

HOW MUCH SENSITIVITY SHALL WE DEDICATE TO THE PAST?

Folk architecture monument was built on block of flats in the housing project Dargovských hrdinov, north of the historic center of Košice, the second largest city in Slovakia, about 440 kilometers east of Bratislava.

Folk Architecture Monument (FAM) is a monumental ready made installation – three original timbered barns transferred onto the roof of a typical socialistic 12-floor block of flats. FAM is a memorial of irreconcilable differences. On one hand, the timbered barns can be perceived as a symbol of our lost innocence, on the other hand, the housing projects and the blocks of flats are homes built on ideology we would rather forget. FAM is inaccessible to visitors; it is neither a place for laying garlands nor for collective remembering. FAM is addressing residents of the housing project, they see it through the window of their apartments, watch it while driving their car or when walking by.

If the nature of a memorial is to be a place where society is symbolically coping with its traumas, then FAM could be perceived as a classical monument. Nevertheless, its origin is enrooted in social agreement and respect for democratic processes. Neither the author nor the city of Košice have chosen the site for the monument, it was offered by the residents of the panel house themselves in a reaction to an open call.

FAM had the ambition to become a permanent monument, however, this permanency was supposed to be regularly verified by the vote of the residents of the house. Original two-year rental contract (2013-2015) approved by 2/3 majority of the residents can only be prolonged by the same majority. Through the FAM, the ordinary housing project of Furča gained a powerful mean of identification, the city of Košice a new dominant.

FAM is a statement of a generation born or growing up after the totalitarian era. For them, prefabricated buildings are not a repulsive rabbit hutch (as called by Václav Havel) but the real “birth house” that bears the status of tradition just as much as traditional architecture.

In nearly three years of its existence, the project attracted considerable media attention and broad societal interest. Many people feel proud of FAM being build in Slovakia, and appreciate it as one of the few contributions that can resonate abroad. FAM opened the issue of ownership and nature of public space.

In November 2012, the project gained 36 positive votes from all 48 to rent the roof for the FAM. In July 2015, the vote on a 10 year extension of the lease took place and the project has not gained the necessary 2/3 majority of votes (32). The author has thus failed to prolong the lease. The project will be deinstalled by spring 2016, and is currently getting ready for dismantling. The most common reason for voting against the prolongation was mockery coming from surrounding neighbourhood.

During the vote which was made public, several active groups of people came to being that tried to use their contacts and persuade owners to vote for the preservation of FAM. The situation created an obvious conflict between public and private interest – shall the FAM be retained as a positive contribution to current Europe, or is this decision solely up to the residents, since they are the ones to decide rooftop what to have above their heads?

The city of Košice, realizing the significant media value of the artwork actively entered the dispute and tried to contribute to its preservation. In November 2015, artist Tomáš Makara filed an application to register FAM into the list of cultural heritage sites. The respective authorities based in Bratislava decided to reject the application in January 2016 by claiming, that “wooden barns situated on the rooftop of a block of flats - not even with its inhabitants - do not form any heritage value.”

90 percent of the area of Košice consists of blocks of flats. More than 55 percent of Slovakia’s population live in blocks of flats. Author of the project went bankrupt and currently takes a consumer loan to pay the debts.

