

press information

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WKO Styria, Graz

Center of Excellence

1st prize in an open, two-phase realization competition for the training center of the Economic Chambers Styria (WKO) in Graz

Competition: 12/2017

SHORT

The Center of Excellence - an elegant link between the WKO and the city

The urban design solution for the Center of Excellence highlights its role as a new educational hotspot in Graz. Thanks to its self-confident yet respectful approach to its environment the building complex enjoys a positive symbiosis with the existing urban fabric. ATP also created a generous, richly diverse square at the heart of the WKO site that confidently continues the clear spatial sequence that runs through the city and will connect all surrounding buildings, present and future. The result is a series of high quality meeting spaces that will especially appeal to young people.

“The design extends the high-quality, park-like character of the WKO site to Grabenstraße where the building addresses the outside world in the form of a huge educational shopfront”, says the architect Paul Ohnmacht, Head of Design of ATP Innsbruck, describing the design idea. “In the same way that the technical nature of the educational facility is represented by the metal, glass and timber façade the varied work-based and training activities can be seen in the generous “exhibition format” of the façade to the base.”

A large number of the spaces are indeed workshops which are located at ground level for functional reasons. This is made possible by a highly flexible slab. Penetrated by atria this guarantees short travel distances, optimal logistics, and easy adaptation. The subtle suppression of the building at the street corner emphasizes the new complex without detracting from the existing presence of the WKO ensemble.

ATP CEO Christoph M. Achammer spoke about the Center of Excellence: *“Our central idea first addressed the issue of urban design. By creating an appropriate image for the entire WKO complex in such a sensitive location we opened the way for a new urban organization which takes full account of the existing buildings. Secondly, it was very important to us to use the core process of the future role of the building – as a place of training – as the basis for an open structure that is as flexible and communicative as possible as a means of supporting this educational role.”*

URBAN DESIGN

The special location of the WKO is underlined by the largely green surroundings. An elongated single story base which is slightly raised above the green slope elegantly accompanies Bergmannngasse and Grabenstraße and acts as a shopfront to the Wifi workshops. At the junction this apparently floating volume reinforces the urban character of the ensemble. Thinking about future developments the design team proposes the broadening of the base to the north adjacent to Building A1 and the use of this base as an underground car park parallel to Hochsteingasse. Building W1 can thus be retained and at the same time replaced. The subtle set back of Building A2 creates an elongated central space between the WKO and Wifi that connects the various buildings. The new buildings treat the WKO ensemble with respect, ensuring that positive symbiosis is a principle feature of the entire complex. Given the contemporary desire to intensify the use of public transport the bus stop is consciously integrated into the site, creating a powerful symbol for a public institution/training facility. This also grants some importance to the main entrance of the WKO building while also enabling this to retain its natural appearance to Hochsteingasse.

FUNCTIONS

Most of the spaces are workshops that are located in the highly flexible ground floor base due to their function. Materials are supplied to these learning spaces from a central, covered ground floor delivery zone located between Building W1 and the base. Most training courses present themselves to the city through display windows in the Grabenstraße façade. The kitchen which is located on the base and serves a café on the campus also opens up to the street as do further training workshops in the building which “floats” above this.

MATERIALS/STRUCTURE

The base and the first building are designed as reinforced concrete frames with element façades due to the size of the spaces and the resulting free spans. The glass and metal façade with wide elements facing the street thus has the character of shopfront. However, this is a shopfront that displays not consumer goods but one of the most important goods of all: education and handcraft. Metal and glass are the connecting elements. The training workshops at ground floor level and on the upper floors are located on the south façade. The recessed horizontal joint between the elements contains the kitchen and café. The rhythm of the façade elements becomes denser on the upper floors. This means that the building can also be used at a later date as an office building with an office grid of 135 cm.

OPEN SPACES

The concept for the open spaces integrates the sometimes highly heterogeneous existing situation into a highly legible overall concept. Clearly organized spatial edges, connections and relationships create a generous yet differentiated central square which connects all the buildings in the ensemble while also resolutely continuing the urban fabric. Diverse green spaces with varying designs and levels of intimacy establish communicative meeting places, attractive views and a high spatial quality throughout the open spaces. In formal terms, the basic structure of this square is strictly orthogonal although the rhythm of the floor materials and the apparently “thrown together” nature of the green spaces and objects lend it both a dynamic appearance and a sense of identity.

The high number of trees creates a continuous green link between the lush woodland to the north and the district park to the south. The competition team provided the extra areas required for the planting of these trees by creating steps in height across the site which are both structurally useful and aesthetically pleasing. The reduced amount of hard surfacing and the intense greenery of all the built areas create a pleasant natural atmosphere and an improved microclimate. The location of underground reservoirs in the retention garden guarantees the long-term irrigation of the green spaces and encourages evaporative cooling in summer.

BUILDING SERVICES CONCEPT

The highly efficient envelope minimizes energy loads. The large areas of glass optimize passive solar gain in winter and reduce heat loads. Glazed atria provide high levels of daylight in the workshops and reduce the need for artificial light. The resulting reduction of internal heat loads, combined with the sophisticated external shading system leads to an equally low cooling load in summer. Cooling ceilings provide additional comfort in summer. All workshops and teaching and office spaces have the appropriate number of air changes (3 to 10 times). The contaminated air is extracted from the workshops and teaching spaces via the roof. A photovoltaic plant is planned for the roof to Building A. The electricity generated by this plant can be used to operate the ventilation plant. The clear design of the plant rooms and supply ducts is ideal for teaching purposes. The plant rooms of the ventilation and heating systems in the basement and at roof level and the photovoltaic plant can all be used for teaching purposes.

Further information:

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