

SLOVENIA

Introduction

The Republic of Slovenia is generally quoted among the list of relatively developed countries. The average GDP per capita is more than US\$10,000 (2000). Bordering with Italy and Austria and with strong economic relations with Germany, it seems to be an example of a 'promising eastern state' to enter into the European Community. The political and economic reasons seem to urge such a solution, but public opinion is still insufficient to support this step.

The country, with a mere 2 million inhabitants, is spread over a surface of 24,000 square kilometres that incorporates at least five different types of cultural landscape, from the shores of the Adriatic Sea to the Julian Alps and Pannonian lowlands. Almost half the area is covered with timber suitable for further economic use.

From the conservationist's point of view, the process of intense development is directly connected with the vanishing of traditional arts and craftsmanship. This more-accelerated development is also threatening the survival of vernacular architecture. This unfortunate relationship has become a focus of conservation activity. The urge of competition in production and trade, well known as globalisation, does not allow as much of a local approach as is necessary for the survival of typical and specific local cultural patterns. To be 'modern' means to be fashionable, and to accept forms and materials from 'the advertising society'. Ultimately, in the desire to replace 'the old and simple', the differences start to disappear.

Local Diversities

Three basic types of built structures have been used over thousands of years: stone, wood and adobe architecture. Stone – as the most affordable local material – was a very common, locally pro-

The richly decorated, wooden structure of a traditional hayrack is not enough to support the future use of the object endangered by new ways of hay collecting.



vided building material on the coast, in Karsic middle-Slovenia and in parts of the Alps. Wood was widely spread over the central part of the country and in the hills, and in the lowlands of eastern and southern Slovenia where wood for structure and straw for roofing prevailed. Adobe structures completed the spectrum of innovative constructions and differences in local vernacular architecture.

The important qualities of earlier local traditions included the large number of self-made and self-managed functions within family farms. This resulted in a number of specific and very functional buildings. Such constructions were made of stone and/or wood, easy to repair and able to accept further adaptations. These relatively simple and modest, even insignificant, structures were used for many diversified functions.

The hayrack is one of the most typical constructions, richly varied across the different cultural landscape types in Slovenia. Through the centuries, the construction of hayracks was closely bound to small family farms and the availability of a significant amount of manual labour. The hayrack became the trademark of the Slovenian cultural landscape. However, mechanised haymaking, baling of fresh or dry hay and modern storage, all have different requirements and have made hayracks redundant. In some instances, the vertical supporting of a hayrack has been made of reinforced concrete, which enables some further use.

The barn, pigsty, cowshed, horse stable, vineyard cottage and many other different constructions were made of local material and with distinguished artistic skill. Forced by competition in production and commerce, monocultures in farming are necessary today and the diverse organisation of the past cannot survive. Simplification in production, urged by economic pressure, results directly in the disappearance of building types.

The Role of Architecture and the Building Industry

An approach to engendering positive solutions has to spread beyond the conservation area. To deal with single objects of cultural heritage is not enough for successful protection and preservation. Each entity has today become a part of the historic environment as a whole, and principles for protection and preservation are indispensable parts of urban development and physical planning.

One of the undeveloped, possibly even missing, professional areas is undoubtedly the effective study of historic building types and the cultural patterns related to them. Young architects are neither advised nor urged to deal with thorough analyses of tradition. The elegance of post-modernism, deconstructivism and other theoretical definitions and architectural approaches have to be more logically connected with the study of tradition and traditional practices. The principle of minimal intervention is rarely promoted in the context of renovation or reconstruction procedure on existing buildings. Due to the past lack of financial control-mechanisms, costs have not been previously limited. As a consequence, more and more costs have become controlled and, therefore, favour building entrepreneurs. They use continually more 'up to date' materials and techniques, and no training in traditional approaches can be found. The building industry is evidently responsible for the disappearance of traditional constructions.

The Role of Commerce, Market and Trade

We cannot escape consumer society. 'The blind eyes' of isolated conservationists can do much harm to the heritage. Vast spectrums of decorative articles and materials on the market have considerable influence on vernacular architecture. The aggressive and not at all selective advertising of products, with an absence of professional evaluation, is embraced by the owners of cultural heritage objects and ensembles. Significant indifference towards conservation makes the situation even worse.

Unfortunately, the greater number of everyday constructions are made without architects, a large percentage is even built without administrative permission. Escape from traditional forms and materials is deemed to be the act of 'modernisation', even 'Europe-isation'. Owners use a whole spectrum of odd details and import many strange forms and materials. They in fact transform the cultural landscape into a chaos of private aesthetics.



Scientific Approach versus Practical Activity

The former political system of self-managed socialism gave significant power to conservationists and, at that time, an administrative approach prevailed. Professionals could deal with isolated scientific work. The results, however, were generally not put into practice. Professionals in the conservation field even today would rather escape into science than confront changes in society. To advise with valid arguments can be much more effective than to forbid the expected negative result, but to act in this way is not yet common practice. It is not easy to establish new relations in the circumstances of an open market society where competition has to be active and innovative. Conservationists have to be part of the focus of this new life and be as creative as possible. On the other hand, it does not mean that more research and directed studies into effective contemporary methods and tools are not helpful. On the contrary, the more that heritage is endangered, more innovative and effective approaches have to be discovered to help preservation. From fieldwork to the laboratory is one direct action – no more, no less.

Conclusion

Serious changes due to the development of the political system and economy bring many challenges in the field of heritage protection. The active involvement of conservationists on the side of owners and users of the heritage can bring a much-needed mutual confidence. Private and well-advocated public interests have to meet in a fruitful compromise. New financial sources have to be found to complement the money provided by the State budget. Again, civil society, in the form of non-governmental organisations, can be effective and stipulate appropriate actions. This active public support brings more result than administrative prescriptions.

Examples of vernacular architecture in Slovenia

