

SLOVAKIA

There have been several smaller earthquakes and local inundations in Slovakia in the last years, but these have not been a decisive danger to heritage. The last damage caused to the cathedral in Košice by a flood and an earthquake took place in the middle of the 19th century. However, there has been considerable damage arising from a number of different causes:

- By the end of the World War II there were 255 castles and manor houses, 20 castle ruins, 308 Roman Catholic churches, 137 evangelical and 80 Greek Catholic churches damaged or demolished and the furnishing of over 450 castles and manor houses were stolen or demolished. Many of these residential buildings belonged to members of historic Hungarian aristocratic families, who were treated as 'enemies of the new establishment' following the formation of the new state (Czechoslovakia 1918).
- Very soon after World War II, the elections were won by the communists, leading in 1948 to the 'building of socialism' – private property was abolished.
- The strengthening of the new government required a lot of changes – one of the most outrageous ones was completed in 1950: the monastic and friar (both male and female) orders were cancelled, their possessions became the property of the country and the church was secularised and subordinated to the government.
- In 1951 the Heritage Institute of Slovakia was founded: a new era of heritage renewals began. Chosen monuments were carefully (or less carefully) adapted, reconstructed, restored, conserved on the basis of serious research and planning – to show the capitalist world what an important function cultural heritage had in this progressive sort of society (town halls, churches, town fortifications, theatre buildings and so on).
- Many historic sites, however, lost their centres, or only a small square surrounded by a curtain created by renewed and restored historic façades was saved. In the area of the inner house-yards, new multi-storey unified prefab blocks were built. In addition, enlargement or reconstruction of roads and highways were planned in such a way that historic way-side crosses and chapels could be demolished during the realisation.
- The large size of common fields destroyed the structure of the landscape, created for centuries by a network of lanes and narrow strips of cultivated fields, varied by creeks and small forest areas, and bordered by fruit trees according to the agricultural character of the place. The crosses and chapels were destroyed, the typical field-strips vanished under the collective ploughing, and the historic landscape was completely changed.
- After 40 years of socialistic economy (everything belonged to 'everybody', meaning that no personal individual had responsibility for anything) the changed government in 1989 tried as soon as possible to continue the progress interrupted in 1948. However, traditions, continuity in any field of human activity, local patriotism and a sense of identity – as well as responsibility for common things – were unknown phenomena. This was (and remains) the serious and real danger for our heritage, followed by the ignorance of the *nouveau riche* 'sharks' – a flood that destroys much more of the historic substance of our heritage buildings than was decimated in the last decades of the 20th century.

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.

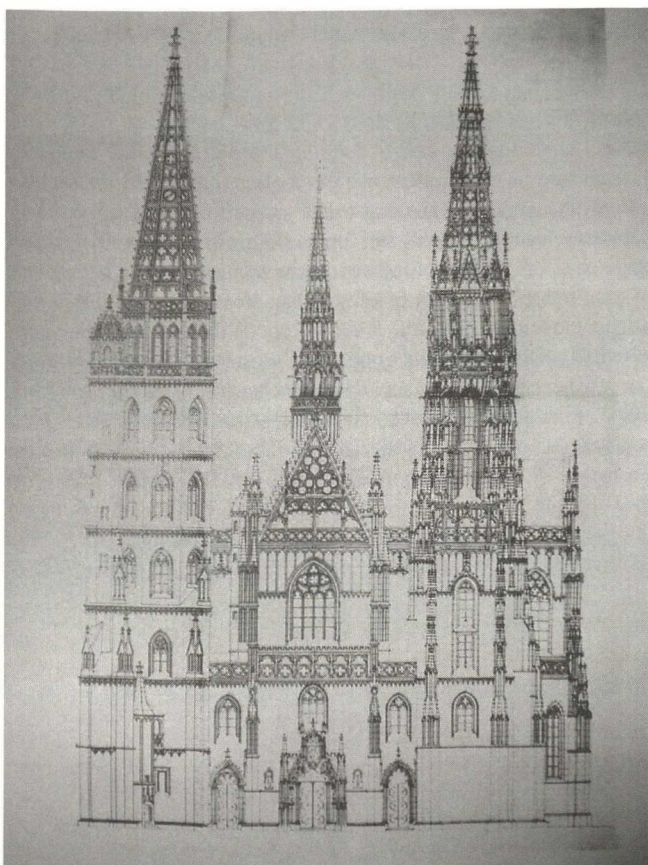
But now, as realisations of sacral buildings are not forbidden any more, there is an effort by the owner, the Roman Catholic parish of St. Elisabeth in Kosice, to return to the idea of the final completion of the towers of the cathedral. (The church became a cathedral in 1804, and since 1995 Kosice has 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 val-

Plan of Imre Steindl from the 19th century, kept in the archives of the Board of Cultural Heritage in Budapest, showing his design of the western façade. (Nr. K5000)



Western facade of the St. Elisabeth Cathedral in Kosice – present state



ues, 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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