

SLOVAKIA

Bratislava – Protected Area of Central Urban District at Risk

The last decade of the Communist regime was characterised by large scale demolitions of historic urban structures and traditional compact blocks were replaced by architecturally inadequate buildings. While most of these territories do not have very high concentrations of cultural and historic values they are representative of many Slovak historic settlements. The best examples of these historic areas were declared “protected areas” by the monument law at the end of the 20th century, with the aim of preventing further uncontrolled decrease of their cultural and historic values.

The central urban district of Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, has been protected by law since 1992. In spite of this protection the district has continually been losing its historic and cultural values. The high numbers of already degraded original structures as

well as the fact that the protected area was too large were the reasons for reducing this area by half in 2005.

The decrease of cultural and historic values has been intensive and partly caused by the backwash of globalisation trends which have changed the originally provincial town of Bratislava into a European metropolis. The pressure from developers has been understood as part of the globalisation process. The loss of an emotional tie to the heritage of their forefathers is another problem. The absence of traditional continuity is reflected in the quality of contemporary architecture and the preference for modern rebuilding.

Despite these problems a fundamental part of the central urban district has been preserved by virtue of the compactness of the original urban fabric and its visual attractiveness.

In this context we would like to define the actual risk to the integrity and authenticity of the inner and outer zones of the historic town.

Inner zone of the town at risk:



Panorama of Bratislava's eastern territory



Square of St. Florian – loss of 19th-century character caused by inadequate new constructions

Inadequate modern buildings in the protected area of the central urban district



Large-scale demolition and erection of tall buildings on the site of an original compact settlement



- large-scale demolition of historic buildings, substituted by inappropriate new construction;
- out-of-scale new construction damaging the historic character of the original environment;
- loss of authenticity to buildings on the monument list.

Outer zone of the town at risk (eastern part of the territory):

- ad hoc construction of tower-blocks visible from the town's historic centre;
- increasing number of floors in original historic blocks.

In fact, these measures are referred to as “the principles of preservation, restoration and presentation of cultural-historic values” of this territory, and are carried out in collaboration with the chief architect of the city, the architects who elaborated the master plan and other specialists in the field of monument preservation.

As the prepared master plan has not been approved, it is very hard to control the developer's plans and intentions and the loss of historic and cultural values is continuing. The vague attitude of the municipality opens up possibilities for the realisation of unacceptable interventions into what remains of the historic urban structure.

Most other territories protected since the 1990s have had a similar destiny. If the long-prepared master plans are not approved soon and if adequate tools for monument preservation are not created, it is likely that this protected district, just as similar districts elsewhere in Slovakia, will definitely lose its authenticity and integrity.

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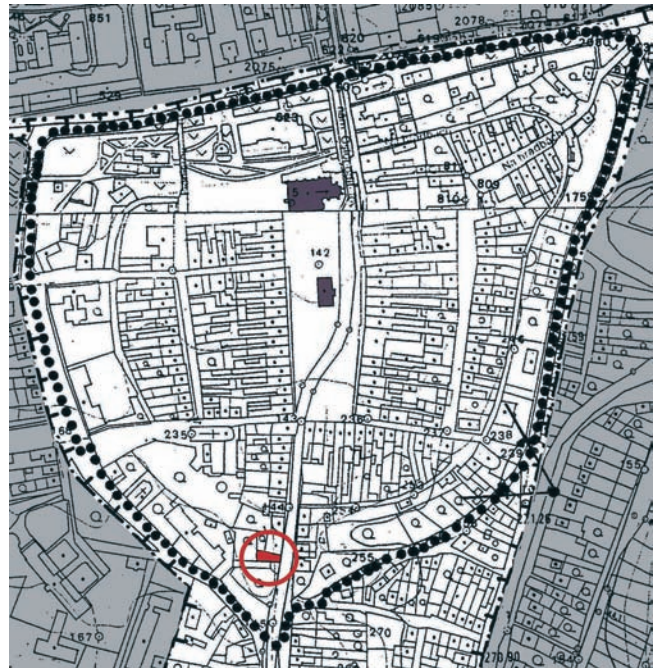
Risk from Development: Threats to monuments caused by ignoring valid legislation

While the previous part was devoted to the topic of threats to Slovakian protected areas in general, in this part we will focus on the threats to the cultural heritage by disrespect for the actual legislation. In our urban protected areas the key issue is not the inadequate legislation, but the ineffectual application of statutory regulations and the great pressure exerted by profit-oriented property developers. Disregarding the law is not unusual. There are many examples of illegal additions, extensions, rebuilding, etc. We will focus our attention on examples of conscious disregard of the law and the intention to legalise this activity after the fact.

Accompanying factors include the following:

- economic pressure to capitalise on valuable land;
- possibilities to realize large investments;
- desire to increase the social status;
- architects and investors who regard themselves as beyond the law;
- pressure to change the place's use and character; and
- changes of life style and production technologies leading to loss of details.

Many different reasons exist why monuments and their curtilage are threatened. Some of them were discussed in our previous reports. Here we are presenting two examples of monuments whose authenticity and integrity are currently under threat. We concentrate on these examples because they have been the subject of repeated efforts to avert the threats without success.



Map of Bardejov

1. House in Rhody Street 14, Bardejov

The first place is within a World Heritage site: the Bardejov Town Conservation Reserve. Originally a one-storey building, during the registration process the house was evaluated as a contributing element of the World Heritage site and was identified for retention. Only its maintenance was allowed. In spite of opposition from the Slovak Monument Office and the lack of building permission, an investor restored the ground floor three years ago and later added two floors. This illegal construction is situated near the castle moat and the arch bridge which are close to the southern gate and damages the authenticity of the fortified castle and of the town silhouette with its dominant landmark, the St. Giles Church, as viewed from the south? These building activities are incompatible both with the legislation and the conditions of protection of World Heritage sites. Other institutions as well drew attention to this incident, but without any positive result so far.

Bardejov, house in Rhody Street 14



2. House in Hlavna Street 107B and 109, Prešov

The problem concerns the re-building and vertical additions to remains of buildings in the designated ensemble of Prešov. In harmony with international principles of protection and re-vitalisation of historic towns (*The Washington Charter*) new housing has been allowed in this area from the beginning. A number of policies have been established to guide the construction of new buildings within the protected area. It has been determined that the form and scale of new buildings should be accommodated to older buildings within the same area. The latter usually have two floors, topped by cornice moulding ledges with pitched roofs. It is necessary to follow the height of the surrounding buildings and the measures of these houses. The original medieval parcelling of land should also be respected.

Although the originally approved project documentation contains these conditions, a house has been built which does not respect them. Its main facade was extended by one floor, the ground plan measure of the third floor was changed, no indication whatsoever of a roof plane was realised and a project documentation was not approved. This illegal building is in use today. The owner applied for retrospective approval, but the Slovak Monuments Office did not authorise it. A solution still has to be found.

In summary we can state that this house:

- is not in harmony with the approved project documentation;
- exceeds the bulk and scale of housing in the area;
- does not respect the accepted territorial plan;
- is not adapted to the historic environment; and
- disturbs the panorama of the west side of the dominant square inside the ensemble.

Map of Prešov



Prešov, house in Hlavna Street 107B and 109

There are other equally negative examples of illegal building and/or restoration activities. In our country there is no institution that conducts building inspections. Sometimes illegal houses can also be legalised subsequently. An owner can obtain a building approval belatedly either by “an amendment to the project documentation before the end of building works” or by the “subsequent legalisation of a building”. Fines today are rather low so that they can be allowed for in the project budget. Unfortunately, the demolition of such buildings after they have been completed is almost impossible.

No doubt, similar examples of illegal buildings can be found in many countries of the world. Maybe in comparison to the realisation of huge investments in skyscrapers, large shopping centres and technological parks, etc, our examples are negligible, but they illustrate the enormous threat to the monument values of historic territories. The first example, above, is part of a World Heritage site. If we accept such activities in an important protected area like this, then any protected building and/or monument in a historic context is threatened.

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