SLOVAKIA

Types of heritage in danger today

- Castles and manor houses: without use (too many museums and galleries for such a small country!) or with misuse (storage for agriculture, low standard homes for disabled people), in special cases a site of a rich owner, adapted according to personal taste, ignoring heritage values and the authenticity of materials.
- Monasteries, friaries, and churches: lacking maintenance in the past, there are now demands for enlargement, and adaptation for the new (opposite) facing altar in Roman Catholic churches: the flood of new pavements and stairs flowing from the presbytery into the nave.
- Ancient public buildings in towns (including town halls, markets, libraries, galleries, palaces, museums, theatres, banks, hotels): changes of the original function require too many adaptations to the authentic substance.
- Town houses in historic centres: housing or flats for centuries, now adapted for high-technology requirements.
- Vernacular architecture: farmers' housing including barns and stalls. The younger generation does not want to work in agriculture, preferring to live far from such sites, so the vernacular agricultural buildings are losing their usage and are very slowly deteriorating into ruins.
- Industrial heritage buildings (including workshops, factories, mines, railway buildings) are adapted for new technologies, or abandoned without future prospects.

What of the Future?

The future urgently requires a massive programme of public awareness, a re-evaluation of the list of protected cultural heritage of Slovakia, more attention by the government and society, and increased funding for the protection of our heritage (including support to owners and tax advantages). Since 1 April 2002, we have a new law for heritage protection, and the Heritage Institute has been renamed the 'Heritage Board' with more legislative power. However, no governmental board is really able to protect any monument against its owner if there is a lack of interest.

Case Study: the Cathedral of St. Elisabeth in Kosice, East-Slovakia

This monumental church is a former parish church of the town, built in place of a previous sacral structure in the period between 1380 and 1470. It was reconstructed in the spirit of the purist neo-Gothic style in 1876–1896. This renewal belonged to the most important heritage restoration period of the Hungarian Kingdom at the end of the 19th century.

The church has a basilical layout with a special disposition: on both sides of the nave are two aisles finished in the eastern end...
with polygonal apses, the transept is located in the middle of the nave, so a space of a central architecture is created in the centre of the church. The western façade is accented by two towers: the northern one reaches a height of over 60 metres, but the southern one has been left unfinished because the building of the parish church in the Middle Ages was broken by the progress of the Ottoman forces interrupting the long distance trade -- the main income of citizens of mediaeval Kosice.

The architect of the purist renewal in the 19th century, Imre Steindl, prepared projects for the church-towers as well: he wanted to demolish the Baroque helmet of the northern tower and the small roofing of the southern one, and finish them both in the same height (over 70 metres) with a marvellous neo-Gothic polygonal openwork construction from sandstone. The Heritage Commission in Budapest did not allow these changes and rebuilding -- it defined them as inconvenient and groundless.

But now, as realisations of sacral buildings are not forbidden any more, there is an effort by the owner, the Roman Catholic parish of St. Elisabeth in Kosice, to return to the idea of the final completion of the towers of the cathedral. (The church became a cathedral in 1804, and since 1995 Kosice has been the site of an archbishopric as well.) The plan was at least to begin with the unfinished southern tower.

The regional heritage board refused the proposal, and the parish applied for the support of the General Monuments Board in Bratislava. The decision was made after discussing the idea with a large group of experts (art history, architecture, history, heritage care, town planning) and the completion of the unfinished southern tower was defined as destruction of a part of the heritage values, irrespective of the point of view of church usage, and unacceptable to the theory and practice of heritage care at the beginning of the 21st century. An important fact to be confirmed is that the church is currently unable to manage the maintenance of the mediaeval substance of the cathedral, and the fine reliefs of the portals are progressively deteriorating, needing an urgent and ongoing conservation programme.

However, in spite of the above, there seems to be a danger that the church will continue in its efforts to 'make the cathedral more beautiful', and that rich sponsors will be found (with the hope of creating an eternal memorial for themselves by supporting the works) and there will always be a number of architects ambitious enough to give their skills to this unique challenge. Perhaps, in the future, you will receive a request to support the protests against these proposed works -- as it was in the case of the Bamiyan Buddhas, and, of course, with the same result?

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