

WORKSHOP BRIEF by Martin Uhrík

CONTEXT:

The Slovak Republic is one of the fastest growing economies of the world with growth around 8% HDP annually. Another important fact is the ongoing transformation from a socialist state owned economy to one of private property and entrepreneurial activity. A lot of money, many opportunities and considerable corruption means that the current climate is something like a Wild West or better yet a Wild East. Despite this there is still some respect for public opinion.

The most important ongoing discussions of Kosice' citizens, is the hot ecological problem of opencast uranium mining in the recreation area of Jahodna very close to city center.

Another long-term problem in Kosice is the gipsy ghetto Lunik IX. This is a sensitive topic because of human rights issues, racism, EU policy, and lots of other factors, that seems to be difficult to resolve.

SITE:

The proposed site is situated on Kosice's Main Street, which is the historical center of the city. The exact location overlaps with an underground archeological complex that is viewed as one of the important attractions of the city, but this has little impact on its surroundings and offers little visual stimulus. This significant place on the Main Street is currently without an activating programme. However, the space is used by skateboarders and during the summer the entrance to the underground archaeological site is used as a stage for small events. One of the aims of the workshop is to better understand the significance of this site and to speculate on its potential use.

FOCUS:

The Speakers Corner is seen as a place of direct democracy - something completely abandoned and prohibited during socialism. Because of this there is no understanding of what Speakers Corner could be. Frequently examples of direct democracy like Speakers Corner have been misinterpreted as acts of screaming out loud. There has been little awareness that discussion and a sympathy for different ideas is part of a democratic culture. While these ideas are probably part of a global sensibility, here they have been suppressed by 50 years of brainwashing.

The main goal of the workshop is create a spatial definition for a Speakers Corner inside the public space of Kosice's Main street. This is a cross disciplinary task, some-

where between architecture-art-communication. Workshop participants will have to consider what activities will take place inside the zone of the Speakers Corner, and how these activities will find an audience. From this point of view the workshop should give recommendations for how the space should be used.

Questions:

Is there a need? A problem?

What is the need?

How can it be addressed (audience/participation) Who is it for?

Platform, monument, memorial?

How can we avoid making a memorial?

Space for action or space for reflection/thinking?

Promoting social networks not expression most effective form democracy?

Why Speakers Corner? Why not listeners Corner? Action Corner etc...

And Why Corner? Why not Centre?

Can it solve the problem?

How do we spatialise social interaction?

You can find more information on history, monuments, etc. of Kosice here

<http://kosice.d42.sk/index.html>

Discussions about community concerns regarding ecological problems:

<http://www.slovakspectator.sk/clanok.asp?cl=22551>

Discussions about the gypsy community of Lunik IX:

http://www.osce.org/documents/hcnm/2000/03/241_en.pdf search for

Lunik

Video footage of London's Speakers corner:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDKaQDKOiR0>