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ARCHIMAP 2/20: MAPPING THE POST-WAR SOCIALIST ARCHITECTURE IN KOŠICE

ARCHIMAPA 2/20: MAPOVANIE POVOJNOVEJ SOCIALISTICKEJ ARCHITEKTÚRY V KOŠICIACH

Monika Kicová

Even though Košice is Slovakia's second largest city, the metropolis of the country's eastern part, and an urban formation that experienced its greatest construction growth in the postwar years, there is a significant absence of knowledge and appreciation of the architecture created between the 1960s and 1980s, in comparison with its historical core. In previous years, research has focused mostly on interwar architecture.¹ More recently, the focus of interest has moved towards urbanism, where investigations have undergone a chronological shift towards the later part of the 20th century.² Yet all the same, the era of socialist construction, the operation of state design institutes in Eastern Slovakia, the realisations by significant national architects (Eugen Kramár, Ján Šprlák-Uličný, Viktor Malinovský, Pavol Merjavý and others) or the contributions by Czech figures (Růžena Žertová, František Antl, Karel Prager and others) still remain insufficiently addressed.

For a systematic expert evaluation of the built production of the given period and region, it will be necessary first of all to undertake a basic survey and mapping of the individual structures. Unusually, the activities in this direction have not emerged primarily from professional institutions or universities, but from citizens' initiatives. Within the project Archimap 2/20, the Initiative for Modern Architecture (Iniciatíva za modernú architektúru – IMA), bringing together people of varying professional backgrounds (architects, designers, visual artists, art historians, photographers) has prepared a basic database of the most important buildings.³ IMA emerged as a response to the situation in which, to an ever-increasing extent, its members witnessed damage through poorly executed reconstructions, or the decay and slow disappearance of this architectural heritage. This initial aim of protecting and preserving the architecture of

postwar modernism as a vital layer of built history and component of cultural heritage, in turn, stimulated an interest in the more thorough investigation of selected buildings in Košice.

It is worth asking whether this activity outside the institutional framework can fully replace the formalised procedures of the established scholarly community. Does it have any notable limitations? Or, conversely, advantages? Are the motivations behind the research proof of an “unobjective approach” or indeed a clear admission of the researchers’ positionality in the network of involved actors?

Civic Engagement as an Impulse for Architectural Research

The very fact that up until now, this architecture has not been granted its fair share of attention brings along practical problems regarding its preservation. Many buildings are now reaching an age when it is necessary to perform structural interventions to improve or rationalise their operation. However, these new alterations are often performed in a radical manner: rebuilding, changes in layout, replacement of materials. In terms of scholarly knowledge, we are losing the chance to investigate and capture these buildings in their original state.

This inactivity in the research field, though, has its consequence in the general social unawareness (shared among building owners, public offices, or even the architects, engineers and designers entrusted with reconstruction), which could lead to a devaluation of characteristic and valuable architectonic elements.

In a way, it forms a vicious circle. We cannot undertake research since the research object has ceased to exist physically (or is irreversibly damaged with respect to its original state). And this destruction of the building could be partially an outcome of an insufficient awareness of its values or a failure to recognise its quality – in other words, the areas that should be coherently stressed by expert authorities.

Of course, the question is far more complicated and cannot be reduced to a simple equation of significant knowledge of architecture automatically equalling good reconstruction/restoration. Also playing a significant role is the economic aspect and social acceptance. The majority taste of society still opposes the demands of this architecture for

appropriate protection. Yet the current state is also the faulty of an unwillingness on part of the professional community, primarily in the area of heritage protection, to identify with the architecture of its own era. As such, personal or ideologically contingent antipathies make it impossible to view this architecture as the product of individual architectonic intentions, if nonetheless created in specific socio-political conditions. And even this historical era, in the end, deserves like any other its right to critical investigation and new interpretation.

In such a situation, the engaged public can become a significant actor assuming, at least in part, the role of a professional institution. Drawing upon the new knowledge acquired, in turn, it becomes better able to explain and defend the values of this architecture to society at large.

Process and Methods

The architecture created under the regime of state socialism in the period from the 1960s to the 1980s presents a diverse array of various approaches, alternately stressing structural elements, sculptural modelling of masses, work with details, new conceptions of spatial wholes, or intriguing material-aesthetic solutions. In certain cases, we encounter artworks not as a separate category applied to interiors or exteriors, but created in synthesis with the architecture.

However, this characterisation does not apply to the majority of the era’s built production. Hence, we included in the mapping process not only those works that could be assumed to have these mentioned qualities. The method of selection lay in highlighting several criteria, meaning that in our basic listing we included architecture that was not designed purely as a standardised object where we could note a deviation from the norm, but also architecture representing a specific typology of the given era that may have been widespread in the past, but now survives only in fragments. As such, the latter can be regarded as a characteristic representative of a certain stage of building production. Additionally, another role is given to the social importance of the building and the standing of the architect, in both national and local scales.⁴ As for typology, the buildings can have administrative, cultural, social or civic functions.

The process of mapping consist of the following phases:

**THE INFORMATION PANEL,
DRUŽBA CINEMA, 2020**

INFORMAČNÝ PANEL,
KINO DRUŽBA, 2020

Photo foto: Peter Beňo



1. Identification and selection of buildings.
2. Research in the literature and archives.
3. Examination in the terrain.
4. Documentation.
5. Analysis of materials.
6. Presentation of results.

The main outcome of the project is an online map in which the specific buildings are indicated along with basic factual data. An expansion of the findings is represented by an active website that will, over time, continue to acquire further material on the individual structures. Each structure is assigned its own page with information that can be divided into two categories.

The first category consists of information that could be assigned to the category of traditional architectural-historical research (authorship, dating, formal description of building, literature and sources).

The second category is closely linked with the long-term goals of IMA. It included monitoring of the building's current state, protection status, or ownership. Visitors to the website can find information on what is currently happening to each building: whether it is neglected, partially damaged by previous structural alterations, facing planned reconstruction, recently reconstructed, etc. Other information provided is the level of protection in the legislative sense.³ No less important is the stating of the object's owner. A range of actors with an interest in the reconstruction process can therefore have information about who owns the building or who administers it.

In the texts accompanying each building, our attention focuses primarily on formal analysis. Emphasis is placed on explaining the qualities of the architecture and the values of the elements that should be preserved. A certain amount of the text is also devoted to an explanation of the wider social context.

Communication

A clear problem for scholarship in Slovak society, in general, is the continually insufficient ability to communicate its findings to the general public. Even when the matters are ones of public interest, let alone financed from the public budget, the popularisation aspect has never been systematically developed in all fields of studies. As for architectural-historical knowledge, the research outcomes presented in standard forms – scholarly articles, collective studies, monographs, perhaps with the sole exception – never reach a wider group of recipients outside the immediate community. In recent years, though, certain breakthroughs from the research sphere into the media have occurred, e.g., the documentary popular-historical series IKONY on the second generation of Slovakia's first domestically trained architects⁶ or the cycle of discussion on Slovak history conducted in the public broadcasting media.⁷

In this area, the approach of IMA draws upon a strategy less common among academic professionals than among popularising associations or architecture enthusiasts. Such forms of presentation span the gamut from public walks and excursions through interventions in public space up to media presence. One of the first activities in this area was the plan to provide information about the Družba cinema,

a now-neglected building from the 1970s, which at the urging of the owner (the city of Košice) became the subject of architectural-historical investigation. The viewing of the building, with the aim of providing a verdict on its overall internal and external condition, was arranged as a joint excursion by experts, members of the engaged public, and part of the city's cultural community. In turn, the findings from this investigation were used as the basis for considering appropriate structural modifications and sensitive restoration.⁸ One major question remaining, though, is how to communicate this information outwards. Public mediation of the findings regarding the cinema's architecture, history, or social and cultural context was provided through an exterior panel placed in the cinema's pergola. This physical entry into the public space, moreover in close proximity to the building, became a way of involving a still wider public.⁹

Another form of presentation that IMA uses is the actual photographic documentation of buildings. Registration of the current state serves on one hand as a preservation method, yet equally forms an autonomous product with a unique aesthetic. Photographs, primarily focusing on individual building details, are presented in series via online social networks,¹⁰ offering a new, indeed fresh perspective of viewing architecture.

The Blurring of Borders between the Enthusiast and the Expert

The concept of the *architectural enthusiast*, originally taken from ethnographic investigations of humanistic geography¹¹ and used in recent years to define the mutual relationship of the lay and expert public outside of institutionalised networks to the protection of architectural heritage, might be used to gain a clearer understanding of the engaged role of IMA and its activities.

Interest in one's own city and the wider region, the built environment, a specific aesthetic, or even the social dimensions of architecture and urbanism – all these are motivations that bring people to the activities related to architecture and reacting to its changes. As the main driving force connecting this community and its actions, we could cite the quality of enthusiasm – here described as *an emotional affiliation that influences our passions, performances and actions in space*.¹² Manifestations of architectural enthusiasm can assume a variety of forms, from building photography

(capturing changes over time), urbex, visits to buildings or participating in/ organising guided tours up to the creation of internet fan pages and blogs, organising campaigns or even protests for building preservation.

Nor need it be merely a leisure activity or hobby – such activities could even become a productive force. Since it takes place in a professional, and moreover partially political, setting, it requires communication with public authorities, involvement in discussions around municipal administration, addressing the broad public, or even assuming a key role in discussions on building preservation and restoration among various involved actors. Architectural enthusiasts as such can be seen as part of the stakeholders (alongside building owners, local government, heritage authorities) in the process of deciding about buildings and their transformation.¹³

Emphasis on common action, commonly shared emotions, or relations to the object of interest among architectural enthusiasts is, however, not restricted to the category of enthusiasts-amateurs. Architects, city residents, designers, historians, or a variety of expert professionals can all become part of the engaged public. Emphasising civic participation, pointing out the importance of architecture as material culture, drawing attention to the past and social relations inscribed in the physical site, are genuine topics of interest across the academic disciplines.¹⁴

Additionally, architectural enthusiasm need not assume a position of uncritical support requiring strict conservation and opposing all changes; *rather, architectural enthusiasm mobilises people, emotions and knowledges that can drive the safeguarding and protection of architecture and design*.¹⁵ Similarly, it does not imply any relativising of the role of professional institutions, but more the supplementing of views from a different position.

The actions of architectural enthusiasts have a further civic dimension: motivating public activity, stimulating long-term participation, possibly even changing relationships between people and urban built environment as such.¹⁶

Conclusion

In formulating hypotheses and posing research questions, we always have to confront our own personal, cultural, or political preconceptions. The attractiveness of what we present in a certain moment in scholarly discourse naturally develops out of the social

situation in which we momentarily find ourselves. Hence it is understandable that mapping the architecture of postwar modernism in Košice has emerged out of specific realities and personal interest. Yet we cannot deny the existence of objective grounds on which our project is based. A critique of the sources preceding the awareness and overall use of the standard tools in the practice of art and architecture historians can be proof of this. Similarly, it is impossible not to acknowledge the social role and ambition of the project, which is linked with the goal of activating the public and drawing attention of municipal authorities to immediate questions affecting this architectural legacy. In the wider sense, it implies creating a presence in the field of mutually deciding on how our urban built environment appears and will appear.

While one part of the project might lie closer to the scholarly community, contributing to new knowledge and serving as a starting point for further research, the second focuses predominantly on the public, activists, or architectural enthusiasts who are not indifferent to this architecture's fate. It would, however, be an error to see these two parts as strictly separated territories. In the actual configuration of IMA, these two positions overlap and work in parallel. Connecting professionalism and personal engagement can help fill in blank spaces in architectural history in the region, while also achieving the preservation of this architectonic legacy with a stress on its architectural, aesthetic, and social aspects.

1 Of the extensive literature, note, e.g.: PRIATKOVÁ, Adriana and PÁSZTOR, Peter, 2012. *Oelschläger – Ůry*. Košice: Agentúra SÁŠA, 344 p. PRIATKOVÁ, Adriana, 2020. Košické medzivojnové vily a rodinné domy súkromní investorov. *Pamiatky a múzeá*. **69**(4), pp. 16 – 26.

2 SEKAN, Ján, 2019. Urbanistické koncepcie a územné plánovanie v Košiciach 20. storočia = Urbanistic Conceptions and Town Planning in 20-th Century Košice. Bratislava. Available at: <https://opac.crzp.sk/?fn=detailBiblio-Forme&sid=6F29251F586C1375F28B-Co6FCFAF&seo=CRZP-det ail-kniha>. PhD dissertation, Bratislava: Faculty of Architecture, Slovak Technical University. Project supervisor Peter Pásztor. PRIATKOVÁ, Adriana, SEKAN, Ján and TAMÁSKA, Máté, 2020. The Urban Planning of Košice and the Development of a 20th Century Avenue. *Architektúra e Urbanizmus*. **54**(1 – 2), pp. 70 – 87.

3 The project is supported from public funds of the FPU.

4 Similar categories are applied in the database Register of Modern Architecture by the Historical Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (HŮ SAV). MORAVČÍKOVÁ, Henrieta, SZALAY, Peter, ANDRÁŠIOVÁ, Katarína and BARTOŠOVÁ, Nina, 2013. Identita a diferenciacia: Monitorovanie a hodnotenie najvýznamnejších diel modernej architektúry na Slovensku. *Architektúra e Urbanizmus*. **47**(3 – 4), pp. 144 – 169.

5 With only one exception (the villa of the Mathé family with the studio of sculptor Ján Mathé), the buildings

on our list do not have protected status. A certain form of protection is extended to buildings situated within a heritage reserve. Currently, a subject of discussion is, at least on a purely formal level, to strengthen the importance of certain buildings through including them on the register of city landmarks. It is expected that this protection category will gain greater importance in the future, while not excluding them from national heritage status.

6 The expansion of individual parts of the series is formed by the interactive web document www.ikonny.tv.

7 Specifically, the television series SK Dejiny and the radio programs Dejiny.sk.

8 Even these activities, in coordination with the Office of the Chief Architect of Košice, made it possible that the currently prepared reconstruction will reflect the value of the architecture and the future use of the building will be for cultural purposes.

9 A similar intervention in the public space was recently performed by the German initiative Die Betonisten, which has created campaigns to bring attention to the history and quality of postwar architecture and planning in the city of Mainz. Here, they used the scaffolding erected around the prominent modernist structure of the Mainz city hall during renovations as a surface for hanging banners with information about the building's history, the architectural ideas of its creators, or photographs of the exterior and interior. This "banner exhibition" directly confronted passers-by with the qualities and exceptional features of the building.

Unser Mainzer Rathaus. *Bauen mit Plan: diearchitekten.org* [online] 2021 [Accessed 1. 12. 2021]. Available at: <https://www.diearchitekten.org/quick-links/newsroom/detail/unser-mainzer-rathaus/> It is also worth mentioning the activities of IMA in their project Iconic Ruins?. The part of the project was held in the former department store Prior. Using the building then undergoing reconstruction to hold exhibitions had the result of bringing public awareness to the building and increasing its visibility.

10 Specifically, its Instagram profile entitled @ima_archiv.

11 CRAGGS, Ruth, GEOGHEGAN, Hilary and NEATE, Hannah, 2013. Architectural Enthusiasm: Visiting Buildings with the Twentieth Century Society. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* [online]. **31**(5), pp. 879 – 896 [Accessed 2. 12. 2021]. Available at: [doi:10.1068/d14512](https://doi.org/10.1068/d14512) – CRAGGS, Ruth, Hilary GEOGHEGAN and Hannah NEATE. Managing enthusiasm: Between 'extremist' volunteers and 'rational' professional practices in architectural conservation. *Geoforum* [online]. 2016, **74**, pp. 1 – 8 [Accessed 2. 12. 2021]. Available at: [doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2016.05.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2016.05.004). CRAGGS, Ruth, GEOGHEGAN, Hilary and NEATE, Hannah, 2015. Civic Geographies of Architectural Enthusiasm. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* [online]. **14**(2), pp. 367 – 376 [Accessed 2. 12. 2021]. Available at: <https://www.acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/1165>

12 GEOGHEGAN, Hilary, 2013. Emotional Geographies of Enthusiasm: Belonging to the Telecommunications Heritage Group.

Area [online]. **45**(1), p. 45 [Accessed 4. 12. 2021]. Available at: [doi:10.1111/j.1475-4762.2012.01128.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.2012.01128.x)

13 Craggs, R., Geoghegan, H. and Neate, H., 2016, p. 2.

14 For Czech examples, it is worth noting the publication *Zbořeno* by Kateřina Bečková and the activities of the "Club for Old Prague", or the publication *Architektura na červeném seznamu* from a team from the Department of Architectural Theory and History at the Faculty of Architecture, CTU in Prague. BEČKOVÁ, Kateřina, 2021. *Zbořeno: zaniklé pražské stavby 1990 – 2020*. Praha: Paseka, 192 p. VORLÍK, Petr, POLÁČKOVÁ, Tereza and BRŮHOVÁ, Klára et al., 2020. *Architektura na červeném seznamu: normální je nebourat*. Praha: Česká technika – nakladatelství ČVUT, 288 p. *ICONIC RUINS? Postwar Socialist Architecture in the Visegrad Countries*. [online] 2019 [Accessed 4. 12. 2021]. Available at: http://www.shared-cities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Iconic-Ruins_catalog_screen.pdf

15 Craggs, R., Geoghegan, H. and Neate, H., 2016, p. 2.

16 Craggs, R., Geoghegan, H. and Neate, H., 2015, p. 370.