

HUNGARY – HERITAGE @ RISK!

The protection of cultural heritage in Hungary dates back to the end of the 19th century. The responsible organisation has been restructured many times, and at present it is the National Office for the Protection of Historic Monuments (OmvH) which is in charge of the protection of cultural heritage – although the maintenance and safeguarding of these properties is in the first place the responsibility of the owners.

After the political and economic changes which started in 1989, the new Law No. LIV of 1997 regulates the protection and conservation of historic monuments (M) and sites (MJT) as well as the surroundings of monuments (MK). In Hungary, there are in total 10,356 cultural heritage places, 25 sites and about 200 surroundings, for the protection and conservation of which the OmvH is responsible as a centralised institution. Of course, the control in itself is not sufficient to guarantee good conditions for all protected cultural heritage places.

The lack of regular maintenance has to be named first as a threat to heritage values. Before the above mentioned political changes, the Hungarian State was in most cases the owner of these places. Since the Transition this has only been valid for certain cultural properties belonging to the churches. At present, the municipalities are mostly the owners of cultural monuments. These “new” proprietors have inherited places which are in a very poor state.

As far as historic towns and villages are concerned, the greatest danger is land speculation which does not care about cultural and historic values, but only about financial values. In the central parts of Budapest there is an urban fabric of late 19th century buildings. Investors often want to change the existing structures so as to have underground car parks or additional storeys to create more office space. Furthermore, the phenomenon of so-called *façadism* is increasing: see, for instance, in Budapest *Múzeum utca 3* and others. In the 3rd town quarter an area called *Újlak* has almost completely been changed by demolishing the ancient buildings and replacing them with a new structure which imitates old examples (a bit like Disneyland).

Palaces and vernacular architecture are endangered as well: the former owners have nearly all left; they either had to leave for political reasons or because of urban redevelopment and, afterwards, these buildings have been neglected in most cases. The new owners, many of them from foreign countries, treat these heritage places rather liberally saying that it is better that way than to let the buildings fall into decay, as would happen if they were not looked after at all.

Religious buildings, especially synagogues and Orthodox churches, which have lost their parishes, are constantly at risk. Their re-use is nearly always difficult – they normally remain empty or are misused (for instance the synagogues of Mád, Tokaj, Bonyhád, Pápa, Nagykanizsa etc and the Orthodox church of Siklós, etc). In certain regions, other churches, for example Calvinist ones, have also lost their parishes, and their buildings are therefore deteriorating.

Another danger is the forced urbanisation which, fortunately, does not happen too often. For instance in Kecskemét, it is intended to demolish an old house which gives evidence of the former town plan (*Kápolna utca 14*), to improve the traffic

network. There is, of course, another solution which would spare this house, but the final decision has not yet been made.

One of the more delicate problems concerns the financial resources for heritage conservation. Opinion polls have shown that the public believes that restoration will cost three times as much as a new building. It is mostly banks or insurance companies that will consider this “expensive” solution for middle-class town houses. Due to the considerable alterations they normally want to have done, these restorations can indeed become very expensive. So far, conservation of protected heritage is not promoted in terms of tax exemptions (the present government, however, intends to improve this situation), and the label “monument” reduces the value of a house on the market. Another danger is the growing number of shopping centres in the towns. These are dangerous for many reasons:

- The architecture of these “boxes” breaks the harmony of the traditional urban appearance
- Small shops in the city will have to close, which will also affect the maintenance of the old houses which contain them
- There is a trend towards central quarters for this type of store (eg in Budapest the “Mamut” centre; in Győr a project for a big commercial centre at the site of barracks of the 19th century, which are in good condition).

We have had bad experience with heritage places in the World Heritage List as well as with heritage sites attracting a lot of tourists. The negative consequences of too many tourists can be seen in Szentendre (a small protected and picturesque area 30 km north of Budapest) or in Hollókő (a village in the north east part of Hungary, on the World Heritage List). The main elements are:

- Commercialisation including fast food restaurants and small gift shops selling objects which are not really authentic
- Loss of traditional aspects and, combined with that, transformation of usage and authentic appearance
- Use of contemporary inauthentic materials and structures
- New infrastructure which is necessary but badly adapted
- Old-established families are leaving, and their houses are then converted into “pretty” weekend homes.

There is also the problem of historic parks and gardens, as most of them were completely damaged by abandonment and by a new “use of the grounds”. Near the palaces of Ráckeve, Gödöllő, Fehérvárcsurgó, etc, considerable parts of the parks have been cut away. This applies also to cultural landscapes which were transformed by forced co-operatives during the Communist period – and, in contrast, by a current exaggerated land division.

Industrial cultural heritage places also must be mentioned. Unfortunately, no inventory has been drawn up of them yet. With the economic changes in this area we are confronted with a period of rapid and dangerous developments, for instance the demolition of industrial chimneys in Özd, the abandonment of old factories in order to re-use their bricks, closed railway stations, etc. It is true that there is also a positive example: on Óbuda island in Budapest the site of the old boat factory is being converted into a leisure centre.

Finally, some more examples of heritage places at risk:

- The pavilions of the “Várkertbazár” (Royal Garden)” in Budapest which are on the World Monument Watch list of 1998

- Schosberger Palace in Tura, which is empty, the owner from India who bought it in 1991 is not able to maintain or to restore it
- The stone bridge in Zalaszentgrót, where restoration has already started
- Several protected vernacular houses to be found everywhere in the country
- The garden of a medieval Cistercian monastery in ruins in Píliszentkereszt
- Baroque Huilier-Coburg Palace in Edelény, 18th century, decorated with excellent wall paintings, is empty and seriously infected with fungi ("merulius lacrimans").

Certainly, this list could be continued for a long time, but we think that these examples will be sufficient to illustrate the present situation. As far as the "political background" is concerned, there is certainly an improvement: financial resources for cultural heritage have been considerably increased in the national budget. We also hope to find new proprietors in the future, who will really feel responsible.

ICOMOS Hungary

ICELAND – HERITAGE @ RISK!

A well known postulate declaims that Iceland is on the border of the habitable area of the globe. So it may be but this borderline existence has all the same brought about various cultural achievements of great importance both locally and in a wider perspective.

Iceland is a volcanically and seismically active area, which represents a great threat to the environment and all living creatures in large parts of the country. The harsh climate also represents various threats to the built environment and can in certain areas indirectly lead to serious danger in the form of avalanches of snow, mud and rocks. Thus Icelandic nature itself, from which the national culture has grown, is at the same time wearing down its physical cultural heritage. The same goes naturally for all other regions of the earth, but under the extremities in Iceland the threats from the natural environment are as serious and periodically overwhelming as they can be.

Written sources tell us about powerful earthquakes in the southern areas of Iceland, which have shaken the earth regularly at intervals of every hundred years, ever since the settlement of the country. The same sources describe serious damage done to buildings and other built constructions in large areas. Time and again nearly every farmstead was damaged and many were totally ruined near the origin of the earthquakes. In 1786 the bishopric in Skalholt, which is in the middle of southern Iceland, was damaged by an earthquake to such an extent that it was transferred to Reykjavik which is situated in a less seismically active part of the country. The same area was again shaken by a powerful earthquake in 1896 and still again in the summer of 2000. In the meantime modern technology has made it possible to construct houses which resist the forces of earthquakes, and buildings erected in the latter part of the 20th century did not suffer damage in the earthquake mentioned above.

The built heritage and ruins from earlier centuries are made to a large extent of local earthen materials such as turf, peat and stone and such constructions are easily damaged by earthquakes. In Iceland the turf-house based upon a common Nordic tradition, evolved through the ages to the late 19th century, whereas in the other Nordic countries it was replaced by houses of timber and of stone as early as the 10th century. With growing economic strength in the 19th century the Icelandic turf-houses were gradually abandoned and replaced by more hygienic and adequate houses of timber and concrete. Around 1900, 50% of the population still lived in turf-houses but in about 1950 only very few turf-houses were to be found in the country.

The building materials and the building technique of the traditional turf-houses are of a nature that they deteriorate rapidly and have to be maintained constantly. The turf-house can rightfully be characterised as a continuous building process. To find a new role for an abandoned turf-house is almost impossible apart from as museums and therefore the economic means to maintain them are very limited. Left abandoned and not maintained, the turf-house falls into ruins in only a few years. Only a handful still exist of the thousands of turf farms to be found in Iceland until the 19th century. The National Museum of Iceland is responsible for 10 turf farms in various parts of the country and another few are under the protection of municipal museums and even in private ownership.