

# SLOVENIA

## Heritage of the 19th and 20th Centuries at Risk

When speaking about the cultural heritage that is most at risk in Slovenia, it is necessary first to highlight the heritage from the 19th and 20th centuries. Despite intensive efforts of a small group of experts, this heritage remains to be misinterpreted and thus left to intensive interventions, which in turn have a detrimental effect on it and significantly change its testimonial value.

This year's report is focused on a few cases from the capital city of Ljubljana, where most of the construction activity takes place and consequently the heritage is highly exposed as well.

Since the mid-19th century Ljubljana grew from a provincial town on the margins of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy to a national capital and precisely the architecture and the bold urban planning solutions of the major Slovenian architects influenced its high-quality urban life and also its visibility. The spatial development of Ljubljana was importantly shaped by Camillo Sitte (1843–1903) and Maks Fabiani (1865–1962) after the great 1895 earthquake, Jože Plečnik (1872–1957) between the two World Wars, and Edo Ravnikar (1907–1993) in the second half of the 20th century. The work of other architects was significant as well: France Tomažič (1899–1968), Vladimir Šubic (1894–1946), Edo Mihevc (1911–1985), Danilo Fuerst (1912–2005), Stanko Kristl (1922–), Savin Sever (1927–2003), and Miloš Bonča (1932–2007), to mention just a few.

Nevertheless, the work that left the most indelible mark on the city was that of Jože Plečnik, with his thoughtful planning, delicately connecting spatial ambiances and temporal layers into rich, magnificent ambiances, never disloyal to the measure of man. During his more than 20 years of intensive creation, he developed solutions which provided the backbone of life in the city centre. He designed the key city axes – the pedestrian routes in the city centre – and upgraded them with architecture that complements, upgrades, and connects them in terms of use and design. Prešerenov trg (Prešeren's Square) with Tromostovje (The Three Bridges) is one of the key locations of this connection and opening outward and along the city paths and the Ljubljanica River, to which he paid special attention. So today, after 100 years since the design of the first plans and implementations of Plečnik's Ljubljana, we speak of this design as a monument to timeless urban humanity, which is also why the nomination of the most important monuments of this urban landscape for the World Heritage List is being prepared.

The central figure of the second half of the 20th century was Edvard Ravnikar, Plečnik's pupil, who worked in Le Corbusier's office for a short period of time. His works include the Trg republike (Republic Square) as the new centre of the modern city, the Ferantov vrt (Ferant Garden) residential quarter, and many studies and competition entries for the redesign of the city centre. His pedagogical role at the University of Ljubljana was paramount;

there he taught generations of architects who with their work, particularly in the 1970s, laid the foundation for what is now called the Ljubljana school of architecture.

The spatial development during socialism was planned and manageable and many high-quality urban architectural solutions were created as a result of the qualitative development of the profession throughout Yugoslavia;<sup>1</sup> these circumstances differed considerably from the conditions witnessed in other Eastern European socialist countries. Nevertheless, after the change of the political system in 1991 these conditions changed as well.

Democratisation also broke away with state-managed planning, which was logical, but this also meant a discontinuity of appropriately guided spatial planning, at least for a while, i. e. until a new system was set up. This greatly influenced the preservation of quality in spatial design and architecture. Previously public investments were replaced by private capital, which no longer followed the previously set standards, while new ones took time to take shape. In the 1990s, many private multiple-dwelling projects were built, which lacked outdoor green areas and the necessary social infrastructure (kindergartens, primary schools, shops, health care centres). Life in the neighbourhoods built during socialism, which had an appropriate infrastructure, became less interesting, regardless of the quality. This was a period when large, oversized industrial zones and commercial centres were established in practically every major Slovenian city, even in highly unsuitable locations, because the state wanted to accelerate economic growth in this way. This irreparably marked spatial development. The sites of bankrupt industrial enterprises, on the other hand, mostly ended up in the hands of private investors. High-quality industrial architecture, often important examples of industrial heritage, was torn down in many places, because politics did not want to become an obstacle to the investment in any way.

Conditions of transition resulted in the loss of many important buildings of the 20th century, particularly those that emerged during socialism. This led to architects organising themselves and to the first public campaigns to preserve the most significant heritage of modernism. The result is undoubtedly awareness-raising, at least among some of the professional community but, as explained above, there are still not many efficient systemic solutions in place at the state level, as public heritage protection services do not have enough well-trained experts who could fulfil the current needs. A great problem has been unprofessional implementation of energy-performance improvements, which we have witnessed over recent years. Under the Ministry of Culture, experts have prepared guidelines to improve the energy performance of cultural heritage buildings;<sup>2</sup> however, buildings of post-war modernism and industrial heritage are highly specific and require special refurbishment projects. These projects are prepared on an exceptional basis, while the decisions about the refurbishment of significant buildings, particularly apartment buildings, are made by the owners and their managers. Experts

from the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia are included only rarely, as this heritage still lacks proper legal protection.

## Case Studies

New political and economic conditions led to the first large-scale private investments in cultural heritage sites, which have largely proved to be problematic, particularly due to unrealistic investor expectations and political support, even though the investments generally did not consider urban planning conditions and conditions for the protection of cultural heritage. The projects were mostly prepared in a way that necessitated subsequent coordination with the competent services and changes to the spatial documents. However, this finally resulted in making compromises at the expense of heritage. It is difficult to comment how the many solutions were accepted. Disagreement with intensive construction and professional decisions led to the establishment of various civil initiatives. The most active were the initiative that opposed the construction of underground car parks at Ljubljana Markets, adjacent to the Plečnik Colonnade, the initiative to preserve Plečnik's stadium at Bežigrad in its original form, and the initiative committed to preventing the restoration of Vegova Street in line with Plečnik's project, as this would mean the removal of trees that have grown to an extent where the urban design itself is put at risk.

Many major investment cases in the city centre were stalled because of the financial crisis and investments that went beyond the investors' capacity. Nevertheless, the initiatives' activities helped everyone to reconsider the situation. City professional services were also involved in the pursuit of quality solutions, at least in some locations, as this was the only way to speed up the procedures and resume the work in many abandoned construction sites in the centre of the city. The following cases need to be particularly mentioned: Kolizej, Tobačna tovarna (the Tobacco Factory) and, the most notorious one, the refurbishment of the Stadium at Bežigrad, which will be presented in more detail.

### Kolizej

Kolizej was one of the earliest mixed-use building in the world. Dating back to 1848, it was built to the design of the Graz entrepreneur and architect Johan Benedikt Withalm<sup>3</sup> (1771–1865). It was designed in the sense of a transitional barracks for the army who occasionally came to Ljubljana as well as for the needs of social life of the former citizens. Along with the barracks, the building houses several halls for various events, areas for socialising, dining areas, and an inn. In the late 20th century, Kolizej was in a very poor condition since nobody invested in it, except for a few residents who lived in the apartments in the tract at Gosposvetska. In 1995, part of the building with the main hall collapsed because of the users' interventions into the structure. The building was then bought by a private investor and in 2004, the investor held an international design competition for a new construction in the area of the building that had the status of a cultural monument of national importance. Nonetheless, the existing spatial documents and the cultural protection background were not considered. Neutelings Riedijk Architects from the Netherlands won the competition. Their design greatly intervened with Ljubljana's traditional cityscape, so in the harmonisation phase it failed to acquire the necessary construction permits. However, the owner managed to tear down the building despite its exceptional qualities already back in 2011, acquiring a new project that still



Fig. 1: Kolizej in the mid-19th century as depicted by Anton Jurmann (Source: [https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kolizej,\\_Ljubljana#/media/Slika:Kolizej\\_in\\_Ljubljana\\_in\\_middle\\_of\\_19th\\_century.jpg](https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kolizej,_Ljubljana#/media/Slika:Kolizej_in_Ljubljana_in_middle_of_19th_century.jpg))



Fig. 2: The project for the Schellenburg Palace to be erected at the site of the demolished Kolizej (Source: <https://www.gravitas.si/projekt/stavbe/aktualno/palaca-schellenburg/>)

does not achieve the qualities that it should, given the significance of the location (Figs. 1 and 2).

### Tobačna tovarna

The revitalisation of the abandoned Tobačna tovarna, which was built in the second half of the 19th century, then on the periphery and now in the very centre, has led, because of the investor's ambitions and the insufficiently critical attitude of professional services and the Chamber of Architecture and Spatial Planning of Slovenia, to an over-dimensioned project, whose realisation prompted the demolition of several original buildings at the heritage site, which had the potential to develop a content suitable for the city centre. The selected competition entry from the 2006 competition accommodated the requirements of the investor as much as possible; the project not only destroyed the important buildings of this industrial complex but had an adverse impact on the cityscape as well. This was not implemented because of the investor's bankruptcy, but here as well an open construction site has remained for several decades with excavated underground garages with 3,600 parking spaces. Nevertheless, in the mean-



Fig. 4: The first-prize winning entry in the public competition for restoration of the Tobačna tovarna site (Source: <https://radiostudent.si/politika/off-sajd/tobačna-mesto-postaja-center>)



Fig. 3: The Tobačna ('Tobacco Factory') as it once was (Source: Muzej novejšje zgodovine Slovenije)

time the City Council has adopted a decree on designating the preserved buildings as monuments of local significance, and there are also discussions underway<sup>4</sup> how to keep the uses that occupied the space in the preserved buildings and are important for the city and adapt the project accordingly (Figs. 3 and 4).

### **Bežigrad Stadium**

The restoration history of the Central Stadium Bežigrad began with the bankruptcy of the central city football club Olimpija, which in the 2004/2005 season also stopped playing in the premier league. In the bankruptcy proceedings, its central property, i. e. the stadium, was bought by a Slovenian entrepreneur who wanted to restore the stadium and upgrade it programmatically, as the city was practically left without a central football facility for major competitions, while the project also provided for an extensive additional commercial programme. To that end, in 2007 a public-private partnership consortium was established, together with the City of Ljubljana and the Slovenian Olympic Committee. The BŠP (Bežigradski športni park) company was established, which was, with the majority share by Joc Pečecnik (GSA), the central investment vehicle. On its website, BŠP presents the project along with the project's timeline.<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 5: The gloriolite on top of the stadium was erected in 1935, when it was adapted for the needs of the Eucharistic Congress (Source: Muzej in galerije mesta Ljubljane)



Fig. 6: The stadium around 1965 (photo: Edi Šelhaus, from Muzej novejšje zgodovine Slovenije archives)

The stadium was originally designed by Jože Plečnik in 1925 for the Catholic gym society Orel. The project was completed by his student Ivan Pengov. In 1935 it was changed for the first time to the design of Jože Plečnik and expanded for the Eucharistic Congress, when the one-storey gloriolite and a visitors' arena were added. After the war, the stadium was intended for sporting events, a track was added and the stadium was adapted to the needs of the Olimpija football club. The stadium fully closed down in 2008 when the restoration was supposed to start to the design of GMP architects (von Gerkan, Marg and Partners) from Berlin who won the invited competition, which was held together with the City of Ljubljana. The project includes the construction of a high-rise on the south side of the stadium, three business villas on its northern side, a two-storey gallery above the existing stands, and the facilities for the athletes and an underground car park below the stadium field. The jury comprising representatives from the City of Ljubljana, Chamber of Architecture and Spatial Planning of Slovenia, the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, and the investor unanimously selected the entry by the German GMP group. The investor acquired all the necessary permits and according to the competition solution the Municipal Detailed Spatial Plan (OPPN) was drawn.

In 2009, ICOMOS Slovenia provided a statement regarding the competition solution in a press release, underlining the following: “Despite the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia’s confirmation of adequacy of the winning entry for the restoration of Plečnik’s stadium, we demand a re-evaluation of how cultural protection baselines are considered in order to allow for the protection of Plečnik’s stadium in line with international provisions and legal protection of the cultural heritage.”<sup>6</sup>

In 2011, a civil initiative was formed, headed by some of the residents of the Fondovi bloki (Fund Apartment Buildings), which are at the same time a party to legal proceedings in determining plot ownership on the eastern side of the stadium, where the Slovenian Olympic Committee also has a claim. The initiative is trying to restore the original form of the stadium, which is of course not in line with the investor’s interests; such a solution gives rise to professional concerns as well, as even the project’s name itself does not take into account the 1925 expansion, when the stadium was extended to hold public assemblies.

Given the length of the procedure and the many obstacles, the investor put the stadium up for sale, but there are unfortunately no private or public resources that would allow for a restoration, which would be more appropriate than the one already planned.

In 2014, a negative environmental report was prepared for the project due to noise pollution during construction, as a result of which the proceedings were suspended until the new construction legislation was adopted in 2018. In line with this, BŠP re-applied for a building permit, while new cultural protection documentation is also being re-acquired, i. e. culture protection guidelines. The fact is that in 2009 the Plečnik stadium was declared a monument of national significance. It is not clear how this will be taken into account when acquiring new guidelines by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia. It is necessary to thoroughly think about the admissibility of such intensive interventions as those permitted by the 2008 conservation plan. It is particularly necessary to rethink the acceptability of building the galleries above the stands and the extent of the garages, whose construction will affect the structural stability of the gloriette as the central motif of Plečnik’s renovation. During the time when the necessary permits were being acquired, the monument was not appropriately maintained and it deteriorated (Figs. 5–8).

When looking at the chronology and the duration of the procedures for the restoration of the Bežigrad Stadium, which has taken more than twelve years, it is necessary to establish a responsible attitude of everyone involved towards the investor, who, despite everything, stood by the project that the expert committee unanimously selected at the competition. And precisely the competition is the point to which we must return if in the future we want to improve the conditions regarding the interventions into cultural heritage. Professional services must have clearly-defined criteria and assessments of the individual monuments or heritage in the decision-making phase on the selection of the restoration projects, and their voices must be heard and respected throughout the procedure. In turn, they are given the responsibility to carry out high-quality professional work. The current adjustments among investors – as this is the only way to understand some professional decisions – have proven to be counterproductive in all the cases presented – and also in other cases not mentioned in this report, as they brought serious damage to everyone involved, investors included, but mostly to heritage. ICOMOS stressed this as early as 2009 in the aforementioned press release.



Fig. 7: Winning project of the international competition by GMP, 2008 (Source: <http://bsp.si>)



Fig. 8: The stadium in 2008 (Source: <https://radiostudent.si/sites/default/files/slike/2018-06-19-mnenje-kot-resnica-88515.jpg>)

## Conclusions

The role of the conservation profession in Slovenia must be strengthened, and particularly adequate budget and staff must be provided who will be able to prepare the necessary materials in a professional manner. The work of both key ministries directly involved with the restoration projects, i.e. the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning and the Ministry of Culture, must be coordinated. Also, the involvement of Slovenian researchers from universities and research institutions concerned with heritage protection is too small, particularly in actual research tasks of evaluating heritage and drawing-up protection guidelines.

ICOMOS Slovenia as a non-governmental organisation in the public interest is trying to work in a connecting and constructive manner as much as possible. We organise various conferences, e.g. a 2016 conference on the topic of refurbishing Plečnik’s stadium. We have also prepared several events open to both professional and general audiences, which expose the significance of cultural heritage protection and the potentials that it offers for development. In this context, it is important to mention two documents that can be helpful to anyone involved in the planning or decision-making regarding restoration projects: firstly, the European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st Century of the Council of Europe, and secondly, the European Quality Principles for EU-funded Interventions with Potential Impact upon Cultural Heritage. The fact is that people are increasingly aware (investors included) that heritage has an important economic po-

tential and that it is important to understand all of its dimensions and the necessity to invest in it – instead of short-term profits this contributes in the long-term both to the economy and to society. This report was also compiled to create better conditions for heritage in the future. ICOMOS Slovenia also aims to

arrange for the earliest possible translation into Slovenian of the European Quality Principles for EU-funded Interventions with Potential Impact upon Cultural Heritage, which will particularly support the designers of any projects concerned with heritage protection, not only those financed by the European Union.

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#### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> This was stressed by the exhibition *Concrete Utopia*, which was held in 2018 at the MOMA in New York. It included the creation of the Yugoslav architecture of the second half of the 20th century in the worldwide context. An extensive monograph with the same title was published to accompany the exhibition.
- <sup>2</sup> Vendramin, Mojca et al. (2016). *Smernice za energetska prenova stavb kulturne dediščine*, Ljubljana : Ministrstvo za infrastrukturo : Ministrstvo za kulturo. Link: [https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MK/DEDISCINA/NEPREMICNA/smernice\\_kd-final.pdf](https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MK/DEDISCINA/NEPREMICNA/smernice_kd-final.pdf).
- <sup>3</sup> The first building of this kind was built by Withalm earlier on in Graz, which however deteriorated at the turn of the 19th

- to the 20th centuries. His work also includes the Iron House (1846), also in Graz, with a cast-iron facade construction. Part of the building is integrated into the Kunsthaus complex by Peter Cook and Colin Fournier.
- <sup>4</sup> A round table on the future of Tobačna was organised by the Institute for Spatial Policies in April 2019. More at: <https://ipop.si/2019/04/04/kaj-bo-s-tobacno-preberi-tukaj/>
- <sup>5</sup> <http://bsp.si/>
- <sup>6</sup> The full text of the press release is published at the ICOMOS Slovenia website: [www.icomos.si](http://www.icomos.si).