

Possibilities of Rural Settlements Restoration in the Programme of the Village Renewal in Slovakia

Anna Kršáková

Możliwości
rewitalizacji
wiejskich osiedli
w ramach
programu odnowy
wsi w Słowacji

The Programme of the Village Renewal (PoVR) is a well – known, popular and successful tool of rural development in European countries (mainly in Austria, Bavaria, Ireland, Netherlands, later in Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic) and since 1998 we have tried to achieve such a standard also in Slovakia. The PoVR in Slovakia is based on the principles of spiritual and physical (natural or artificial) environment renewal. The basic starting-point of this Programme is an increased human activity – on individual or communal level.

The Ministry of Environment of Slovakia has delegated the Slovak Environmental Agency (SEA) with the organisation and expert guarantee of PoVR. On the central level the SEA covers publicity, edification, education, international co-operation, executes methodological documents, leads the Secretariat of Interdepartmental Commission of PoVR. SEA and its offices provide consulting, monitoring of grants, publicity of positive and exemplary projects and realisations.

The main objective of the Programme of the Village Renewal is to retain life in the village, to increase its standard, along with the preservation of its peculiarity and identity. Partial objectives concern socioeconomic, building – technical, cultural – historical and ecological – environmental issues. In the field of physical environment the Programme is especially aimed at its renewal – at planning – architectural solutions with the

primary respect to reconstruction of neglected housing fund and complex solution of public spaces, followed by building of social, technical and ecological infrastructure with the emphasis on ways and technologies suitable for rural architecture.

Participation of village citizens in the process of PoVR targets implementation is an important part of PoVR. Only a few citizens are able to perceive the phenomenon called “genius loci” – presented by the placement of village in the landscape, by the housing structure, by architectural character of buildings, by composition of settlement verdure and also by small architecture which fills up the overall image. A part of “genius loci” are also human relationships which often result from the original way of life, customs, folklore and societies’ activities. Harmony of landscape and human provides a final image of each village.

In the time of European Union pre-accession strategy was our Programme extremely actual because of its characteristic signs, which were identical with the principles of regional and structural policy of E.U. (principles of partnership, programming, concentration, subsidy, auxiliary and transparency).

With the formation of globalisation and economy transformation the PoVR gains a new dimension oriented to the environment identity, uniqueness, traditions, cultural identity, landscape value. These areas are supported also by the European



Landscape Convention, which was assigned by the E.U. member states in 2000 and in Slovakia this time the process of its ratification and implementation is running. During last years of totalitarian regime we were witnessed how the phenomenon, like uniqueness, traditions, identity were, were violently stopped or moved to the latent form. Under an ideological pressure (according to the slogan of equalisation the village with the town) an extensive part of the material and spiritual culture had been destroyed. The rural environment as a whole and its spirit were permanently and aggressively attacked. The fact, that the village and rural environment had their own tradition, their own evolutionary regularities and their regional and local peculiarities, was ideologically and consequently physically suppressed.

The time of expanding rural development with building of huge agricultural corporations, merging the fields, hydromeliorations, full-area sanitation of historical parts of villages with building large settlement units

of family houses, repeated building of schools and cultural facilities is irretrievably over. By the change of social structure the decay of rural areas is occurring. The country is ageing and migrating. In the countryside the processes of succession begin to dominate. Spiritual values, way of life, economy are changing. That is the negatives of nowadays. But on the other hand villages near big cities begin to prosper (the western part of Slovakia and area along the longest river of Slovakia – Váh). At the same

time more people are more interested in having a cottage also in neglected parts of Slovakia.

Lower solvency of population doesn't allow building of new houses. We can see more often the reconstructions of old building stock. On the other hand with the change of property relations new people or businesses without any emotional attitude to the original environment are coming into the village. The following situations often occur: change of functions of the village centres, which haven't been used because of neglected housing stock and also building of new houses out of village areas. It is a big chance and at the same time a big threat for the rural life. These interventions can often lead to destruction of feeling and character of settlement and landscape.

That's why a diligent edification – work with citizens is needed. Not all parts of villages or objects are suitable



Suitable way of reconstruction of folk architecture objects (Hronsek, Middle Slovakia)

Suitable way of reconstruction of folk architecture objects (Selce, Middle Slovakia)



for state conservation (monument fund). The better way is to persuade the owners, the local governments about uniqueness of their objects, houses or the whole village and to help them fulfil their requests and preservation of uniqueness. A big threat (alike as in the past it was) are houses from catalogues – the situation becomes worse because foreign models (Bavarian, Tyrol, Mediterranean types of houses) or so called “make-a-fortune baroque” (as a combination of all previous types) are very often used in Slovak villages.

Within the PoVR by the processing of analyses and plans of village development and milieu renewal there are used many interactive methods and work forms with the emphasis on participation of maximum of general public or experts. A basic phase of such process is the awareness of the environment together with its positives and negatives. A view of a man from “outside” is often very useful because such a view can draw attention to things and objects which are for natives common, uninteresting and unvalued.

One of the following phases is an experts’ help to local governments or citizens in the processes of village centres revitalisation planning, houses renovation, public places formation, small architecture realisation. In this process a discussion with people is very important. These people are going to live in new milieu and they are also going to create it. The success of any realisation depends on extent of

their confidence. When they accept the realisation as it is their own idea and then they carry out it themselves, with their own hands, they will have another relation to it and after years it will not be devastated.

And that’s true, that very nice things can be done with little money. During such a process new relations between citizens, village, entrepreneurs and experts can create. By the creation of a new architecture it has to be insisted on its composition into surroundings, on utilisation of traditional architectural elements and local building materials. Very nice results were achieved in many villages – namely Brdárka, Čelovce, Hrušov, Soblahov, Tajov, Prenčov, Kvačany, Turčianska Štiavnička,....

Under such an influence and also under influence of other suitable reconstructions of typical family house the opinions and relations to the “old houses” are changing. Good reconstructions of wooden, brick or stone houses increasingly appear. (Čierny Balog, Jamník, Hronsek, Selce,...). In many cases the village buys old, creaky houses and rebuild them into museum expositions presenting inside and outside the original way of life (Sucháň, Hrušov,...)

Due to many small realisations the look of fencing, front gardens and public places is changing, as well. For such realisations many excursion of mayors, local governments to the neighbourhood countries (Austria, Czech Republic) are very inspiring and motivating.

The spatial plan plays a covering role for all mentioned activities. Especially, the way of acquisition and permission proceedings of such plan ensures a broad citizen participation in the whole process. The target of spatial plan in democracy is to find a common consent between requirements and possibilities, between sources utilisation and their preservation, between private and public sector. When the plan is created together with citizens who have a clear vision about what they want and don’t want to have in their village, then they are very quickly identified with that document and thereafter the plan can represent a basic stone for next development and activities. It isn’t often needed to designate the extraordinary objects of folk architecture as listed buildings. It’s enough to define them well and then in regulation plan to determine the regulations of their utilization and architectural rendering. But for the first time it is necessary to persuade people to want to do it in such way.

Utilisation of local traditional architectural elements in the look of bus station (Prenčov – Middle Slovakia)



After negotiation and ratification the spatial plan becomes a “local law”, an expert and public agreement about land use. It’s a pity, that the spatial plan hasn’t had its appropriate position in planning and decision-making processes yet. In addition, only a few spatial plans have

been made on a satisfactory level. Nowadays in Slovakia a process of preparation the landscape planning law is running. This law should fill in a legislation gap and co-ordinate the tools of all others laws concerning landscape in order to achieve the integration of landscape preservation and landscape creation on the principles of sustainable development.

PoVR often helps us to understand such documents and definitions which are for common citizen very complicated and sophisticated. The main role in the PoVR plays the village – community. But the local government can’t define the visions and priorities of village renewal alone, without any other active interesting groups, associations, organisations

or citizens in the village. When these active groups think out ideas and matters of village renewal, they will also want to have these ideas included in the other development documents made by experts.

The best reward, for an architect or spatial planner who is acting in rural environment for his effort, is a successful and considerable realisation of architecture or environment according to the philosophy of village renewal.

In conclusion several statistical indicators: besides the expert support of Slovak Environmental Agency the PoVR is supported from the Ministry of Environment of Slovak Republic in the form of direct grants for villages or groups of villages, so called microregions, in the total amount of 120.000 € to 600.000 € in a year. Altogether in 7 years of PoVR existence it has been more than 2,5 millions €. In form of direct grants following activities are supported: creation of spatial planning documentation of villages and microregions, plans and programmes of rural sustainable development, other technical design documentation aimed at settlement renewal and landscape identity, realisation of small investment activities and publicity and edification activities promoting the subject and targets of PoVR. Although the average grant is about 1.600 €, during 7 years more than 80% of all villages of Slovakia have been applied for our Programme of the Village Renewal and among them about 750 villages



Renovation of folk architecture object - a stone house – into original state and creation of museum exposition (Hrušov, South Slovakia)

Children are the best potential for preservation of cultural – historical heritage (Hrušov, folk festival “Hontianska paráda”, South Slovakia)

and 90 microregions were supported, which means almost 30% of all villages of Slovakia.

The overall financial support of Programme of the Village Renewal in Slovakia is not as high as the demand of villages and microregions is. We hope that in the nearest future this Programme will achieve an adequate public and political support with an adequate financial cover (not only from the Ministry of Environment, but also from other Slovak ministries) at least comparably to the Czech Republic, where the average financial support for similar programme is about 160 000 millions € a year.

Anna Kršáková

Slovak Environmental Agency Banská Bystrica, Slovakia



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