

Theatre of Architecture, Mendrisio, Switzerland

Project: 2005/2010

Construction: 2013 – 2017

Architect: Mario Botta

Collaborators: Eleonora Castagnetta, Marco Mornata, Antonello Scala, Guido Botta

Client: Università della Svizzera Italiana, Lugano; Accademia di architettura, Mendrisio;

Fondazione Teatro dell'architettura, Mendrisio

Civil engineering: Brenni Engineering SA, Mendrisio

Metal framing: Lurati Muttoni Partner SA, Mendrisio

Electrical engineering: Elettroconsulenze Solcà SA, Mendrisio

HVAC engineering: IFEC Ingegneria SA, Rivera

Site supervision: Direzione Lavori SA, Lugano

The Theatre of Architecture is an instrument to promote the cultural debate on architecture, strengthen reflection on the discipline and, at the same time, to highlight the new transdisciplinary interests that are increasingly affecting the planning process and redefining the social role of architecture.

Why a Theatre of Architecture in Mendrisio

To offer an instrument for the promotion of the cultural debate on architecture is the driving force behind the efforts of the Università della Svizzera italiana and the Theatre of Architecture Foundation to establish a new building, the Theatre of Architecture on the campus of the Academy of Architecture in Mendrisio.

Besides the educational and research activities that the university has been carrying out, this initiative aims at strengthening its reflection on the discipline and highlighting the new transdisciplinary interests that are increasingly affecting the design process and redefining the social role of architecture.

The difficult issues contemporary society has to cope with – the effort to preserve the environment, the availability of energy resources, the drastic climate changes and the difficult new social scenarios – so strongly affect the dynamics linked to the identity aspects recorded at the regional level as to make it necessary to develop new approaches and a new sensibility in architecture, urbanism and landscape planning.

The effort to understand the impact of the changes in progress is one of the duties of architectural culture, and its protagonists, the architects, must become aware of the new responsibilities they have to take on when designing humanity's living space. The new transdisciplinary forms of expression that today affect art, fashion, design and photography, as well as dance, cinema and literature, are exerting an ever more active influence on previously autonomous activities and are addressed to a broader and more varied public: free men and women who can explore the new enticements of living with no particular reference to social background and with no preconceived ideas.

Aware of these radical changes, ever since its foundation the Academy of Architecture has sought to favour and strengthen the humanistic values underlying the discipline and now, after the founding phase, with the construction of the Theatre of Architecture it intends to confirm its vocation and favour new initiatives as a supplement to its professional training.

The building (it has a round plan with three floors above ground and two floors underground) recalls the ancient type of the anatomical theatre. The new Theatre of Architecture, as the first one of its kind, will represent the new identity of the school: a laboratory of ideas and events, a place of experimentation, a contemporary instrument that will act as a seismograph capable of recording and conveying ongoing trends.

Management and Objectives

The events of the Theatre of Architecture of the Università della Svizzera italiana, Mendrisio, will be jointly managed by the Academy of Architecture and the Theatre of Architecture Foundation.

The Academy will continue to promote public cultural activities related to the study and the promotion of architecture; the Fondazione will present independent initiatives in order to create new opportunities for critical thinking on the themes and the transdisciplinary interests Architecture has to cope with.

The spaces on the main four levels (approx. 2'000 sq.m.) lend themselves to a wide range of uses for both concomitant and independent events. The Foundation will finance the events it promotes also thanks to the sponsors it will be able to secure, while the Academy of Architecture events and the building management will be financed by the School budget. All the events will be open to the public, thus strengthening the basis of a solid cultural vocation towards the region. The Theatre of Architecture will act as a forum for exchanges with other institutions interested in the issues of the culture of the territory.

Studies and research articles produced as a result of, and bearing witness to, the initiatives held at the new Theatre of Architecture will be gathered in a series of publications.

The fact is that the Campus of the Università della Svizzera italiana of Mendrisio is attracting the interest of many disciplines akin to architecture.

The project

The Theatre of Architecture is located on the University Campus of the Academy of Architecture in Mendrisio, next to the Palazzo Turconi.

The centrally planned building, with a diameter of 27 meter, consists of two underground and three above ground levels.

The total area is of about 3'000 square meters and the entire size is over 17'000 cubic meters. Activities within the Theatre of Architecture are planned to start in Spring 2018.