

EHHF- Vienna-Presentation

When Barack Obama held his inauguration speech this January he mentioned the historic heritage of the US not less than 16 times, from the founding fathers to the fallen heroes of the Second World War. This would never happen in Austria. An Austrian politician in a similar situation would avoid speaking much about the past, he might mention the so called “Wiederaufbaugeneration”, the generation that built up Austria after 1945, this, together with the Austrian State Treaty in 1955, being the only non-controversial historical achievement. So there is not much consensus about history in Austria and that also affects our relationship to our heritage.

Lets have a short look at Austrian History since 1945, which, compared to Slovak history proceeded in a rather smooth way. After 10 years of occupation the four allied nations left and Austria got independent again. “Österreich ist frei”. Just one year later oppressions of the Hungarian Revolution, brought about 200 000 refugees to Austria and we were reminded how *precarious* Austria’s position so close to the Iron Curtain was, and how lucky we had been, having seized the situation of 1955 when a small window of opportunity had opened. The same shock happened again in August 1968, when the Soviet Union and its allies occupied the CSSR. So for a very long time the East of Austria was locked in a kind of dead end street with very limited economic development. This changed in 1989 when the Iron Curtain fell and the progress of normalisation was supported by Austria’s accession to the EU (then the EC) in 1995, followed by Slovakia and Hungary in 2004.

This continuity of Austrian history also had an impact on preservation policy. Our constitution dates back to 1920 and our preservation law to 1923. It was the protection act of a poor and weak state which paid a lot of respect to private ownership. Already the question whether a building is a monument worth to be protected can become the matter of legal procedure. Nowadays this law is executed by the Bundesdenkmalamt (Federal Office for the Protection of Monuments) an office subordinated to the Ministry for education, arts and culture. Since 1923 there have been some amendments to that protection act but basically it stayed the same. It primarily aims at protecting single monuments, as only Denkmalschutz (protection of monuments) is a competence of the federal state while the provinces assume the responsibility for the preservation of townscapes and landscapes. It is interesting to note that in 1934 the year of the Austrian Civil War, the Bundesdenkmalamt (Federal Office for the Protection of Monuments) was abolished and the law was executed by a small department of

the Ministry itself. Even if we don't like to remember/be reminded, it is a historical fact that preservation of monuments was a big issue in the Third Reich. In the first years after the occupation hundreds of buildings were protected/listed as national/historic monuments//declared a historic monument (and the owners did not dare to object). After the Nazis opened bomb-war by destroying Coventry in 1940 they desperately tried to protect their own artworks and monuments from destruction. A very efficient organisation was put up to save art-objects. This well established organisation of monument protection – which also comprised a specialised restoration workshop – was converted into the “revitalized” Bundesdenkmalamt” (Federal Office for the Protection of Monuments) when the old administrative-system was put into force again after the war. And this organisation proved to be quite useful in the years after 1945 when so many demolished monuments had to be restored.

But lets go back to Austria's approach to build up a relationship between Austrian citizens and their monuments. Still the most accepted monuments are the ecclesiastic buildings of the Roman Catholic Church. More than 15 000 such objects are registered, ... percent of our money and a big part of our efforts are absorbed by that category. Many of those buildings are full of precious artworks that need a lot of care. The Roman Catholic Church, whose subsidies derive from a tax every member of the church has to pay, is spending a huge part of its income on maintenance. This might change in the future because the church constantly loses members and thus income. The church has not given up any of these buildings yet but it is quite probable that things will change within one or two generations (Ziffern !!!)

What about the legacy of feudal times ? As you know the Habsburgs had to leave the country in 1918 when the First Republic was established. And yet they are still present somehow. They are part of Austria's marketing concept. You have seen Schloss Hof yesterday and you will see Schönbrunn today. You will realize that this cult of the Habsburgs is part of the tourist industry and has nothing to do with the ideology of the people itself. Quite the contrary, we have the feeling the more this kind of nostalgic myth is used to attract tourists the more it alienates the Austrians from that past. People get the feeling that these monuments are not part of their own heritage but of the tourist industry. It might be something different in Hungary.....

There are also mixed feelings about the heritage of the First Republic and its big social achievements. Even if the social housing projects of Red Vienna (Vienna's nickname under socialist majority) from the 1920s are less often visited by tourists than the social housing projects designed by Friedensreich Hundertwasser, the huge blocks like the Karl Marx-Hof are well known as a flagship of Viennese modern architecture and also of modern social developments. Yet it is also still remembered as a symbol of the Civil War of 1934 when the brand new building was conquered by the military.

Looking at Austria today you will find very few significant monuments reminding of the destructions of WWII. Most of the demolished historic buildings were reconstructed, at least their exteriors.. The reconstruction of historic buildings was no issue then. Maybe we should be grateful, that in the years after the war the typically German expression "Vollendungsverbot" (ban to complete) was not yet used. And maybe we should also somehow be grateful to have at least in Vienna the 6 huge flak towers which proved to be indestructible and which remind us of the horrors of war. Nevertheless there are fierce discussions if they should remain monuments of that kind or fulfill other functions.

After the Period of the "Wiederaufbau" (reconstruction) which was finished in the 1950s there was the new tendency to reshape old sites to adapt them to modern traffic. There has been some success in saving some of the most picturesque townscapes from brutal street projects, but one has to admit that our law was not strong enough to meet these new threats. While in communist Czechoslovakia, it was quite easy to protect whole townships, that was not possible in Austria, where not only the right of the owner had to be respected but also the demand of the federal provinces, that claimed that the protection of sites was their responsibility. But it wasn't until the 1970s that some provinces passed laws to protect a selected number of towns. Such special laws were made for cities like Vienna, Graz, Salzburg or Innsbruck.

I already mentioned that economic development slowed down in that areas in the East which were in direct proximity to the Iron Curtain. And there is still a number of important palaces which have not yet recovered from the demolition and lootings of the Second World War. But the number of these threatened buildings is now decreasing, and that is to some extent due to the political changes of 1989. Schloss Hof where we were yesterday is a good example for that development. Whereas a first rather superficial restoration already took place in 1986

,the grand-scale projects of the restoration of the manor-house and the reconstruction of the baroque garden-terraces would not have started yet, if we still had that dead-end situation of pre-1989.