

Managing heritage impacts associated with urban development: Learning from the challenges of Museum Island

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The Museum Island (MI) has gradually come into shape over a century, guided by the concept of “a sanctuary for art and science” ordered by King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia in 1841. The five renowned museums, together with their marvelous collections, associated gardens and bridges were inscribed in the World Heritage list in 1999 as a building complex under criteria ii and iv¹ (23WHC Nomination Documentation No.896,1999). At the time of nomination, criterion vi proposed by State Party on its associated value and artistic significance was not accepted. However, the value of the property rests not only on the historic ensemble and its physical qualities, but also on its continued social-cultural implications as the “Acropolis” to the city. Located in the heart of Berlin, the MI has always been the centre of public interest and political powers. It benefited from the prosperity of the city to complete its function in exhibition and education, whilst facing recurrent challenges from development projects in and around the property.

1. Historic evolvement of the Museum Island

Reviewing the development of the MI, the building design and housed collections illustrated clearly the evolution of modern art museum influenced by the Age of Enlightenment and French Revolution over a century. In the chronological order of museum construction, the first Museum (Royal Museum and today known as the Altes Museum) emerged on the Spree Island in 1830, designed by Karl Friedrich Schinkel. The collection of Altes Museum focused on the Greek antiquity to “awaken and develop an appreciation of art” (according to Karl Friedrich Schinkel). The Neues Museum (1859) followed the concept and the Neo-Classic design of Altes Museum. It housed prehistoric and Egyptian collection, with an aim for the education of art history. The temple-like Alt National Galerie was constructed in 1876, and initially planned as a university for arts education. But due to the change of political power, the Alt National Galerie turned into a museum after its completion and dedicated to contemporary German arts to ally with the political interests of the Prussia empire for national identity. The Bode-Museum (1904) and the Pergamon Museum (1930) were designed in Neo-Baroque and modern style, together with their housing collections demonstrated clearly the imperial aspirations with modern display techniques.

The buildings and collections of the MI have suffered heavy damage from bombardment during the World War II, as well as the separation of East and West Berlin for decades. In the wake of German reunification, the MI has been through a continuous restoration and development to fulfill its role as one of the most attractive historic ensembles and most modern museum complexes. The Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, SPK) as the responsible authority for managing the site launched the MI Master Plan in 1999 to guide future development.

¹ The World Heritage Committee described the Outstanding Universal Value of the Museum Island as below:

Criterion ii: The Berlin Museumsinsel is a unique ensemble of museum buildings, which illustrated the evolution of modern museum design over more than a century

Criterion iv: The art museum is a social phenomenon that owes its origins to the Age of Enlightenment and its extension to all people to the French Revolution. The museumsinsel is the most outstanding example of this concept given material form and a symbolic central urban setting.

2. The Master Plan for the Museum Island and the James-Simon Galerie

The MI Master Plan was developed on the basis of the preservation requirements in accordance with its Outstanding Universal Value illustrated as a World Heritage property and the expectations of future visitors of several millions per year² as an inspiring modern museum complex. It involves the complete overhaul of all historic buildings, fully respecting the harmonious spatial relationships and the architectural consistency evolved over time, including the innovative restoration of Neues Museum after 70 years in ruins and restoration of historic entrances. In addition to restoration measures, new structures and facilities are added to release the pressure from wear and tear of historic buildings and to provide necessary storage space and service facilities. Two new building complexes are planned across the Kupfergraben canal for the relocation of museum-related internal functions: the Archaeological Center (completed in 2012) to house administrative, storage and workshop facilities and serve as an archaeological library and central archive for state museums in Berlin; the envisioned Museum Courtyard, which carries the idea to present the Old Master Paintings to complement with the sculpture collection in Bode-Museum, as a lively way of conveying art history to the public.

At the MI, the new wing to Pergamon Museum is under construction to present an Ancient Architecture Tour, and the James-Simon-Galerie (JSG) is expected to open in the coming summer as a new entrance building with all necessary facilities to a modern museum complex. JSG as illustrated below is the sixth building at MI, designed by David Chipperfield. It is located at the previous extension of Neuer Packhof designed by Karl Friedrich Schinkel in 1829 and demolished in 1938. The Denkmalschutzrecht (conservation regulation) in Berlin does not prohibit new buildings in historic area, but requires a due respect to the historic environment with cautious control on volume, design, height, layout etc. The design schemes of JSG has been heavily revised due to criticism from Gesellschaft Historisches Berlin e.V. (the Community of Historic Berlin) and was finalized in close cooperation with heritage authorities and experts in 2007. Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) was not ordered for the development of JSG, but an official letter to UNESCO was sent in this regard by the Senator of Urban Development in 2007, stressing that it is necessary to build service and infrastructure facilities in the MI to release the wear and tear from excessive use of the historic ensemble.

As reviewed in Architectural journals and magazines (Details 2018, The Architectural Review 2015), the new structure of JSG is featured with the motif of colonnade in a contemporary understatement and takes a back seat in the historic ensemble with well-blended material and color. The street-level colonnade echoes the original colonnade running from the Alte Nationalgalerie to the Neues Museum and formed a new courtyard on the back side of the Neues Museum. The elevated colonnade along the Kupfergraben canal allows the view from Schlossbrücke into the depths of the MI and a glimpse of the west façade of the Neues Museum. The 9.5 metres open outdoor staircase creates impressive visual connection with the Berlin Cathedral and the reconstructed Berlin Palace (Humboldt Forum). The critiques on JSG from the design perspective will continue, like the Louvre pyramid. However, the fundamental justification of JSG regarding to its functional contribution to the transformation of MI into a prototype of modern museum complex is well acknowledged. The auditorium and space for temporary exhibitions offered by JSG play a vital role in the dynamics of museum education and program adaptation. In addition, JSG serves also as the hub for the Archaeological Promenade, which connects

² According to the Deutsche Welle (Germany's international broadcaster), the MI attracts more than 2 million visitors per year. The General director of the State Museums in Berlin reported a total of 3.65 million visitors across the State museums in Berlin in 2016.

four of five museums and links cultural epochs reflected by the exhibitions. As commented by Prof. Hermann Parzinger (Science First Hand, 2015), the MI is transformed into “a universal encyclopedic-type museum” guided by the Master Plan.



Photo 1 (left): The James-Simon-Galerie © Ute Zscharnt for David Chipperfield Architects

Photo 2 (Right): The Master Plan of Museum Island (resource: <https://www.museumsinsel-berlin.de>)

3. The impacts of Flussbad project

The “Flussbad Berlin” is a community-initiated urban development project, with an aim to clean and reactivate the Spree Canal in the heart of Berlin. The project won the 2011 LafargeHolcim Award in Gold and gained strong political supports. The Flussbad Berlin Association³ was established to implement the project. The Flussbad project is composed of three sections: the natural waterway as an ecological regeneration zone to renature the shallow river and to create a park landscape; the 400-metre filter basin with a biotope landscape and a reed pool to clean the canal by natural means; and the 835-metre outdoor swimming area between Schlossplatz (Palace Square) and Bode Museum. According to the Flussbad association, an initial study on the technical feasibility for the filter basin was carried out with funding from the LOTTO Foundation. The design schemes of the open stairways at the Schlossplatz and the open areas at the ESMT are in the process of public consultation. The stairways at the Humboldt Forum is also slowly taking shape in design.

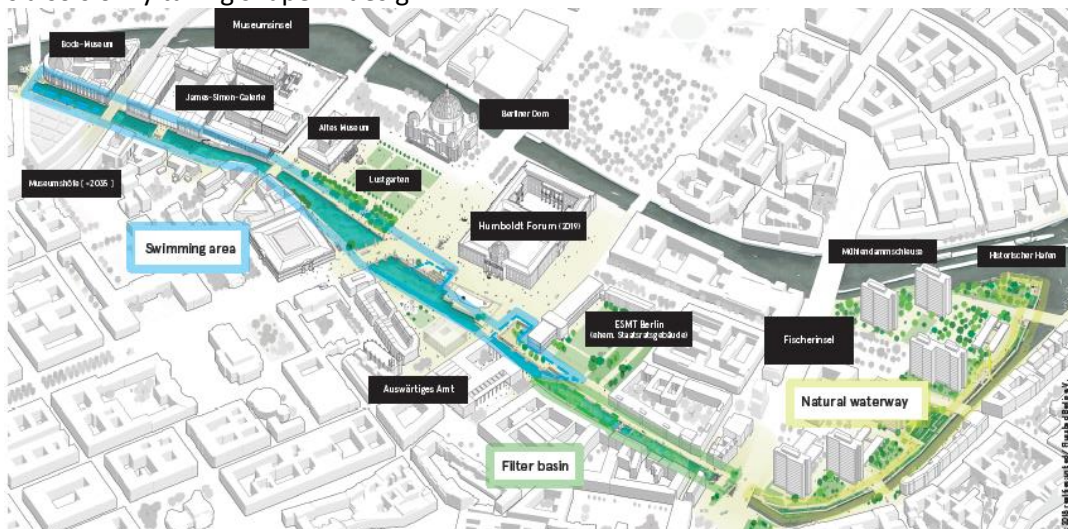


Photo 3: Flussbad Project specifications from Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing

³ There are currently over 420 members with 6920 supporters (source: <http://www.flussbad-berlin.de>, accessed at 21 Apr, 2019)

The design scheme of the Flussbad project has been revised according to the advice of relevant stakeholders. In particular, the proposed swimming area involves the World Heritage property and received strong criticism from heritage-related organizations and professionals. In 2016, experts of the ICOMOS Germany indicated negative impacts of the project on the MI and museum managers also criticized the project as an inappropriate use of the World Heritage areas. The current plan of the project has changed from a centralized staircase to access water at Lustgarten into three small-scale staircases. The critiques from heritage professionals focus mainly on four aspects:

- construction of stairways planned next to Monbijou bridge for the access to the Spree Canal will lead to demolition/destruction of historic elements;
- construction of weirs and other seasonally-based facilities (floating pontoons, toilettes, showers, dressing rooms and lockers) will have negative visual impacts to the historic ensemble;
- the raised river level will destroy the water reflection of historic façades aligned with the river embankments, which is a distinct historic image of the MI and part of the heritage environment;
- the recreational activities and associated noise, litter and behavior do not match with the function of the MI as a place for contemplation and inspiration and its symbolic image.

Since 2014, the project became a “National Urban Development Project” supported by the German Federal Government and the Federal State of Berlin and received 4 million euro to carry out feasibility study. In November 2017, the Berlin’s parliament passed the cross-fractional proposal “Getting the Flussbad flowing”, which encouraged all relevant departments to make it realized. A politician spoke to support the Flussbad project in Berlin’s state parliament that, considering the JSG is built on the MI, it is hard to explain why it is impossible to reinstall a quay wall for water access (the excerpts from Flussbad Berlin Annual review No.3, 2018). Due to the overwhelming consents to the ecological and social advantages of the project and its acquired strong political supports, the opposition from heritage sector is likely to be subordinated, although the project approval is suspended to the consultation among stakeholders of public interests.

The Senate Departement for Culture and Europa has informed the World Heritage Centre on the development of Flussbad project in 2018 and indicated its potential impacts on the authenticity and integrity of the MI. However, due to the lack of specific measures in current studies of the Flussbad project, HIA cannot be carried out yet. The Berlin Monument Authority (Landesdenkmalamt Berlin) as the responsible body for the MI has launched an attribute mapping programme for the MI to identify in details all physical attributes and significant visual connections related to the Outstanding Universal Value of the MI. It is a preparation for HIA and serves also as important evidences to adjust the protection boundaries and guide development interventions. The preliminary results of the attribute mapping have been included in the arguments to revise the plan of Flussbad project. A HIA mission will probably be invited when the project plan is approved at the state level with more concrete design measures. Apparently the HIA will come in a later stage of the project development. Its mitigation measures if applicable will be realized at a higher social, economic cost.

4. Strategic integration of HIA

As highlighted in the statement of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the MI, it illustrated the evolution of modern museum design over a century. It does not stop as an illustration, while it continues its function and evolution as an inspiring and educational centre to the public, as it was initially designed for. The Master Plan of the MI has set a clear vision that all development interventions shall comply with two principles: maintaining the OUV of MI and being an inspiring prototype of modern museum complex.

It is worth noticing that the JSG as a more massive interventions in the core area, comparing to the physical alterations caused by the Flussbad project in the buffer zone of the MI, arouse less concerns regarding to potential negative impacts. One possible explanation could be that the JSG is guided from the very beginning by the Master Plan of the MI, which integrates transformative forces with the OUV. However, the Master Plan is limited within the MI. As situated in the heart of Berlin, the MI remains a close connection with the city development. However, what are the roles and functions of the MI in the urban development and regeneration process have not been clarified at a strategic level in view of its uniqueness. This partially leads to the challenges of the Flussbad project, which intends to regenerate the historic area without fully understanding heritage values and conservation requirements. HIA can be employed in a more proactive manner to identify compatible future functions and activities of heritage resources, and further develop thresholds to filter out inappropriate interventions at an earlier stage.

As reflected in the practice of Environmental/Social Impact Assessments, the upstreaming process to include IAs in the strategic planning process is critical and becomes a regulatory focus. HIA practice shares the same concern. Furthermore, the intrinsic challenges of heritage management to communicate heritage values with stakeholders and the public add to the difficulties in building a shared view and finding an appropriate role for heritage resources in a dynamic and demanding urban context. HIA has the potential at the strategic level to address emerging risks and develop preventive measures. In the practice of HIA, attribute mapping becomes a critical tool to support prevention/mitigation measures and further informs decision-making, while it is a challenging task. The key values are often embedded with both tangible and intangible attributes, and some sensitive attributes may reach much beyond delimited boundaries. The attribute mapping of the MI demonstrated the importance to extend existing boundaries to include the Schlossbrücke and both embankments of the Spree Canal, as well as some important visual channels. Despite of technical challenges, the most difficult task is actually to establish a shared vision on the basis of technical assessment though stakeholder engagement, and thus inform decision-making and guide development activities at different levels to prevent or reduce potential adverse impacts.

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