized in a clear statement of findings of the analysis. It would be of great benefit to have both a SWOT and Constraints & Potentials analysis so that the design proposal can be reviewed as a response to the analysis findings.

Vision & Goals:

The design proposal seems to be rather black box in that there is not a clear vision statement and goals as the guiding force behind the development of the design proposal. Although I know some of the goals and vision from discussions during the developmental phases it is unfortunately left to the interpretation of the reader and left either implicit or missing from the submitted documents.

The Design Proposal:

The first drawings of the design proposal on pages 17 and 18 give faint clues to fundamental design intentions. The interconnectedness between the building and the immediate surrounds is fundamental to the design proposal but barely discernable, particularly on page 18. The thoughtfulness of these intentions could have been better explained

with drawings and annotations that emphasize both the intention and the design response. For example, the triangular shaded areas are showing something; what and why? The rammed earth wall is a fundamental idea of the design, yet it is invisible in these drawings.

The elevation drawings on pages 19 & 20 are a very flat visualization of something that will be much more texturally rich. Although the ideas behind the design proposal are very interesting, the intentions of the façade design and the seasonal responses are not particularly apparent. The cursory plan drawings below do not really help as shown; however, possibly a combination of both the plan and elevation in an axonometric showing the surrounding site would overcome some of these problems. It

The elevations on pages 21 & 22 are much more successful and much more clearly reveal the building and site relationship, some of the interior spatial qualities as well as hinting of human occupancy and function of the design proposal.

The illustrative plans on pages 23 to 26 focus entirely on the interior and miss the critical relationship between interior and exterior, particularly since this is a fundamental design intention. Unlike the elevations, the plans have no hint of human occupancy, left to the furniture plans that are rather mechanically inserted.

The technical plans on pages 27 and 28 are crisp and dimensioned, translating the qualitative attributed of the design proposal into technical terminology. Unfortunately, basic material; rammed earth and wood. Once again, exterior spaces are not referred to.


The Living Building Challenge (LBC):

An additional requirement of the diploma assignment was to utilize the Living Building Challenge as a guide in the development of the design proposal and demonstration of the application of those principles. The author has recognized these principles and provided a cursory description of their integration into the design proposal. It is worth noting that many of the principle integrations are reflective of traditional construction practices and do not rely on complex 'high-tech' features.

Conclusion:

The design proposal for the "Maříž Center for the Past and Future" has great strengths apparently originating from three critical vectors; 1) personal extended on-site exploration, 2) historical research, and 3) through the lens of the LBC. The author spent significant lengths of time on site with repeated visits; walking extensively throughout the area, meeting and speaking with local people, getting to know the place. The author also invested significant effort to become familiar with the heritage of the place; socially, culturally and politically. The author looked through the lens of the living building challenge and discovered the depth of these principles in the heritage of the local context and their potential future applications.

The author took the risk of imbuing his portfolio with the spirit the springs from the convergence of these three vectors. Although this risk has created complications in representation, the proposal none the less possesses both the intended spirit; as well as the functional and technical components of an architectural proposal. Therefore, my evaluation of the Diploma Project of Stephen Apolonov is C; Good.



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