

Experimental Puppetry Arts Centre

The project for Experimental Puppetry Arts Centre in Stara Zagora is designed as a multifunctional public space that will attract and gather visitors and at the same time have the pulling power to create a community hub for cultural activity related to both theatre and other types of outdoor and indoor arts.

In the design process, we set out to find sustainable functional solutions in several key areas:

- synergy with the existing building in terms of functional and aesthetic connectivity;
- preserving as much open courtyard space as possible - building up instead of out;
- a rich and multifunctional reception area, allowing flexibility in the organization of different events;
- spatial and aesthetic characteristics of the building envelope that open the building to the surrounding while creating a distinct public space.

One of the team's main objectives is to achieve a sustainable solution to the building's function, so that the new centre would be organically connected to the existing Puppet Theatre, and at the same time the new centre would be able to function independently, while meeting the requirements of the brief. In this process, we have sought those connections with the existing theatre that enable the new centre to function properly and also improve the functioning of the existing building. The connection zone between the new and the existing building is designed as a merging space, which serves both theatres and connects different spaces on different floors.

The main Warehouse E, with an area of 600sqm is located at underground level. The required size of this warehouse area, as well as the overall building area requirements above ground, basically defines the position of the main warehouse underground. We have sought a spatial solution whereby as little of the site as possible is affected by excavation works and at the same time as many trees as possible are retained. Access to the car park, warehouse B.3 and the platform for the main basement warehouse is from Tsar Ivan Asen I street, next to the boundary with the existing school. This solution allows, via a platform, to serve both the new centre and the existing puppet theatre and gives the existing puppet theatre a connection to the new underground warehouse E. Evacuation routes are provided in the basement to serve both the new centre and the existing theatre. Heating Room C.6 is also located there.

We propose that the trees that fall within the scope of the excavation works and cannot be retained in this location to be relocated, with the necessary equipment, to suitable locations within the school yard or in the green space in front of the entrance to the existing puppet theater.

Above ground, the design for the new centre is a function of several spatial blocks and the relationship between these and the existing theatre. In our concept we have defined the following spatial-functional blocks:

- service areas / offstage area
- main hall
- entrance area
- a separate block containing the rehearsal space, administration and resident block

The main entrance to the Experimental Puppetry Centre and the entrance for administration and artists are located on General Gurko street. The main entrance is located near the intersection of General Gurko street and Tsar Ivan Asen I street.

We propose to locate the service areas adjacent to the existing puppet theater and school. In this block on the ground, second and third floors are located the following rooms - B.2. Wings, B.3. Storage, B.4. Sound and lighting space, B.5. Technical booth, C.1. Dressing rooms, C.2. Offstage restrooms for the actors, vertical and horizontal communications, stairs and lift. This layout allows for connection of both buildings, as well as the implementation of adequate evacuation from all floors of the existing building through the evacuation stairs and corridors located in this area. This location of the offstage spaces is also intended to ensure that as little of the courtyard as possible is affected by the new development.

The main hall is located adjacent to the service block. The hall is of a size, height and parameters to meet the requirements of the brief. The entrances and exits of the hall, and the connection of the hall to storage B.3. determines the location of the folding modular system for the spectator seats. The internal space of the hall is free, with the sound and lighting space outside the volume of the room which contributes to the multifunctional use of the hall. We are deliberately looking for a connection between the existing puppet theatre and the new centre, as the ability to share common space and auditoriums increases the functionality of the whole complex many fold. For example, temporary exhibitions could also be developed in the foyer of the existing puppet theatre, the new rehearsal hall could be used by both buildings, the new warehouse can serve both buildings, etc. Functional sharing of common spaces is a fundamental principle in sustainable planning, through which the volume of new construction is reduced and thus the overall environmental impact is reduced.

The reception area is formed by two types of spaces - an open common space and closed service spaces to this area. Through the open common space, the reception area connects the new centre to the existing theatre. At the same time, this area connects all the different functional blocks in the new centre and is a kind of transition to the courtyard space. We propose to develop the reception area partially on two levels, which will give greater possibilities for different functionality of the space. Dividing the reception area into two levels, also allows for the splitting into two levels of the service areas to this area, which in turn increases the open area of the indoor reception space and gives greater flexibility in organising presentations and exhibitions. The second-floor gallery in this area, as well as the connecting space with the existing building on the ground floor, are suitable for permanent and temporary exhibitions. At the highest part, the entrance space has a height of 7.5m, which opens completely onto the inner open courtyard and the main hall by means of folding walls and windows and serves as a stage for outdoor performances. A café bar is located close to the courtyard, with tables to the café scattered on both levels in the reception space and in the courtyard of the Experimental Puppetry Centre.

On the top floor of the new building, we propose to locate the following functional groups - C.3. Rehearsal room, C.4. Administration, and C.5. Residential Block. We are deliberately seeking to develop the building in height in order to retain as much open courtyard space as possible. As the level of this floor is above the roof of the existing puppet theatre, all rooms can have natural lighting and ventilation.

The connection between the different floors is by stairs and elevator. A platform for people with disabilities is provided to connect the two levels of the reception area and to make a connection with the reception area of the existing puppet theatre. Evacuation from the top floor and from the offices on the lower floors is via two escape routes - a main service stair and an external escape stair located on the internal boundary with the school.

The courtyard space is located between the reception area and the school yard. It is open to Tsar Ivan Asen I Street and is accessed from both the street and the reception area. We have sought the courtyard space in this area for several reasons. The first reason is that this part of the site contains the most existing trees and thus preserves them and makes them part of the courtyard of the new centre. This courtyard layout allows for a connection of the outdoor space to the high part of the reception area to be used as a stage for outdoor performances. In addition, the reciprocal arrangement of the main hall reception area and the courtyard allows these spaces to simultaneously open up to each other and together to the outdoor courtyard. In this way we aim to extend the functionality of the main public spaces - reception area, hall, courtyard. Placing the outdoor courtyard in this area creates a space that is as isolated as possible from the surrounding residential buildings, with the two-storey reception area creating the necessary barrier.

We propose green roofs for the new center, which will have positive effect on the reduction of the heat island effect, the thermal insulation of the building and the rainwater management. The idea of the curtain being raised before the start of the theatrical performance has been adopted by us as the main form-forming concept in this project. The white envelope of the new center and the vertical elements of the glazed main storefront, deliberately seek the visual effect of a curtain that is raised in places and invites visitors to the arts center, while simultaneously demarcating the enclosed and open interior spaces. The effect sought is one of a smooth transition of the envelope between solid and transparent volumes, with the distinction between the two blurred and not clearly defined.

We propose to provide a partially new envelope (curtain walling) of the existing puppet theatre, on the second and third floors, facing General Gurko Street, to relate to the appearance of the new building.

The structure of the new building is designed to be partially concrete and partially steel structure. The main hall will be with steel structure, because of the dimension of the space. The round columns behind the entrance storefront are also proposed to be steel columns. Basically the Service areas adjacent to the existing theatre and the service areas of the reception area are designed with monolithic concrete structure. All the floor slabs will be with monolithic concrete structure.

The envelope of the building is designed to be completed with aluminum and composite cladding systems and glass screens. The aluminum elements on the main storefront are custom designed. We propose, that the same cladding system to be used on the second and third floor of the existing theatre.

The heating system is by gas boiler, with boiler room situated in the basement. Due to the different functional blocks in the project, the ventilation will be combined – natural and mechanical, and the air from the mechanical ventilation will be exhausted above roof of the new

and the existing surrounding buildings. Chillers and air conditional systems will be placed on the roof of the last floor, above the surrounded buildings.

Main rooms with design areas according to the design brief:

- A.1.1 Entrance area - 152.67 m²
- A.1.2 Entrance area second floor - 101.74 m²
- A.2. Welcome Desk and Box-Office - 4.93 m²
- A.3. Storage space for the Welcome Desk - 5.04 m²
- A.4. Cloakroom - 25.87 m²
- A.5.1 Restroom women - 10.24 m²
- A.5.2 Restroom men - 12.51 m²
- A.5.3 Hygienist - 3.49 m²
- A.5.4 Accessible restroom - 2.74 m²
- A.6. Cafeteria & Bar - 5.23 m²
- A.7. Cafeteria & Bars storage - 6.67 m²
- B.1. Main performance hall - 267.22 m²
- B.2. Wings - 25.59 m²
- B.3. Storage - 42.67 m²
- B.4. Sound and light boxes - 33 m²
- B.5. Technical booth - 13.55 m²
- C.1.1 Dressing rooms men - 20.76 m²
- C.1.2 Dressing rooms women - 24.64 m²
- C.2.1 Offstage restrooms men - 10.57 m²
- C.2.2 Offstage restrooms women - 4.08 m²
- C.3. Rehearsal space - 123.47 m²
- C.4.1 Administration 1 - 12.36 m²
- C.4.2 Administration 2 - 12.36 m²
- C.4.3 Administration 3 - 12.36 m²
- C.5.1 Residential block - Room 1 - 19.65 m²
- C.5.2 Residential block - Room 2 - 20.94 m²
- C.5.3 Residential block - Room 3 - 23.62 m²
- C.6. Heater room 26.6 m²
- C.7. Toilets 5.69 m²
- E Warehouse 605.53 m²







































































