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Launching Colloquy of

« Heritage and Beyond »

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society (Faro Convention)

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*Public participation in cultural heritage management:
contribution towards the participatory democracy development
(with examples from Slovakia)*

*(dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution in
Czechoslovakia and the role of volunteers in it)*

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Introduction - basic outcome:

Let me start with one general statement: *it is practically impossible to save cultural heritage without wide public participation.*

The fundamental question, relevant in the frame of this colloquy, seems to be:

How to distribute responsibility among the governmental authorities, self-governments, private sector (business, investors, developers) and the public (NGOs, civic initiatives, and public at large) in favour of heritage?

Voluntary activities in the field of the cultural heritage conservation have existed in the world for several decades. Also in Slovakia as well as in whole Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) they played an important role even many years before system changes in 1989. They gained a more systematic and organised character during about last 35 years, first of all in connection with several categories of endangered historical sites and/or areas.

Different kinds of heritage which has been popular among volunteers

- Historical railways (e.g. Crmel, Vyčylovka, Cierny Balog...).
- Folk technical installations, like water mills (e.g. Kvacianska dolina, Kolarovo...).
- Other folk historical monuments, e.g. wooden houses/technical structures (Vlkolinec (UNESCO heritage), Podsip, Velke Borove, Kokavka, Osturna, Zahorska Bystrica, and many others...).
- Important technical monuments in cities and towns (in Bratislava e.g. historical railway stations (today museums), historical power station in Poprad (gallery), old railway station near Žilina (gallery, theatre),
- Mobile technical monuments (mostly old locomotives and cars),
- Cultural heritage plus relevant infrastructure, such as cultural or natural-cultural-historical landscape structures (Horna Mlynska dolina near Bratislava, Open Air Technical Museum in Bratislava, old mining region Banska Stiavnica and the surrounding landscape (UNESCO heritage), Oblazy in Kvacany valley, complex of water mills in Kolarovo, Open Air Museum in Cierny Balog and Vydrovo valley...).
- Castles/ruins reconstruction/conservation (Spissky hrad (UNESCO heritage), Trencin, etc.).

- Old churches, chapels, monasteries, cemeteries and other (mostly religious) monuments conservation (Marianka, Sv. Katarinka, Bratislava, Banska Stiavnica).
- Historical parks/gardens protection (e.g. Horsky park in Bratislava).
- Pre-historical and/or historical archaeological sites and/or different types of historical landscape structures as a whole (mountain agricultural landscapes, old vineyards, mining regions, historical water management landscape systems, historical cities/villages, etc.) (Huba et al. 1988).

Folklore (folk songs, dances, costumes, crafts, etc.) represented a special and large field of heritage addressing the volunteers, too

Under the communist regime in the CEE region, when basic rights and freedoms were repressed, people practically could not travel abroad and many of them could not carry out their professions or realise their interests/hobbies. At the time when apathy and even resignation were the typical "nation illnesses", the voluntary activities in the field of reconstruction, conservation and/or care for historical heritage in CEE countries played an important role. It provided an opportunity for self-realisation and overcoming of passiveness. Somebody called it "The University of Patriotism" – but it means a positively oriented patriotism, which was immune against any nationalism or other forms of intolerance. Other observers, e.g. social scientists, appreciated these activities as the way to combat social pathology and overall nihilism among young people. Indeed, these value-oriented activities served as a medicine not only against the destruction of landscape values, but also against the atmosphere of passivity and resignation (more see Huba, In: Balteanu et al. 2007).

Between past and present

Activities in this field in 1980-ties in Slovakia had not only the pragmatic, but also symbolic character and played an important role in the preparation process of the Velvet Revolution. They contributed not only to the enlargement and strengthening of the voluntary conservationists' movement, but also to the horizontal networking of different initiatives and step by step to the origin of the civic society in Slovakia.

Several thousands of participants were involved in these activities for many years.

To organise such kind of activities, which require combination of the expert approach and enthusiasm of volunteers is a big logistic problem and a good training of organisational skills.

Another challenge is that such kind of activities are not ad hoc actions, but require a long – term strategy and systemic approach. Usually it does not costs take days or weeks, but years or even decades.

But the systemic commitment also requires fight for the protection e.g. of historical city/town parts or industrial monuments/areas at the territory of Bratislava and other Slovak cities and towns which are under the pressure of dynamic development of new functions and constructions. It is necessary to monitor systematically the state and

changes of territorial plans, interests of developers, to participate in the Environmental Impact Assessment processes, etc.

Contemporary problems

Today, there are less administrative barriers as well as more potential financial sources for the public voluntary initiative in comparison to the situation before November 1989. But in reality, it seems that (from time to time) disadvantages use to be even more important than advantages.

They include e.g.:

The "lack of time" phenomenon.

Lack of both the governmental and private financial support and sponsorship.

Competition of other activities at home and abroad.

Increasing importance of the private ownership.

Rapid increase of the material, energy, transport and other cost.

All these reasons are compelling us to re-define the situation of voluntarism in the field of the cultural heritage protection.

Potential outcomes

I see the outcome in several directions, among other:

Strengthening of capacities of all subjects, which are responsible for the cultural heritage (from ministries, through professional institutions, to self-governments and NGOs)

Avoiding barriers to the democratic involvement in this field.

Improvement of PR activities towards the public (education and awareness improvement).

Looking for excellent examples of recovery and integration of historical sites/areas and other cultural heritage into contemporary life which exist in the world.

Better utilisation of financial resources (including the EU and international funds).

Support and introduction of Win-Win strategies (e.g. culture+hobby+tourism+bussines).

Partner co-operation of different social sectors and/or stakeholders (government, self-government, business, NGOs, experts, etc.).

International partnerships and co-operation (e.g. via networks in the frame of the European Landscape Convention).

Moral satisfaction, e.g. via diplomas, awards, etc.

The most important requirement: strictly oppose all kinds of the EU/EC financial and other support to the destruction of cultural heritage in new member states.

To introduce something like the **Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment**.

Conclusions

Continuation in voluntary (NGO) citizens' activities in the field of activities in favour of the natural and cultural heritage is an important contribution to the **shared responsibility, partnership and participation** and represents a challenge not only for conservation, revitalisation and meaningful, sensitive and sustainable utilisation of our traditions, monuments and landscapes, but also for the revitalisation of our mentality, spirituality and positive patriotism.

Literature

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