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Urban Planning, Architecture and Scenography

text: Benedikt Loderer

The Schindler Award 2006 confronted the students with three overlapping tasks: the Link, the Visitors' Center and the Exhibition Concept, as well as three overlapping fields of work: urban planning, architecture and scenography. The task made high demands upon its participants.

• Paris, Passerelle Debilly. Why here? Because it is an ideal example of what is meant by "Access for All". Paris is attractive, the monumental architecture of the Palais de Tokyo invites in-depth analysis, the site is well documented and has big differences in height and difficult impediments. The brief complied with the educational aims to which the schools of architecture are obedient, and the competition demanded a thorough analysis of the needs of people with disabilities. The Link, the Visitors' Center and an Exhibition Concept constituted the three parts of the competition.

The Link

First of the urban planning aspect. The best location for an overview is the Eiffel Tower. The great axis from the École Militaire via the Champ de Mars to the Pont d'Iéna and the Trocadero indicates the direction. The eye roams over around 800 meters up the Seine to the Pont de l'Alma. Between the two bridges, we discover the Passerelle Debilly. This is the main impediment. The principle of "Access for All" founders on this little footbridge, a leftover of the 1900 World Exhibition. It separates the south and north embankments, for it is by no means suitable for people with disabilities. The core of the task is to improve it: the Link. We are moving in a museum landscape. To the south, on the Seine embankment, stands the recently opened Musée du Quai Branly by Jean Nouvel, to the north the Palais de Tokyo, a colonnade connecting two independent buildings. To the left, the real Palais de Tokyo, which nowadays accommodates artists' studios. To the right, the Musée d'art moderne, and directly behind it the Musée Gaillard. The Palais surmounts the river slope with several storeys, something that is clearly visible in the interior courtyard with its three terrace levels. Thus the Link, "The Museum's Walk for All," must be regarded primarily as an ascent. From the low-lying south bank, the first thing is to cross the riverside road, and then the river at a height that permits the passage of boats beneath it. On the other bank, the task is to overcome the city motorway, to find the access to the Palais de Tokyo, and to ascend the approximately ten-meter river slope. An obstacle race is to become "an easy stroll for people with or without disabilities."

This new pathway is located in the center of Paris. Here, urban planning means incising the pathway into the city landscape. The Link is also a high walkway, an observation promenade. There is a view of Paris and the two embankments, but the all-commanding monument is the Eiffel Tower. The pathway has to stage the city. But the Link is also an advertisement for the Visitors' Center, a proclamation in the urban context. In short, the program states that "your conceptual approach integrating urban aspects, topography, surroundings, sights and traffic is what we are looking for."

The Visitors' Center

The actual Palais de Tokyo belongs to the French Republic, the opposite Musée d'Art moderne to the City of Paris. Only the western half of the complex and the courtyard are available for the Link and the Visitors' Center. The artists' studios, the restaurant and the administration take up only half of the huge building. The basement floors are empty. Today's utilization is only a stopgap, which poses the question: What is to be done with the Palais de Tokyo? A Visitors' Center is the Schindler Award's answer. This

proposal is one idea among many. The Republic can choose. The Visitors' Center would require approximately 3,000 square meters useful area to be accommodated in the existing building substance of 20,000 square meters. The space allocation program requires the usual space for exhibitions, conference rooms, cinema, restaurant and the relevant secondary rooms. Over and above this, special facilities for people with disabilities are required. A workshop for wheelchairs, for example. Naturally, the Link must reach as far as the Visitors' Center, whereby the Link "may also pierce the Palais de Tokyo at any point." A gentler approach would, however, be possible. The Visitors' Center is a classic architectural task. A conversion and insertion is to be planned in the high rooms of the Palais.

The Exhibition Concept

The space allocation program stipulates around 1,000 square meters exhibition area, for which, however, no specifications are given. What is required, however, is an exhibition concept that creates awareness. It is to facilitate access to the arts for everyone. People with disabilities, not only wheelchair users but also people with im-

paired sight and hearing and blind and deaf people, are to be provided with access to the arts. We anticipate proposals that provide people with disabilities with access to music, painting and sculpture, and which are also attractive to the nondisabled. But there is also an educational intention behind this project: "Our goal is to create in the participant's mind a special awareness of the different forms of disability, of the different possibilities of circumventing these disabilities, and thus to influence the future architect in his or her everyday work."

This task requires each layout or exhibition plan to be based on a concept of how to convey its essence. How does one show a blind person pictures? Not an easy question to answer. What is needed is an intellectual show of strength. The three-part task was complex and made high demands upon the students.

The organizers were aware of this. They conceded: "The size and multipurpose character of the overall project are too demanding to be studied in every detail. We request conceptual drawings only on these tasks." A competition in the center of the City of Paris. Could there be a better place for a student of architecture? •



The planning area

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- Perimeter
- Palais de Tokyo
- Courtyard / Le Parvis
- Musée de l'Art Moderne
- Passerelle Debilly

Part of Paris from above

- 1 Trocadero
- 2 Pont d'Austerlitz
- 3 Arc de Triomphe
- 4 Eiffel Tower
- 5 Palais de Tokyo
- 6 Passerelle Debilly
- 7 Musée du Quai Branly
- 8 Pont d'Alma
- 9 Champs Elysées
- 10 Grand Palais
- 11 Hôtel des Invalides

