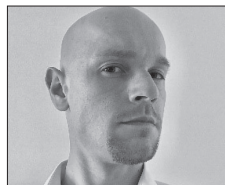


Mediatheque or Centre of Knowledge and Culture – Case Study of Piotrków Trybunalski Mediatheque



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This article presents a case study of the Piotrków mediatheque. Analysing it in a broader context, it is possible to pose a thesis on the re-evaluation of this type of facility.

That for which room is made is always granted and hence is joined, that is, gathered, by virtue of a location, that is, by such a thing as the bridge. Accordingly, spaces receive their being from locations and not from space¹.

In recent years, a new type of institution has appeared in the cultural landscape of the Polish cities: the mediatheque. As one observes this phenomenon, an interesting co-dependency can be noticed – in big cities, the majority of such facilities are created in already existing libraries or museums through reorganisation or expansion². In medium-sized and small towns, newly-designed buildings are dedicated for them³. In this article, an analysis of the new building of the Mediatheque of the 800th Anniversary in Piotrków Trybunalski is conducted. This constitutes a basis for further conclusions regarding a new type of already existing library buildings. The case study method combined with field research, supplemented with interviews with the director and the chief designer, became a solid basis for putting forward certain arguments and drawing conclusions.

One of them is that medium-sized and small-sized towns can meet various needs, providing educational, cultural and scientific value for local citizens thanks to such a new building. A multi-functional facility can create a “metropolitan” substitute and make a promise which, so far, could only be fulfilled in big cities.

Mediatheque as a phenomenon reflecting changes in the world

Before starting the analysis, we shall first introduce the meaning of the neologism “mediatheque”. The short history of the phenomenon itself must be explained, including the general state of research. The term “la mediatheque” was more commonly used in France in the 1990s with reference to such projects as Médiathèque de la Cité des sciences et de l’industrie de La Villette (1986-89) and the mediatheques in Arles (1989), Le Blanc-Mesnil (1993), Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines (1993), Issy-les-Moulineaux (1994-1995) and Saint-Étienne (1994-1995) [1]. It was a reaction to the rapidly increasing pace of information exchange and the role of mul-

timedia forms of communication in the societies of developed countries. The objective of the mediatheque, barring the traditional library role, was also the collection and distribution of sound recordings and other forms of digital data related both to culture (concerts and theatre plays) as well as important social and political events [2]. As the authors of the article on the French mediatheques claimed: New media are discovering their true function in the mediatheques, their true call, which is information and communication between people. [...] The mission of this new mutation of libraries is providing information, education and culture regardless of the age, achievements and cultural or economic status of the recipients [1]. Since that time, those multi-functional buildings have become a global phenomenon rather than being unique to France only [3]. They have spread to all developed countries, and the most famous example outside of France is the Sendai Mediatheque designed by Toyo Ito in Japan in 2001 [4], [5]. Scientific research on the mediatheque is multidisciplinary in nature – the analysis concerns both the architecture and the point of view of librarianship. More general publications can also be found [6], [7], [8], but the ones referring to individual cases are dominant in this matter [1], [2], [3], [4], [9]. The phenomenon in question is still in its development phase, so the final conclusions are yet to be drawn



Fig. 1. Visualisation “View from the west”; Provided by the director of Mediatheque, Mrs. Renata Wojtczak

¹ Heidegger M., Building, Dwelling and Thinking, 1954 [in] Frampton K. Modern Architecture – A Critical History, 1980, Reprinted 2002.

² It is so, for example, in Warsaw, Kraków, Wrocław or Poznań – Only the city of Łódź is an exception, where the new investment will not be a new building. The new mediatheque is going to be located in two recently revitalised villas at 3 and 5 Moniuszki street.

³ For example the Zagłębiowska mediatheque in Sosnowiec, Mediatheque in Grodzisk Mazowiecki, Mediatheque in Tychy, and the 800th Anniversary Mediatheque in Piotrków Trybunalski.

whether librarianship or architectural aspects are concerned. Thus, it is worth observing it and further expanding the research on the mediatheque.

The case of the Piotrków Trybunalski mediatheque

Thirteen years before this issue was raised, the Town Council of Piotrków Trybunalski had made a decision to build a new library. The town itself was founded in the 13th century in a region that today is part of central Poland, and for more than the past 42 years, the main library occupied the building of the Great Synagogue; it was rebuilt after the war, during which German occupying forces burnt it to the ground. Naturally, the concept of a new library evolved due to important questions being asked about its role, future and the innovative approach. Thus, a tender was opened and then a competition for the construction of the building was organised; the architect Daniel Frąc was selected as the winner in January 2008. Under his guidance, the concept evolved into a truly modern design. Before the preparations were made, archaeological research had been conducted in that area and, as expected, it revealed historical remains in the location intended for the new library. The excavation quickly led to the discovery of the foundations of military barracks built in this area at the time of Imperial Russia's occupation in the 19th century. Previously, there was also a cloister nearby but, as the architect explained, its remains had not been exposed during the excavations. What is more, this area is in close proximity to a Renaissance tower palace built in the 16th century for king Sigismund I The Old of the Jagiellonian dynasty, and this architectural relic still remains in that spot, towering high over the surrounding buildings. All of this forms a unique background of the architectural problems described in this article.

What makes this exceptional is the fact that the Piotrków Trybunalski authorities managed to realise their plan using the town funds. The building which was merely supposed to offer a new and spacious spot for the public library has become a special place, perfect for work and rest, education and entertainment. The archetype of biblioteka [library] has turned into mediateka thanks to a great number of additional amenities. The library possesses not only a vast book, newspaper, comic book and audiobook collection, but also a VR warehouse, PS4/ PC/ Boardgame playing spaces, a conference hall, cinema, print shop (including a 3D printer), soundproofed lounges, free underground car park, as well as spaces dedicated for exhibitions, which are regularly used by SOWA: EC-1, the Copernicus Science Centre and the students of the Częstochowa University of Technology.



Fig. 2. Visualisation "View from the southeast"; Provided by the director of Mediatheque, Mrs. Renata Wojtczak



Fig. 3. Facade and the main entrance; the west side of a building; Author's photography

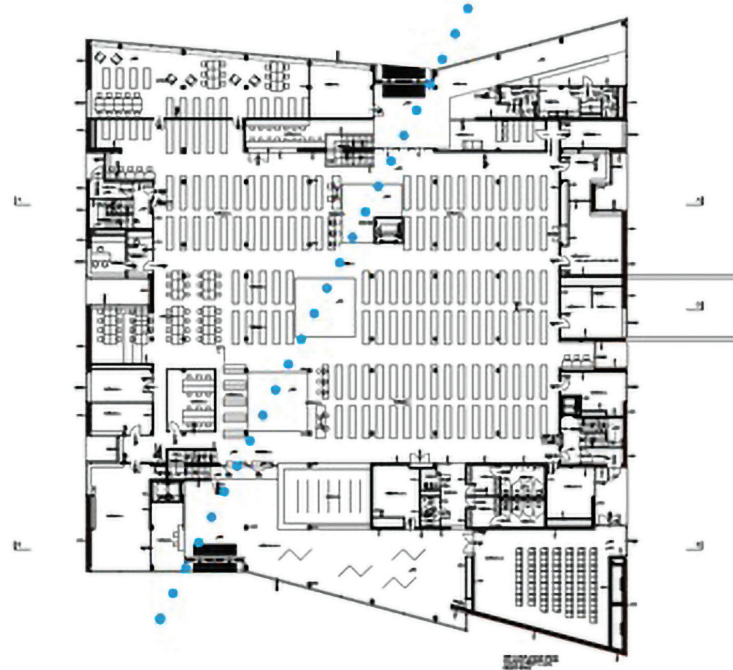


Fig. 4. Diagonal axis shown on the building's plan; Provided by architect Daniel Frąc

With regard to the appearance of the building, the architect Daniel Frąc revealed that its shape has a metaphorical meaning, even though it no longer follows the traditional archetype of a library. The new building of the mediatheque resembles an open book, with clean, smooth glass walls representing pages to be read by an ordinary passer-by. The glazing of the architecture, however, was used on a big scale only on the axis visible

in the plan below, on the western and eastern walls. The northern and southern sides are covered with a combination of smaller-scale glazing and raw, oxidized metal plates, changing their colours from dark grey to rusty red and even blueish verdigris.

The building took the form of an open book, which constitutes a clear message and an architectural code of sorts, exposing the core function contained inside – namely that of



Fig. 5. Northwest of the building; Author's photography



Fig. 6. South west of the building; Author's photography



Fig. 7. Interior of the Mediateque in Piotrków Trybunalski – The photography depicts the collection of experimental tools belonging to the SOWA scientific exhibition; Author's photography

a library. The proximity of the Renaissance castle and its influence through the landscape axis on the building of the library is reflected in breaking the main elevations, which the axis penetrates. Breaking the elevations takes the shape and form of opening book pages. The most attractive part of the building, enriched with the most spacious glass coverage providing mutual permeation of the library collections and the external surroundings, is led towards the Old Town district visible from that spot⁴. A similar effect can be seen in Nimes in the southern France, where the classical architecture neighbours the exceptional glass architecture of Norman Foster⁵. The individual case of the 800th Anniversary Mediateque in Piotrków Trybunalski is a good example of how well architecture goes with politics [10]. As the director of the institution, Renata Wojtczak, explains, the town's

president, Krzysztof Chojniak, was the father of the idea and treated the entire architectural and social enterprise with the seriousness and professionalism of a politician cooperating with actual architectural designers. Not only did the town authorities manage to move the public library from the building of the old Great Synagogue, they also successfully conducted the entire operation of creating an exceptional piece of architecture, which can be described as a truly democratic one, considering the fact that the local mediateque serves its purpose, providing benefits for all the citizens willing to participate in any of the cultural activities mentioned above.

Conclusion

The analysis of the mediateque in Piotrków Trybunalski leads us to a few conclusions:

– It appears that the understanding of the word mediateque is changing, so it might be wiser to use terms such as knowledge and cultural centres to refer to these institutions. It is due to the fact that, especially in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, access to digital media in countries such as Poland is nearly unlimited. That is why their present role as places of dissemination of knowledge and culture by means of digital media can no longer be their primary function. A mediateque should, instead, be a space where people can spend their free time away from home, be it individually or in a group of colleagues or friends. This can include book-reading, playing board games, taking part in a concert or theatrical performance, educational games, as well as using devices which are not common in our homes due to their high prices. That is why one of the most important aims in design should be creating exceptionally diverse interiors.

– Medium-sized and small-sized towns are starting to build mediateques as centres of knowledge and culture, enhancing the quality of life of their inhabitants. Big cities, however, are in possession of buildings with particular functionalities, which has not been the case in smaller communities so far. Thanks to new investments, such as the one in Piotrków Trybunalski, these communities are now able to take advantage of various facilities in the same place, namely:

- Traditional library with reading rooms and book rental included;
- Multimedia rental;
- Educational centre;
- Archives;
- Exposition spaces;
- Advanced digital technology spaces;
- Concert hall;
- Autonomous, soundproofed spaces for working;
- Café.

– The fact that the mediateque itself is directly connected with the use of digital media influences the architectural form of the building. Symbolising technological progress, the building cannot use the means of traditional library architecture. Instead, it reaches for features such as the elimination of spacial hierarchy, maximum erosion of the differences between the outdoor and indoor space, or open, flexible areas. We can notice this in many mediateques, including the one located in Piotrków. This explains the

⁴ These are the words of the architect Daniel Fraç, the main designer of the building, who agreed to an interview in December 2021.

⁵ Foster, N., Jean-Marc Prévost, "(...)Nimes was given a new forum, designed by Norman Foster. A hub of culture, of exchange and creativity, a meeting place for the generations, Carré d'Art dialogues with the Maison Carrée in a dream of stone and glass made real". Moving. Norman Foster On Art, Carre d'art – Nimes Architecture Exhibition, 3rd of May, 2013.



Fig. 8. Northeast of the building – The fragment of a historical town's panorama is visible in the right corner of the picture; Author's photography

use of glass and metal as the main materials, the lack of differentiation between the exterior and the interior or the extensive glazing of the facade, which also affect these special differences.

– The case of the mediatheque in Piotrków also shows an attempt to integrate a building, which by its very nature is modern in form and technology, with its historical surroundings and genius loci. By using the contrast between the old and the new a skilful architect can design a building correlating with its historical surroundings, composing the aesthetics of the mediatheque in such a way that it enters into a dialogue with the local landscape. Hence, the core difference between the traditional library, known in the Polish language as Biblioteka, and the new archetype that is the focus of the present article, Mediateka, is the expanded value of the architectural structure, which is measured by means of social interactions. Speaking of interactions, the additional aesthetic value that might be recognised in said structure consists in its special relationship with the adjacent Old Town, being reflected in the glass walls of the Mediateka. Naturally, this architectural eclecticism contrasts with the new architecture of the multimedia library erected in 2019, and not by accident.

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PRAWIDŁOWY SPOSÓB CYTOWANIA
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Abstract: In recent years, Piotrków Trybunalski has been enriched by an exceptional building of an innovative character. Designed

by Daniel Frac, the 800th Anniversary Mediatheque is an innovative building and perhaps the most important architectural work in the region. This article presents a case study of the Piotrków mediatheque. Analysing it in a broader context, it is possible to pose a thesis on the re-evaluation of this type of facility. Their previous role as library and digital centres is changing more into an interactive centre of knowledge and culture. The article points out the role such buildings play in medium-sized and small towns and addresses the issue of architectural form and its symbolism.

Keywords: mediatheque, knowledge and culture centre, public facilities, case study

Streszczenie: MEDIATEKA CZY CENTRUM WIEDZY I KULTURY – STUDIUM PRZYPADKU MEDIATEKI W PIOTRKOWIE TRYBUNALSKIM. Piotrków Trybunalski wzbogacił się w ostatnich latach o wyjątkowy obiekt o innowacyjnym charakterze. Zaprojektowana przez Daniela Frąca Mediateka Osiemsetlecia to nowatorski obiekt oraz być może najważniejsze dzieło architektoniczne w regionie. W artykule zostało przedstawione studium przypadku mediateki piotrkowskiej. Jej analiza w szerszym kontekście pozwoliła na postawienie tezy o przewartościowaniach w ramach tego rodzaju obiektów. Dotychczasowa ich rola jako centrów biblioteczno-cyfrowych zmienia się bardziej w interaktywne centrum wiedzy i kultury. W artykule wskazano rolę, jaką tego rodzaju obiekty odgrywają w średnich i małych miastach, a także podjęto zagadnienie formy architektonicznej i jej symboliki.

Słowa kluczowe: mediateka, centrum wiedzy i kultury, obiekty użyteczności publicznej, studium przypadku