title
Prayer Hall - IBC Zürich

location
Grabenstrasse 7, Schlieren,
Zürich, Switzerland

client
IBC Zürich

type
interior architecture

net area
240m²

project year
2011

completed
2012

costs
estimated 360,000 CHF

author
FILTER ARCHITECTURE
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Prayer Hall is built in the former industrial building, previously used for production of rail-wagons. The wider area of the site is former industrial zone of Zurich, being subjected to a change of function.

Even before conversion the hall served as an improvised space for praying and lectures.
Design is steered by a notion that conventional form of sacral spaces has an important symbolic function related to collective memory.

The major challenge was to create a design which can be recognized as conventionally sacral by the community, while clearly achieving a character of contemporaneity. General spatial organization has been determined by placing a box-like, ritual-ablation facility inside elongated industrial hall, in order to introduce new sequences of space - matching those in a traditional mosque.

Porous wooden elements have been placed over windows, not only to make an introvert atmosphere necessary for prayer and contemplation, but also to interact with the surrounding outdoor environment and emphasize a change of function.

The final result is a place that reflects toward the community by introducing a feeling that they belong somewhere, rather than nowhere.
The demolition and preparatory work were done by community members on a voluntary basis. They started before a total amount of money was raised. Experience of collaboration and fellowship created an overwhelming atmosphere of solidarity and support.

Process of design was characterized by a constant discussion with the commissioner. Given that the client was a community represented by a number of individuals, primary task of the architect was to hear and articulate many individual opinions. This process many times included different roles that architect had to play in order to educate, articulate, conclude, reconcile and arbitrate.

The process of design was a certain type of research that included technical, economical, sociological and psychological aspects of the given task. The communication and survey was almost entirely done over the internet, adding even more challenge into the process. Many detailed technical drawings had to be done to substitute face to face communication.

Inventing strategies for fund raising was important part of the job, which demanded significant amount of creativity. Explaining the significance, branding and motivating people to invest in communal space, was done by a series of small-scale projects concerning both economy and design. For example, postcards containing the 3D image of an unconstructed space were designed and produced in order to be sold; various fund raising lectures were held; small-scale replicas of the carpet were produced, in order to be sold, etc.
Everything, except for the wooden elements, stone wash-basins and the carpet, was constructed by the members of the community. Fortunately, many of the members were skilled craftsmen, professionally involved in construction industry. In order to organize and distribute the work, the steering committee was formed involving professionals like economists, civil engineers, electrical engineers, information science engineers, theologians, etc.

Voluntary character of the construction process increased community bounds, and created the emotional attachment to the space being formed. Community started acting toward it as if being their personal space of living, rather than being someone else’s, or being no one’s.

The major consequence of the process was a positive attitude which, towards the end of the development, created excellently detailed physical space and an emotional landscape.
Wooden elements and stone-basins were manufactured in Bosnia. The very fact that material and craft necessary to produce them originate from the community homeland added even more symbolic meaning to it. Besides being practical equipment, they became physical artefacts of emotional attachment.

All the elements were custom made, without a prototype. The process of production was demanding in terms of the necessary precision and detailing. Each step of the production had to be carefully discussed and controlled.
Being part of the Prayer Hall project in Zürich is a positive experience. Due to the fact that prototype was not made for any of the proposed solid wood elements, the challenging thing was to produce them. Although some details seemed demanding in terms of precision, geometry and compounds, production proceeded without major problems and proved that the complexity can be achieved by relatively simple means.

Fadil Ćostović
Owner of Artisan - solid wood furniture
www.artisan.ba
The high-quality design conversion of one floor of former industrial building into a Prayer Hall is a participatory project among young architects and the commissioner (Muslim community of Bosnian immigrants in Zurich). FILTER ARCHITECTURE played participatory role as educators and researchers in order to achieve a psychosocial dimension of space based on a contemporary and profound architectural program. The original concept, free of formalism, shows the importance and influence of architecture on preservation of collective memory and process of cultural integration.

Elša Turkušić (M.Sci. architect) works as a Senior Teaching Assistant at the Architectural Design Department of the Faculty of Architecture, University of Sarajevo. She has been dealing with issues in the fields of architectural design, architectural research and the protection of cultural and historical heritage.
In a faceless, former industrial building, the architects from FILTER ARCHITECTURE created a light place that is a home in an inhospitable environment. With simple means they adapted the old factory for the new use. The new spatial organization meets the needs of a traditional mosque. Materials, colors and symbols are complementary and help to ensure that the male and female visitors feel at home here. Thanks to the openness of the client and the commitment of the architects a contemporary place of reflection and meeting was realized.

Peter Sägesser
dipl. Architekt ETH/SIA, Vorstand Architekturforum Bern
www.ostarchitektur.com
Individual wooden elements have been designed as independent, floating objects. Their free-standing character refers to nomadic condition of community – they are not attached to place, but allow one to move and migrate.

Given that they represent standard parts of the mosque equipment, design was driven by the notion that they should preserve generic, recognizable form. Still, design allows one to see clearly that it was steered in accordance with the contemporary means of production, such as CNC technology.

The walls containing windows are covered with the perforated wooden panels, not only to avoid industrial impression, but to create an introvert atmosphere necessary for contemplation and prayer. Viewed from outside these elements emphasize that change of function has emerged.

The carpet is designed to be element of space which connects all other elements and forms an impression of unity. The pattern is not merely a decoration - it has a profound meaning and function. It is formed by repetition of a symbol, one being rather common at a traditional Bosnian carpet. In that manner, it creates symbolic connection with the homeland of the people using it. The geographical direction of the Masjid is not aligned towards Mecca, due to the fact that it was originally designed to house different functions. This was an important issue, facing the fact that Muslims have to turn to Kaaba in order to pray. The carpet corrects the problem by turning the pattern fifteen degrees off the walls, toward the accurate direction. The peak points of the symbol serve as the element of orientation.
When I think of Prayer Hall in Zurich the following ayet comes to my mind:

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His light is like a niche within which there is a lamp: the lamp enclosed in glass: The glass as it were a pearly white star lit from the blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by the fire. Light upon light! Allah doth guide whom He will to His light. Allah doth set forth parables for men, and Allah doth know all things. (Surah 24:35)

This is the room of tranquility, silence and serenity. It is filled with light but it is not illuminated. When I’m in the room I feel like I’m in the very depth of the wall which illuminates the light. It is neither of the east nor of the west. This light is a bond of spiritual and worldly inspiration, as well as the aspiration for something which is unattainable.

A generation of Bosniaks, who have been living in this area, come mostly from the working class families. They were the ones who, upon their arrival to Switzerland, had a dream of making enough money to build a home to live in and eventually go back to their motherland. However, as it is in life, one can only dream and Allah is the One who decides; a lot of them realized that their stay in the foreign land is not of temporary nature. As a result of such a fact, they decided to build something to testify their faith and their stay in this area, so they involved the architects who knew how to translate this idea into reality.

This Prayer Hall represents horizontal and vertical bonds. The horizontal bonds demonstrate the encounter of people with the same faith, same origin, same culture and same language.

The vertical bonds display the feeling I have related to my faith, the beauty of the light which illuminates the heavens and the earth, the beauty of the prayer which I share with the people of the same faith and the same origin. The Bosnian carpet pattern, Sarajevo hresha stone and walnut tree wood from Tešanj, are to be found in the industrial hall in Switzerland; that very bond stands for the reality of the Bosnian Moslems in Zurch. Such a bond is forcing them to have a thoughtful look at their faith and to make peace with it. Only then will they be able to experience their vertical journey through the prayer.

...come and see what Devotion does...

Muris Begović
Imam, IBC Zürich
www.ibc-zh.ch
When I visited the renewed Prayer Hall IBC Zurich for the first time I was moved to tears. This was the second time that I experienced something like that. The first time it happened was when I saw Kaabah in Mecca. The atmosphere of this mosque prevails with beautiful but not intrusive architecture, inviting one to establish prayer.

Reto 'Abdullah Inauen
At the very entrance the thoughtful architectural concept of knowledge first followed by the spiritual purity by performing ‘whudu’ gives the impression of climbing the ladder steps to prayer in the front part of the room.

The fragrance of selected Bosnian woods, representing the link to the part of Europe where our sisters and brothers worshipped for centuries is breathed, and touches everyone, not just the heart of the one being conscious. While the eyes are travelling through the Prayer Hall and along the design treasures made of wood, they invite to discover the thoughts and knowledge only one’s heart can see.

Not just the light and the scent of wood, but also the warm and soft ground, invites one to reside for longer than just the prayers and makes the Prayer Hall IBC Zurich a marvelous place to see and feel, and also a place to dive in.

Therefore it also brings Muslims from all over the world together, thus serving an important function, which we strongly need in our nowadays Umrah. Even more, it invites our sisters and brothers to visit Bosnia and to learn more about the source of this gift.

Markus A. Klinkner
Co-Organiser 'SwissMuslimEvents', Member of the board ‘VIOZ’ (umbrella organisation of the Muslim Communities in Zürich), Muslim Member in the ‘Zurich Forum of Religions’, Muslim Member of the ‘National Muslim Dialog by the Swiss Government’

Since the opening ceremony, different events took place inside the Prayer Hall. Forums, discussions, lectures and weddings are some of those. The most interesting fact is that it has become a certain kind of “tourist” attraction. Different people are visiting it in organized groups, almost on a daily basis. It is mostly 4-5 people per day and 25 on weekends. In that sense it has become more than a place for community, but rather a unique kind of open public space.

visiting group of Indonesians

prayer hall as playground

visiting group of Indonesians
This project put a new face on this community. Suddenly, everyone is aware of art being important.

Aladin Hasić
Director of Photography, Scor Production
www.scorproduction.ch
The organization has nonhierarchical structure, while insisting on the exchange of opinions. The work on the project seeks to question a given problem, while design is understood as a certain type of research. Thanks to this approach, the process of harmonization of attitudes becomes FILTER to create quality.

FILTER ARCHITECTURE members:
Asmir Mutevelić, Ibrica Jašarević, Kenan Vatrenjak, Nedim Mutevelić, Vedad Islambegović