

Joanneum Quarter Press

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The Joanneum Quarter Project 1997–2011

On November 26, 2011 – exactly two hundred years to the day that the Universalmuseum Joanneum was founded – the Joanneum Quarter has been opened. This new cultural centre on a historical plot of land unites the historical museum and library buildings in Rauber-, Neutor- and Kalchberggasse into one architectural entity. Retaining the original character of the individual buildings, the new centre creates an urban piazza for Graz Old Town that is situated above an underground visitors' centre. The Neue Galerie Graz, the Multimedia Collections and the Styrian State Library commence operations from the day they open at their newly designed location. The Natural History Museum in the Raubergasse building will open early in 2013.

“Joanneum New”

And so a journey that took some 14 years to develop and realise has reached a major, if not quite final, destination. Based on the master plan “Joanneum New” (presented by the museum consultants *Bogner + LORD*), which marked the starting point in 1997 for a unique series of refurbishments and new installations of one of Austria's oldest museums, the raising of the necessary financing began. Since 2003 the Joanneum – referred to as the State Museum until 2009, and subsequently the Universalmuseum – has been run as a non-profit company with limited liability. Since then, in their position as managers, Peter Pakesch has acted as the Artistic Director and Wolfgang Muchitsch as the Research Director. Under their leadership, the collections and exhibition buildings of the Universalmuseum Joanneum have been systematically refurbished and rearranged, with the State of Styria investing around 114 million euro. The Joanneum Quarter as presented in the Jubilee Year 2011 was essentially six years in its conception. The following milestones can be looked back on.

Milestones of the Joanneum Quarter

A masterplan with the working title of “Museum Quadrant” was drawn up in 2005 in collaboration with the architect DI Hermann Eisenköck, *Architektur Consult ZT GmbH*, Graz; this formulated the basic contents as well as the corresponding costs involved. This masterplan included the general reconstruction of the building stock found at Raubergasse 10, Neutorgasse 45 und Kalchberggasse 2 as well as an underground construction linking the institutions of the Universalmuseum Joanneum with the Styrian State Library. The urgent need for a storage depot was also addressed, both for the library and the museum. Based on this, a cost estimate of 48.5 million euro was named.

In 2006 the political course was set for financing this project, and the Joanneum Curatorium also gave its unanimous support. As a result the resolution was passed on May 24, 2006 by the Styrian Provincial Diet to realise the proposed project. In the same year the property was purchased by the Styrian State Property Company (LIG), which as the building contractor was entrusted with carrying out the project. On the basis of a space and function-related programme

drawn up by all those concerned, a two-step negotiation process for awarding the architectural work was put out to tender throughout the EU. In the first negotiation step, the Jury under the chairmanship of the Viennese architect DI András Palffy invited 12 offices from a total of 41 interested architect companies to work out a specific project; in a second step, on November 16 and 17, 2006, the joint project of the architectural office *Nieto/Sobejano*, Madrid, and *eep architekten*, Graz was selected for realisation of the venture. On December 18, 2006 the State Government passed a unanimous resolution to carry out the whole project titled "Museum Quadrant", and to provide financing to cover the costs totalling 48.5 million EUR.

As the winning project included underground construction works, and these were to be built in the area of the former city fortifications of Graz, and on parts of the later Joanneum garden, intensive archaeological surveys took place from autumn 2006 to August 2007, which were financed by the State of Styria, the Association *Archaeological Styria* and the *AMS Styria*.

From March to June 2007 the whole project was subject to an audit by the Styrian State Audit Court which led to politically induced downsizing. A political consensus was reached in November 2007 for this rescheduled version of the project. In cost terms this was now reduced to 38.5 million euro (including the Andritz Study and Collections Centre). The relevant savings could be achieved by shifting the museum storage depot and the Natural History work and laboratory places to the "green meadow", as well as by dispensing with a third underground floor and by converting some lofts. The corresponding government resolution followed on December 10, 2007. The project also received the necessary authorisation from the Provincial Diet on January 15, 2008, which led to a corresponding resolution. The order for the whole project was then given the next day, January 16, 2011, to the LIG by the Department 9 - Culture.

In 2008 an agreement was reached to acquire the Graz-Andritz Study and Collection Centre for the required storage depot and work area of the Universalmuseum Joanneum as a "green meadow" project. All the necessary procedures for the realisation of the Joanneum Quarter project could be successful carried out by the end of 2009.

At the end of 2009 those institutions in buildings to be renovated were relocated to appropriate temporary facilities, so that the cutting of the soil ceremony could be celebrated on January 13, 2010. After the structural work on the Visitors' Centre was completed, the topping-out ceremony could be carried out on December 9, 2010. On November 26, 2011, the opening of the Visitors' Centre as well as the building in Neutorgasse marks the final stage for the time being. The final pieces making up the Joanneum Quarter will be set in place by the starting up of operations in the Styrian State Library in the Kalchberggasse building - up and running again by mid-2012 - and the opening of the Natural History Museum in 2013.

New Cultural District

The architectural design of the Joanneum Quarter by *ARGE Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos/eeep architekten*, Madrid/Graz, not only grants the historical buildings their due importance, it also takes account of the spatial and functional demands of modern museum and library work.

While the historical centre of Graz is highly regarded mainly due to its roof landscape, the new building work has been developed directly underground. A mineral coating which stretches between the three buildings conceals the new rooms with their required functions within its interior. This decision emphasises the appreciation of the historical buildings as much as the new architecture of expansion. The central square is perforated with round openings, out of which transparent cone stumps protrude, bringing light into the rooms underneath. A large, central cone situated in the centre of the courtyard with a diameter of 13 metres forms the main entrance to the ensemble and leads into the Visitors' Centre. Here in the foyer various service zones can be found as well as a museum shop, while a separate auditorium provides space for events. From here, one reaches both the museum areas of the Neue Galerie in the Neutorgasse building as well as the exhibition and service rooms of the Multimedia Collections. Similarly in the Visitors' Centre the open-access and lending areas of the Styrian State Library are situated.

The Neutorgasse building has now been extended with two exhibition and one administration floor, while delivery access can be found in the northern part of the building, enabling good connection to storage, archives and exhibition space. The new lift systems guarantee that the whole complex of buildings is well accessible. The library building in Kalchberggasse will now get more light and air due to the restructuring, and thus awakes like Sleeping Beauty from the years of inactivity in which the building was previously trapped. The Lesliehof in Raubergasse received new stairwells and lifts as part of the general renovation; furthermore, the exhibition rooms were broken up successfully. The exhibition area has increased significantly due to the work and storage rooms being shifted out to the Study Centre for Natural History in Graz-Andritz.

Equipped with a modern, technical infrastructure, the Joanneum Quarter now offers the ideal conditions for a responsible, modern and public-friendly interaction with the collections housed there. The generous design of space also enhances the urban environment around the Joanneum Quarter. This deliberate emphasis on town planning – together with the richly varied cultural offerings – will contribute to the revitalisation of an area of the old town that had lately become lacklustre, enabling it to return to the centre of the city as the “cultural quarter”.