

Museum taking us into the city

In the past year Ljubljana has set up a museum connecting the architect Jože Plečnik's museum collection with his urban architecture and town planning giving the residents and visitors the opportunity to get to know and to experience the urban landscape of the city through the museum. The city's urban landscape and the architecture designed by the architect Jože Plečnik give Ljubljana special character. In my contribution I will present the Plečnik House renovation project and its conversion into the museum, its collection and the platform on which we have connected the architect's work in the house and its garden with his projects redesigning the city. By doing so the museum has opened into the city, Plečnik's architecture and town planning became the trademark and the identity of the city and its residents. The platform for the creation of Plečnik's museum collection was the interdisciplinary work of different professionals with the idea of intertwining movable and immovable heritage as well as urban landscape into a product enabling communication between the museum and the city with its residents and visitors.

We want to affirm Plečnik as the icon of the city of Ljubljana. In my contribution there is a short presentation of the architect and his work, the renovation of the Plečnik House and its garden, and especially the programs and presentations linking the museum collection with cultural monuments and town planning. The positioning of the Plečnik House on the international stage, the museum as a platform for professional research and its open doors policy to diverse visitors as well as its entwinement with the city are key in enabling us to learn about our own environment and present it to the world.

The Ljubljana Museum and Galleries manages the Plečnik House and all its programs.

The starting point of the cultural policy of the City of Ljubljana is the creative city Ljubljana where culture is closely connected with the tourist, educational, economic and other sectors contributing to the material and spiritual welfare of all its residents and visitors.

For this reason we are also developing projects in the field of cultural heritage which represent added value in cultural heritage preservation as well as its presentation and connectivity.

One of such complex projects from the perspective of heritage protection and preservation as well as from the view of presenting it to the public is the Plečnik House restoration project.

The City of Ljubljana has concluded its multiannual restoration and presentation project of the Plečnik House and Garden as a museum, dedicated to one of the best known architects of the 20th century. The residential house where Plečnik lived, worked and which he designed himself is transformed into a museum which also familiarizes us with the city development of Ljubljana and serves as a point of departure for a cultural and tourist tour of the city.

We want to establish Plečnik as an icon of the city Ljubljana.

Who is Plečnik

The work of the architect Jože Plečnik (1872-1957) left a mark on three Central-European cities: Vienna, Prague and Ljubljana. In Vienna, where he studied under the famous architect Otto Wagner, Plečnik distinguished himself with a number of pioneering works of modern architecture. Among

other projects in Prague, he remodelled the famous Prague castle into the presidential residence and re-landscaped the castle gardens as well.

Upon his return to Ljubljana in 1921, where he was offered the post of professor at the newly established university, he focused his creative energies on designing the city. Plečnik's Ljubljana as a unique urbanistic curiosity is considered to be one of the most important total artworks of the 20th century.

In designing Ljubljana, the new capital of the Slovenian nation, Plečnik tried to use modern approaches while modelling the city on ancient Athens. His style, innovative even by today's standards, is characterized by the use of classical architectural elements, such as pillars, lintels, balustrades and colonnettes, redesigned and combined in his own special way.

Plečnik's best known works

Plečnik redesigned Ljubljana with several key city buildings and by renovating numerous existing ones. His best known works include the National and University Library building, the embankments of the Ljubljanica river, most notably the Triple Bridge and the Cobblers' Bridge, the Central Market, the Križanke Summer Theatre, the funeral home at the Žale cemetery and the Church of St. Michael in the Marshes.

Plečnik and UNESCO

Plečnik's architecture is nominated to be included in UNESCO's World Heritage List. The following is written in the nomination:

»In late January 2015, Slovenia and the Czech Republic have successfully submitted the text of the project titled *Timeless Humanistic Architecture of Jože Plečnik in Ljubljana and Prague* nominating the building and city design works of the architect Jože Plečnik to be included in the tentative UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List.

The submission of the text for the Tentative List is the first formal step in a comprehensive and complex nomination process. In the nomination Plečnik is presented as an architect who in his work, independently from the concurrent architectural trends at the beginning of the 20th century and with a unique reinterpretation of cultural heritage, developed a singular and unmatched architectural language with rich symbolism which is understood even today.«

Plečnik House

The Plečnik house was set up and opened to the public in 1974. In the house artist's valuable original furniture and personal objects were displayed. But the condition of the Plečnik House as well as the exhibited and archived items demanded urgent renovation. To preserve the heritage of national importance in future we started with the renovation of the museum house, the collection and the garden in 2007 and finished in 2015. The preparation of the building took six years and the implementation of the investment two years. The implementation of the project called for constructive cooperation between numerous professions: from project management to conservation

and restoration work, and of course the architectural design, graphic design and architectural landscaping to complex museum work: inventorying, exhibition set up, programme preparation, promotion and marketing.

The purpose of the project was the restoration and renovation of a group of buildings, original interiors and museum exhibits in the Plečnik House recognised as cultural heritage of national importance, coupled with programme enrichment and modernisation and the possibility of expanding museum's presentation. The following has been done within the framework of the project:

- we have inventoried Plečnik's heritage,
- we have concluded a cooperation agreement between the institutions storing Plečnik's heritage,
- we have acquired an exhibition area for the presentation of Plečnik's work and life,
- we have acquired a study area and space for pedagogical programmes and lectures,
- we have acquired space for occasional exhibitions,
- we have made Plečnik's House accessible to the movement impaired,
- we have set up work areas and
- renovated the Plečnik House and the Garden.

Now there is a museum with its supporting programme operating in the Plečnik House. The complex of buildings at the address Karunova 4 and 6 is divided into three programme units: the museum collection, the public programme and the staff.

The house with the garden, preserved as Plečnik left them, are the focus of visitors' experience. In addition to this there is a permanent exhibition in the newly acquired space on the ground floor of the complex displaying Plečnik's opus in Ljubljana, Vienna and Prague as well as Slovenia. It comprehensively presents Plečnik's life story, his architectural and design opus, and puts a special spotlight on the creation of »Plečnik's Ljubljana«. Interesting details from Plečnik's personal life are also presented.

On the ground floor there is an area for pedagogical and andragogical programmes, a shop and an info centre, and on the first floor there is space for occasional exhibitions and a study room with a library. The Plečnik House with its andragogical and pedagogical programmes represents a point of departure for the tour of Plečnik's Ljubljana for different groups. Its programme exposes different aspects of Plečnik's work and its scientific research will contribute to the promotion of Plečnik's opus and Ljubljana.

During the tour of the Plečnik House visitors discover elements, details, materials and approaches which are later reflected in Plečnik's architecture in the city. They represent an additional link and a story between the museum and the city.

Garden

Plečnik's attitude towards plants and greenery is apparent already during the tour of the house in some of the incredibly thought out views from the rooms into the garden as well as in the design of the winter garden and the entrance atrium. It constantly makes us think how to create conditions for Mediterranean plants to flourish in rooms with less favourable climate and how to connect the area of the green garden with the spaces in the house where ivy and grapevine grows as well.

A special characteristic of the Plečnik House is also the garden which has been renovated as well according to the data from the middle of the last century and is part of the museum presentation. Just like the house the garden was also created by Plečnik and as such it reflects his thoughts on the relationship between architecture and the garden, the use of cement products as well as recycled elements in the space, showing neighbourly relations with the hedge, the elements of Mediterranean space design and the preservation of traditional elements of suburban gardens beside residential houses with a vegetable garden, a space for growing plantlings and an orchard. The maintenance of the garden and its museum component thus represent a special challenge for the museum staff, among them also individuals who take care of the garden and produce their own vegetables in a dedicated area.

But this is not the only peculiarity of museum work in the Plečnik House.

Museum approaches to the presentation of the Plečnik House and his work. Due to space restrictions and the method of presenting Plečnik's collection – after all it is set up in the residential house and the garden as he left them in 1957 – the viewing of the collection is possible only with professional guidance in groups of up to seven people.

But because the viewing of the collection is so specific there are numerous parallel programmes available. Just to give a few examples:

With the aim of increasing accessibility we have made a tactile model of the whole complex of three interconnected houses representing the Plečnik House. It is intended for the visitors of the house to make it easier for them to apprehend the complexity of the three connected building units. The model is especially useful for persons with visual impairments because it helps them to create a better picture how the spaces are arranged, designed and furnished.

[The Little Museum](#) is a cultural and educational participative project for groups of primary school children. The exhibition is set up in the Plečnik House in which all preschool and school children and their families interested in architecture, town planning and design can participate.

The presentation of Plečnik and his work in the National Geographic Junior magazine titled: [Knock knock, is Plečnik at home?](#) The pedagogical curator from the Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana has written:

»While visiting the Plečnik House you have a feeling as if you are going into a time machine. The moment you step across the threshold you are taken back 60 years into the past. A curious feeling overwhelms you and that is why you walk silently not to wake up the sleeping architect or maybe disturb him while he is drawing plans of some grand building. Granted, the great master is not with as any more, but his spirit remains alive and is still present.«
(Nika Damijanovič)

New Plečnik's study centre

The renovated Plečnik House is becoming an important study centre since a special space is dedicated to all those who study Plečnik's work. Researchers have access to Plečnik's digitised designs, and by prior arrangement, they are also able to view and examine Plečnik's original designs

kept by the museum in a storage facility with appropriate climatic conditions needed for storing paper.

Plečnik House as a starting point for exploring the city

A novelty in the renovated Plečnik House is a permanent exhibition. The largest room features Plečnik's works in Ljubljana, a model of Ljubljana highlighting Plečnik's urban features and buildings. Some original designs are available in the drawers of the model and digital screens are set up next to the model for more detailed research of Plečnik's architecture. The new exhibition in the Plečnik House is complemented by a newspaper Plečnik's Gazette, a collection of interesting archival and newer newspaper articles on Plečnik and his work.

At the same time the Plečnik House is also a starting point for the exploration of the city and Plečnik's architecture. This means that we have opened the museum and the museum work to include the whole city.

And so museum workers act as tour guides for Plečnik's Ljubljana, and Ljubljana Tourism offers a tour of Plečnik's architecture in the city centre, namely, the Walking Tour of Plečnik's Ljubljana.

In addition, it is possible to go on a tour of Plečnik's architecture, especially of his works dispersed outside the city centre, using Ljubljana's network of Cycling paths.

Plečnik is developing into a trade mark of Ljubljana.

The museum is expanding into the city. Ljubljana is turning into an open-air museum.

ICONIC HOUSES

The Plečnik House is definitely gaining international recognisability with its entry into the ICONIC HOUSES network, joining exceptional architectural creations of the 20th century remodelled into museum houses open to the public. Their mission is focused primarily on the strategy of preservation, management and presentation of architecturally exceptional residential houses converted into museums and mutual cooperation.

Conclusion

And so the museum lives and operates on different levels:

Between the Plečnik House and the city;

Among residents of different age groups and persons with disabilities;

Among different experts, from museum staff, architects, landscape architects, conservationists to art historians and many others;

Between the city and its international reputation;

With its concept the museum has opened the doors to new dimensions of recognisability and identity for the city and its residents.

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