



Leoben Judicial Complex

LEOBEN, AUSTRIA

According to an old Austrian tradition, judicial complexes (*justizzentren*) are always a combination of a courthouse and a prison. According to this principle, the Leoben Judicial Complex has a court building comprising a district court, a regional court, and a public prosecution service unit. The attached prison complex has separate areas for 200 men, women, and day-release prisoners.

The former judicial complex was in the old Leoben monastery in the city center, far from an ideal location for an up-and-coming city and too small and outdated for the expanding regional court. The federal real estate company (Bundesimmobiliengesellschaft mbH; BIG) already owned a 7.6-hectare



JURY STATEMENT

A new approach for a penal system, this complex includes a court building and an integrated prison for 200 inmates. It serves as a model plan for the Austrian penal system with its open design, which creates a sense of transparency. Designed with a focus on human dignity, the complex still satisfies all safety requirements and gives the city a new and beautiful building.

DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Owner/ Developer

BIG Bundesimmobiliengesellschaft mbH
Vienna, Austria
www.big.at

User

Bundesministerium für Justiz, Wien

Architect

Hohensinn Architektur
Graz, Austria
www.hohensinn-architektur.at



(18.8-ac) site on the outskirts of the city and held an international architecture competition in 1999 for the new judicial complex. Entrants were asked to address three questions from the Austrian federal ministry of justice: First, how can damages from imprisonment be avoided? Second, how close can prison life come to normal life without taking any security risks? And third, how can the inmates' feeling of being locked up be reduced?

From 30 applications, the jury, chaired by architect Gustav Peichl, selected the concept proposed by architect Josef Hohensinn of Hohensinn Architektur because of its innovative transparent design that focused on the complex as a service facility integrated with a prison, where human dignity as well as security is considered. (Inmates of Austrian courthouse-connected prisons spend at most 18 months in jail.) The useable floor area is close to 17,000 square meters (182,986 sf), of which 7,900 square meters (85,935 sf) serve the court buildings and 9,100 square meters (97,952 sf) the prison complex.

The court building has a decorative glass facade overlooking the city, designed to illustrate a new self-image of justice as a modern, open, light-flooded service facility for citizens rather than a closed "palace of justice." Great emphasis has been placed on serving the users, making the center a less traumatic place for visitors as well as inmates and employees. Courtyards are assigned to individual departments, and glass walls, windows, and courts look out onto small gardens. The promenade garden on the roof and the sports facilities are both available for the use of the inmates. The open section

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL OTT (ALL IMAGES)

of the prison has work and leisure facilities conceived so that inmates can access them independently without being accompanied. In addition to the traditional closed prison section, living units similar to apartments allow up to 15 inmates to live like a family and move freely. Nine Austrian artists were invited to design “art and construction” pieces that focus on the dignity of human beings, which must also be protected in the context of jurisprudence and imprisonment.

The owner, BIG, which has a triple “A” rating, provided the financing. Completed at the end of 2004 after only 24 months of construction, the new judicial complex is being rented by the Austrian ministry of justice. Rent is calculated based on two factors: construction costs and comparable market rents.

The new architecture and the innovative humane approach to imprisonment have led to a 25 percent reduction in personnel needed to look after inmates. Sick leave among both inmates and employees has decreased by 50 percent compared with other Austrian prisons. The Leoben Judicial Complex has received a constant stream of international visitors open to a potential new model for penitentiary courthouses. The model has proved so successful that two more centers like Leoben are already under construction in Austria, and one is underway in Germany. The model is being considered for penal institutions in the United States, particularly Chicago, and in many other countries, including Australia, Hungary, and Norway.

The whole Leoben Judicial Complex presents a remarkable achievement: a humane, modern, efficient, and friendly building that also satisfies many complex and costly safety requirements. The Europe, Middle East, and Africa ULI awards jury recognized this project as an extremely innovative and excellent model with new standards for humane prison conditions on an international as well as national level.



PROJECT DATA

Web Site

http://www.hohensinn-architektur.at/jz_leoben.html

Site Area

7.6 ha (18.8 ac)

Facilities

7,900 m² (85,935 sf) office

9,100 m² (97,952 sf) institutional

Land Use

civic, office

Start/Completion Dates

November 2002–November 2004