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New
projects



Urban campus reform,
Budapest

O'Donnell + Tuomey set out to transform several buildings in the heart of the historic city into a coherent whole.

HUNGARY — TEXT: LEVENTE POLYÁK AND ISABELLE PRIEST

Founded in 1991, the Central European University is a child of the Velvet Revolution, having responded to the need for new academic institutions in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Supported by many of the region's leading intellectuals, CEU's ambition was to assist the democratic transition of post-communist nations by introducing study programmes in public policy modelled after Western counterparts, as well as social and environmental sciences.

The university quickly became a source of highly trained individuals for the region's universities, NGOs, and governments. Originally located in Prague, CEU moved to Budapest in the early '90s. The choice was a challenge right from the beginning, as its faculties were distributed in several historical buildings. While the new library and faculty tower (1994) by László Iványi created a strong connection between the separate buildings, situating university functions in former residential

buildings had its inconveniences. Moreover, CEU's accreditation began attracting an increasing number of students from Western Europe and elsewhere. In 2010, CEU launched its campus redevelopment programme. Following an international competition, Irish firm O'Donnell + Tuomey, together with Hungarian partners M-Teampannon, was selected to turn the campus into a sustainable complex, respectful of its historical context. Besides bringing all the faculties together in one 35,000 m² campus comprising six contiguous buildings, plans also include a new library, an extended auditorium, and a café. After adapting the proposal to the requests of the Budapest Heritage Authority, construction began in May 2015. The design, while preserving the architectural character of the city block, promises to translate CEU's mission into a spatial arrangement: permeable, accessible for citizens, and giving the university greater visibility and a stronger presence in the city. (LP)



Red staircases accent one of the large atriums, linking various programmatic elements.



A rooftop terrace will wrap around the new structure and continue onto adjoining campus buildings.

Tell us about the design process. We begin every project by a deliberate process of immersion, reading around the subject, analysing our brief, listening to our client and people who can help us learn something new about the situation. By gradual steps of observation and analysis, careful investigation, we prepare ourselves for the precarious, sometimes sudden and always necessary jumps in logic that lead the way to an actual architectural design. Multiple early consultations and meetings with the CEU community (students, faculty, staff) augmented our understanding of the brief and gave us insights into the workings of CEU and the interconnections within and between departments. We explored the city of Budapest, observing the historic architectural pattern of courtyard development, facades, and boulevards of stone.

What is the building's central concept, and how does the idea materialize? The existing campus consisted of five

adjoining buildings, each with an entrance from the street, with minimal interconnectivity between them. We identified opportunities to intervene in this urban block, to make what is now a disconnected and disparate set of buildings into an open campus. We employed a process of selective subtraction and addition to transform the campus into a metaphorical crossroads. By a carefully considered 'surgical' strategy, we link all existing and new facilities through a legible sequence of connected courtyards.

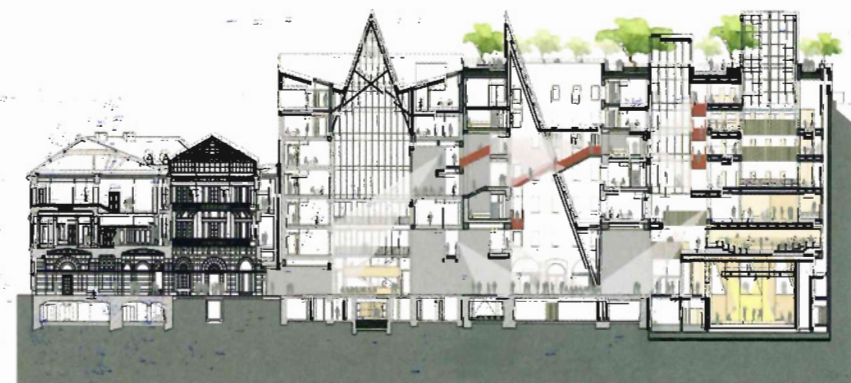
What experience and references did you draw upon for this project? What lessons have you learned from the LSE building, for example (see A10 #57)? One parallel with all our work, including LSE, is our approach to sustainability and environmental design, forming an integral part of the design process. Rather than being an exercise in 'ticking boxes', we see environmental performance as a key measure of the success of the design



Topped by a sharply pitched glass roof, this atrium provides natural light and aids wayfinding.



The expanded auditorium will host public events, conferences, and performances.



Section showing how the redevelopment spans six adjoining buildings.

of new additions and the rehabilitation of existing spaces in CEU. We understand the role an integrated approach to environment, architecture, structure, and services plays, not only in creating a comfortable environment for staff and students, but in the conservation of natural resources. The design team follows an environmental design methodology that prioritizes demand reduction strategies over active supply strategies. This is an approach which defines how we validate architectural and technical design decisions, and ensures that we develop robust and reliable solutions for achieving a low-energy, low-carbon campus.

How were the materials selected? The palette of materials have been selected for their endurance and natural material qualities that give character to the overall appearance. Stone, timber, concrete, and steel form the fabric of the internal public spaces, with bespoke furniture used throughout the building. The new facades

will be constructed with local limestone, designed to emphasize the geometric quality of the building and continuing the tradition of solidity and permanence of the Budapest-stone architecture. (IP) ◀

CEU CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT, 2015 –
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