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Technical museum
Zagreb

Urban wooden architecture of Technical Museum Zagreb buildings and its functioning within museum environment

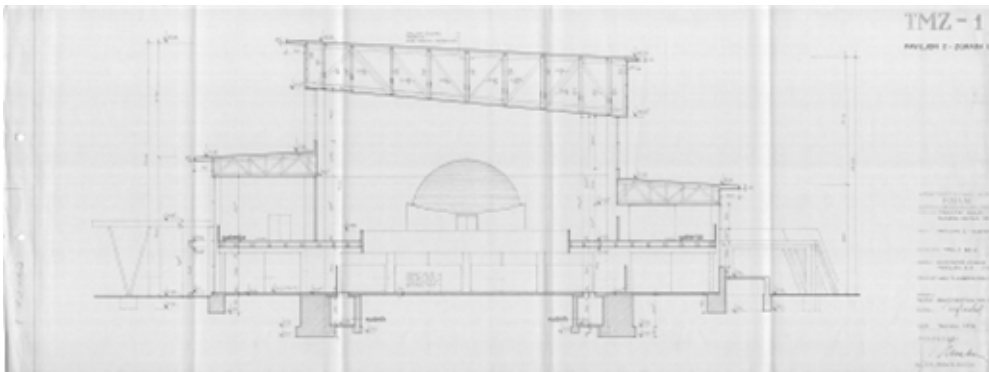
The Zagreb Technical Museum was established in 1954. In 1963, the Museum was moved to Savska cesta 18, to the facilities of the then Zagrebački zbor, which was relocated to the other bank of the Sava.



When a museum, in this case the Zagreb Technical Museum, operates within a facility under monumental protection, legal regulations of the “protectors” often appear to be a factor inhibiting its development.



The architectural peculiarity of the Museum building is its wooden structure. Apart from glass, wood is the only material used in the construction of both the bearing elements (pillars) and the wall and ceiling surfaces, and partly the flooring as well.



In international architectural circles, the Zagreb Technical Museum building is often cited as the only preserved monument of wooden architecture in Europe. Having a preserved cultural facility and a cultural monument functioning as a museum has its advantages, but at the same time, it appears to be an impeding and inhibiting factor for its development.

Are the current location and the current facilities the right place for the Technical Museum?
Is this still the best location for its continuance and development?
Is the present architecture of the facilities an inhibiting factor for the work and development of the Museum?
Should the Museum consider a new location?
Is the current location our destiny?
Perhaps so, as there are many historical facts that make us think so.

Why?

The location of the Museum's building is situated in the part of the town which houses many other museums, theaters, and educational institutions. It is also an unavoidable part and an essential factor in the complex and important cultural events. This was the location of the first Zagreb tramway depot.



This was also the location of the Zagrebački zbor, an exhibition of technological achievements held from 1936 to 1956.



The first radio and television sets, among many others, were first exhibited in this building, as were many other technical artifacts, which are today housed in the Museum as exhibits. It is this location that attracts the attention of the visitors not merely by its technological achievements, but also by its promotional articles (advertising posters) and exhibition installations by eminent architects and visual artists.

A series of exhibitions of technological achievements as well as the inevitable cooperation of scientists, engineers, technologists, and artists was certainly an impetus for the consideration and conception of the idea on establishment and opening of the Technical Museum at exactly the same location.

Indeed, the Technical Museum was opened in 1963.

What are the advantages of the location and the facility?

The spacious fair exhibition buildings (without any partition walls) are an ideal site for the permanent collection of the Museum, particularly for large objects such as airplanes, trams, locomotives, a submarine, and cars.

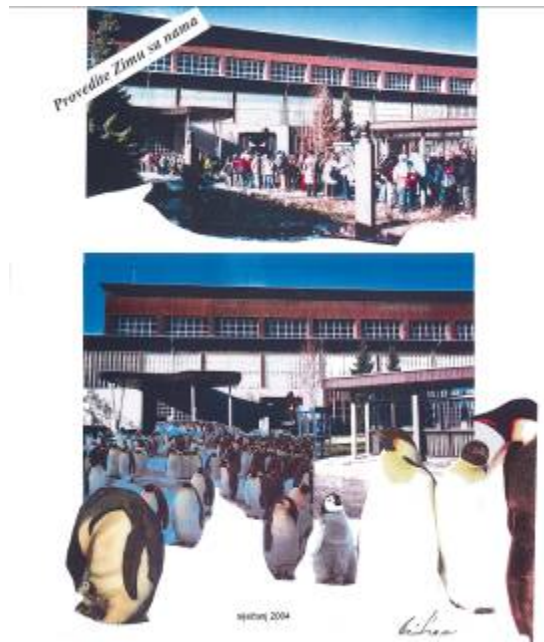


The simplicity of the wooden structure of the facility does not distract the visualization of the permanent collection, but is rather inconspicuous and neutral in relation to the exhibited objects.

Large glass surfaces allow enough natural, daily light to pass through, thus enabling the use of artificial light during daylight only sporadically.

The Museum building has no heating. The values of temperature and humidity are often the same in both the interior of the building and the outside area.

In spite of this, no large damages are present on the exhibits and on the constructional timber. And on the visitors? Sometimes.



The basement rooms were skillfully turned to an attractive coalmine model and the Planetarium fits perfectly into the grand hall's upper floor.

Technical Characteristics (Advantages and Disadvantages)

The construction complex of the Museum consists of Hall A, Hall B, Hall C, and the Old Administration Building. All the facilities are under monumental protection, and no interventions during maintenance works are allowed without prior permission of the City Institute for the Conservation of Cultural and Natural Heritage.

If a facility is under monumental protection, such protection cannot be reversed easily. Thus, the reassignment of the premises is hardly probable. This fact is an additional guarantee of the future existence of the Museum at the present location, which has a great market value, and would be surpassingly more cost-effective with a construction of a shopping mall, for example. This would have happened already, had the building not been placed under monumental protection.

The above stated Institute must always be consulted for all constructional and applicational modifications of the premises within the Museum building.

Such circumstance often obstructs a quicker installation of new exhibitions as well as reconstruction or modernization of the existing museum collections.



The Museum's wooden facilities can hardly cope with legal regulations providing for the anti-theft and fire protection systems.

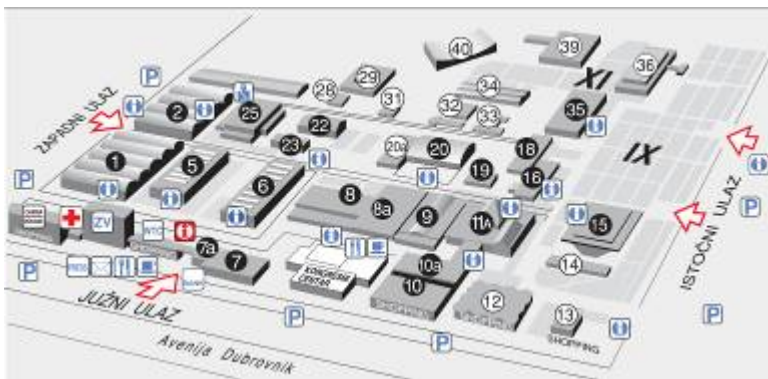
Furthermore, it is impossible for the Museum's exhibition premises and depots to conform to the current technical standards required by the regulations. Such standards refer to the protection of museum collections in terms of light, temperate and humidity.

The Museum's wooden facilities have a very large fire hazard, and are thus placed under special surveillance of the fire department. Such fire hazard category also determines the maximum number of visitors to be present at the premises at the same time, with special emphasis on a limited number of visitors in both the coalmine and the Planetarium.

This may sometimes be an advantage, but it is often an aggravating circumstance when it comes to acceptance of large groups of visitors whose programs comprises only a short tour of the Museum.



However, despite all the above stated disadvantages, the Museum's location (the City's center), good traffic connections (tram, bus), an inland parking lot, as well as the near vicinity of the railway junction contribute to the fact that the Museum's exhibitions are well-attended. On the other hand, this location also appears to be an inhibiting factor for the future development and the extension of the Museum. In consequence of historical facts, a new location is imposed self-evidently – the location of the present Zagreb Fair, whose total area and facilities would be perfectly suitable for developmental requirements of the Technical Museum. Apart from the Technical Museum, the total area of the Zagreb Fair is large enough to accommodate the Croatian Natural History Museum and the Railway Museum as well. They are presently housed in completely inadequate premises, and their relocation to the same area is certainly justified for a very good reason.



In short, yesterday, the Zagrebački zbor – today, the Technical Museum; today, the Zagreb Fair – tomorrow, the Technical Museum.

Is that the real solution? Who would know?

Does the Museum thus consciously give up the best location it now has?

Would the relocation of this longtime tenant, the keeper of the cultural and technological heritage, totally disturb the constancy and forever weaken the invisible (non-existent) fundamentals of this wooden structure, in the name of some “higher” cause?

Or has perhaps this wooden building survived as a cultural monument only thanks to its present purpose?

Only the future will answer all the questions that have been and have not been asked.