

DIFFICULTIES IN THE PROCESS OF RESTORATION OF CULTURAL MONUMENTS ON THE EXAMPLES IN SUBOTICA

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Summary: The aim of the study presented in this article is to detect problems in the process of restoration of cultural monuments in present day Serbia, with special emphasis on the situation in Subotica. Although architectural heritage represents an important element of identity and local culture, it does not have priority in evaluation of people's needs in Serbia. The situation is especially dire for the cultural monuments erected at the turn of the 19th to 20th century. Their significance often remains unrecognized, as they are not deemed to be "old" enough, or treated as valuable architectural heritage. The works performed on them fail to comply with the techniques and crafting skills originally used in constructing these buildings, including instead the use of contemporary materials and techniques. There are number of reasons for this failure and it will be discussed in the paper.

Key words: cultural heritage, restoration, preservation, architecture, Subotica

1. INTRODUCTION

Serbia of today is subject to transition from socialist self-government towards democratic market capitalism, which implies implementation of a new social and economic system, by taking the ready-made model developed in the European Union. The final aim of the transition process is the establishment of democratic society and market economy within the European Union, yet Serbia has certain specific traits and faces some distinct inhibiting factors when compared to other transitional countries [1].

In the course of the 20th century, Serbia, sans Vojvodina, changed three different political models: feudal, capitalist and socialist, while today it is characterized by proto-democracy, with the institutions of representative democracy, civil society and market economy being only rudimentarily developed. Simultaneously, Serbia changed a number of different states, participated in two Balkan wars and two world wars, and finally three civil wars in the final decade of the 20th century, with the process of transition at the time already been initiated.

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In such dynamic social circumstances, in the midst of political and economic changes, Serbian society has never managed to completely establish democratic institutions, rule of law and free market. Results of the two decades long transition in Serbia are slow and highly complicated reorganization of state administration, corruption, exaggerated influence of political parties on decision-making on all levels, declarative commitment to decentralization and balanced development, as well as bureaucratic making of strategic decisions and adoption of strategic documents in order to conform to the EU [2]. In this context, response to the real problems faced by cities have been postponed until virtually unsolvable problems for this generation of architecture practitioners have been created, this including all fields, from infrastructure, environment, housing and economy, down to quality of life, urban living culture, and protection of architectural heritage. The old institutions have crumbled, while the new ones are faltering in the territory bounded by the myriad of new laws.

2. SITUATION CONCERNING RESTORATION OF THE BUILDING HERITAGE IN SERBIA

The efforts to monitor all the changes that have been taking place in Serbia in recent years, as well as to make population and institution adjust to these changes, failed to produce any significant results. It would be unrealistic to expect that situation would be any different in the field of protection and revitalization of architectural heritage. Providing that economic problems and gap between the rich and the poor are ever increasing, while social and health care become less and less accessible, cultural monuments remain side-lined, as their protection is still carried out under the Law on Protection of Cultural Monuments from the Milosevic era (1994)². The most threatened are the monuments from the 19th century, as well as those from the 20th century. They are often subject to incompetent interventions thus being permanently damaged.

For each intervention executed on a cultural monument dating from the 19th or the 20th century, a Statement of Conservation Conditions for undertaking of technical protection measures is issued by the competent Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, while the professionals employed by the institute usually make necessary plans for restoration and revitalization of the protected buildings. However, the protected buildings are made equal to other buildings in terms of carrying out any kind of work based on the Law on Public Procurement.³ Contractors to carry out the works on the buildings that represent protected cultural monuments are selected by the procedure of public tendering and out of at least three received bids, as is the case with any other building.

In application of materials, another important factor is the social changes in Serbia, which result in transition. Old socialist companies have gone, they were either restructured or closed, and new products and materials, that professionals are unfamiliar with, have entered Serbian market. In the ever increasing variety of new materials, where all the knowledge pertaining to them is based on the promo material of the manufacturers, cultural monuments become sites of experimenting, where different materials are tried out

² Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia no. 71/94.

³ Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia no. 124/2012.

in the course of restoration in order to find out which of them would prove to be the best for the purpose.

The changes taking place in Serbia have had a serious impact on educational institutions which adjust to them slowly and with effort. These institutions are left by the young people unprepared for practical work, trained in obsolete and presently inapplicable work techniques. What is also evident is a great deficit of specialized literature which is rarely published in Serbian language because the demand is too limited to make the opportunity of publishing such literature attractive to the Serbian publishers. Scientific research is rarely financed, if at all. Research and testing of the protected buildings are often carried out only when their restoration has begun. Craftsmen, contractors, even conservators are being trained along the way, by experimenting with work methods and materials.

The process of restoration or conservation then becomes quite challenging for the conservator supervising the work, who is often insufficiently qualified for the task him/herself. There are no additional conditions when employing architects or construction engineers by the institutions protecting architectural heritage, except for their university degree. However, the faculties of architecture, and especially those of civil engineering, often fail to provide courses that deal with the protection of architectural heritage. Future conservators are trained in restoration and conservation tasks during their work in the institutions of protection, and their insufficient initial knowledge, as well as their unwillingness to further expand their expertise, frequently present the main reason that lead to cultural monuments not being restored or conserved, but rather reconstructed, redesigned, upgraded, demolished and then rebuilt [3], or demolished at their original location only for their replicas to be built elsewhere by using contemporary materials.

3. TREATMENT OF THE BUILDING HERITAGE IN SUBOTICA

In Subotica, tenders for the performance of works on the cultural monuments owned by the state or the city, were in the past several years invited by the Subotica Land Development Agency. In the course of this process, between the making of statement of conservatory conditions and performance of the works, misunderstandings abound and they often result in devastation of the monuments. In the process of submitting bids and selecting an adequate contractor, statement of conservatory conditions is little respected, if at all. The City Land Development Agency did not have any personnel qualified for the protection of cultural monuments, and the decisions on engaging contractors were usually made based on the lowest price offered, rather than the quality of the future work, while in many cases the representatives of the protection institutions were not consulted during the process. In the majority of cases the construction firms do not have the workers specialized and trained for the performance of specific works necessary in reconstructing cultural monuments, thus resorting to the modes of work that imitate the required skills, but produce results of much inferior quality.

This implies application of cheaper materials of inferior quality, using machines to make the elements that were originally handmade by craftsmen, etc. This was the case with restoring the Female Strand on the Lake of Palić, which was finalized in 2013 (Figure 1.).⁴

⁴ Female Strand is a part of the complex of spa buildings constructed on the shore of the Lake Palić near Subotica between 1908 and 1912, and designed by Marcell Komor and Jakab Dezső. [5].

The Female Strand is an exquisite example of wooden architecture located on water, ornamented with woodcarvings in the style of Hungarian secession. When this building was restored, the old and damaged pieces of handmade woodwork were replaced with machine made carvings on new wooden elements. The colour applied on the building of Female Strand is a product of modern technology, so its shade does not match the original nuance in the least. Even the different part of the building are painted with different nuance of colour, which can be seen on the site. Each new restoration on the building of Female Strand, but also on many other buildings, presents ever more dramatic departure from the original, due to the application of recent materials and techniques.



Figure 1. Female Strand at the lake Palić

Another limiting aspect when it comes to protection of cultural monuments, stemming from the Law on Public Procurement, pertains to additional works. In case that in the course of the restoration works it has been established that some part of the building was in a poorer condition than it had been estimated by the original analysis, additional works need to be performed in order to repair subsequently detected damage. The procedure for awarding additional funds is extremely complicated and additional finances often fail to be approved, so the contractors are forced to finish the work inadequately.

The major problem in restoration and revitalization of cultural monuments is the lack of financial resources, so the works on cultural monuments are performed partially, and after the first round of works is finished, a number of seasons often pass before the next round is started. In the meantime, even those parts of buildings that have already been restored, or conserved, begin to decay. In recent years, this practice of partial restoration has taken its toll on a number of buildings [4]. When conservation work is partially undertaken, complete administrative procedure of issuing statement of conservation conditions, project development, selection of contractors, etc. is performed separately for each part of the building that shall be worked on, so this highly complicated procedure is implemented a number of times for the very same building, which makes the process of restoration and

conservation more expensive and presents the burden for already insufficient budget. Additionally inhibiting factors include different sources of funding and applications for finances with different funds. Funds that would finance the complete restoration of a building are virtually non-existent, but a small portion of the required finances is generally received, and these resources are often insufficient even for the partial works. It is not practical to restore the façade of a building in case the roof is leaking, so many of the works that need to be performed on the listed buildings cannot be performed separately because they are mutually conditioned, so these partial restorations often present only a temporary solution, and should the next round of works begin this often leads to devastation and rework of the things that have already been done.

When it comes to the building of the Raichl Palace⁵ the works performed in the last decade include restoration of the front façade, yard façade, roof and entrance hallway, so each of these procedures included issuance of a separate statement of conservation conditions, separate project design, as well as separate tendering procedure [4]. It is not unusual in those tendering procedures for different contractors to be selected for a single building. In the conditions of economic crisis, competition for an engagement is quite strong and bidders tend to cut down the prices of work and material, eventually influencing the very quality of conservation and restoration works. It thus happens that one façade of a building is restored by one contractor, the other façade by another contractor, and the roof by the third contractor. The quality of works thus becomes uneven, and so it happened that the façade restoration of the Raichl Palace was of a higher quality, while the roof was much worse, which resulted in leakage not much after the restoration (Figure 2.).



Figure 2. Raichl palace – results of water leakage on the ceiling

Insufficient funds for comprehensive restoration of monuments result in partial restorations, or performance of only the most urgent of works which would postpone rapid deterioration of the monuments. Restoration of the Subotica Synagogue, which was built in 1902 and represents a highly important example of Hungarian secession's architecture, is being carried out for 40 years now [7]. In the process, the works have started and stopped on and off, incompletely repaired sections dilapidated once more, only to be

⁵ The Raichl Palace is the finest example of privately owned palace built in the style of Hungarian secession in the region. The palace was designed by its owner, the architect Ferenc Raichl, and it was erected in 1904. [6]

repeatedly restored and thus, with the best intention in mind for the Synagogue to be preserved, the building is being unintentionally devastated [8].



Figure 3. Subotica synagogue

Since harmonization of the standards with the EU is still incomplete, materials for restorations are sometimes chosen in accordance with the domestic, and sometimes in accordance with the EU standards. The results of restoring works are not consistent. In some cases the damage on the restored buildings becomes evident immediately after the first winter has passed, as was the case with the Manojlović Palace located on Korzo Street no. 8 (Figure 4.), while elsewhere buildings resist the weather, like the palace of the former Mayor of Subotica, Lazar Mamužić, located in the Raichl Park no. 7.⁶



Figure 4. Damages on the pillars of Manojlović house restored in 2007

The situation is somewhat different with the privately owned cultural monuments. Here the restoration mainly depends on the owner's personal interest. If the owner for some reason has interest to preserve the building, and has sufficient financial means, the

⁶ The palace was designed by architect Titus Mačković, and was built in 1891 in the neo-renaissance style. [9, p.p. 94 – 99]

restoration will certainly be carried out adequately. However, there are also some examples where conservators have made certain flaws, or omissions, as was the case with the building in the Matthias Corvinus Street no. 10⁷ where a mistake was made while reconstructing ornaments on the building's façade. Instead of ceramics flowers which could have been ordered from and made in the "Zsolnay" factory in Pecs after the preserved originals, plaster flowers were placed, painted in water colour and coted by paper glue, so the colour washed off during their very first winter.

In 2007, the façade was restored on the Palace of the former Town's Mayor Lazar Mamužić located in the Raichl Park no. 7. Restoration of the façade was carried out by the present owners of the palace and this restoration was carried out to high quality standards with no damage being detected since. The works on the Lončarević Palace located on the Republic Square no. 10, were also carried out well, and financed by a private investor. In the majority of cases, however, owners lack sufficient funding to carry out restoration works in a way which would preserve the values of the protected buildings, so the scheme is devised by investor, contractor and conservator to restore the building in a simplest and cheapest way. This is also sometimes done without the knowledge of a conservator, or prior approval of institution of protection.

4. CONCLUSION

Therefore, the results of works on cultural monuments are of uneven quality. It is subsequently very hard to identify the real reason for the poor quality of works, or the person responsible for the damage done. The fact is, however, that quite often almost immediately after the completion of works, damages becomes evident on the restored buildings, testifying of inadequately carried out procedure, as is the case with the majority of the façades restored in the last ten years. On the other hand, if so happens that the construction firm has qualified workers, that the conservator's supervision is adequate and that the investor for some reason has interest to preserve the building, then the results of the works on the buildings belonging to architectural heritage turn out to be of good quality. Such inconsistent attitude towards cultural monuments, depending on the circumstances, participants in the works, degree of professionalism and expertise of the involved individuals and interest of the investors, makes it impossible to make a general conclusion on the basic causes of the evident problems. Each building, as well as the procedures performed on it, constitutes an individual case, often quite dissimilar from the next one. However, one of the significant causes is insufficient knowledge on all levels, from the highest instance authorities which make political decisions pertaining to cultural monuments, professionals which participate in the process of their protection, all the way to the workers carrying out the works on the protected buildings.

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⁷ The palace originally owned by Sonnenberg Salamon, today in the Matthias Corvinus Street no. 10, was designed by Strassburger Isidor and Gombos Lajos in 1910. [9, p.p. 120 – 123]

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ТЕШКОЋЕ У ПРОЦЕСУ РЕСТАУРАЦИЈЕ СПОМЕНИКА КУЛТУРЕ НА ПРИМЕРИМА У СУБОТИЦИ

Резиме: Циљ истраживања приказаног у овом раду је да се наведу проблеми у процесу рестаурације споменика културе у Србији, са посебним освртом на ситуацију у Суботици. Градитељско наслеђе као значајан елемент идентитета и локалне културе нема примарно место у процесу вредновања људских потреба у Србији. Ситуација је посебно тешка у случају споменика културе који су изграђени на прекретници XIX-тог у XX-ти век. Њихов значај често остаје непризнат, не сматрају се довољно “старим”, нити су третирани као вредно архитектонско наслеђе. Радови који се изводе на њима не поштују оригиналне технике рада и занатске вештине који су примењене при изградњи ових објеката, већ се употребљавају савремени материјали и технике рада. Постоји више разлога за ове недостатке о којима ће се расправљати у овом раду.

Кључне речи: споменици културе, рестаурација, очување, архитектура, Суботица