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Get to know and preserve Vinica*

Vinica

Vinica is an old settlement, specific, and in some elements original to Croatia. This is primarily due to the extent and value of the architectural heritage and cultural legacy in wider terms. Two castles, three timber-framed country houses, churches, several chapels, crosses and stylized shrines, three wells, an authentic pillory, dozens of historical buildings, dozens of — there used to be about a hundred — traditional houses and the well-known Opeka arboretum as the crown of the heritage that any settlement of the civilized world would be proud of. On the other hand, such neglect of this heritage is nowhere else to be seen. Vinica is not a typical, but, rather, a basically linear settlement, in which the main street is at the same time the rural backbone of the town. The town is a Panonian type of settlement, with long and narrow parcels perpendicular to the road. The main accommodation, most frequently a three-room building, is built along the main street line with a triangular gable next to the road. This was the face that every host presented to the world public. All these gables are similar to each other as one man is similar to another, but they are not alike, which creates a particular charm. The rhythm of the gables gives the road an impetus to counter the monotony of their long row. The square in the town centre, with its public services, represents the spatial accent of the rural structure of the town. In old photographs and plans, the turn-of-the-century Vinica seemed a place worth living in. One could not say this for the Vinica of today.

The break-down of the traditional way of life of our regions, the means of earning a living and consequently the break-down of construction in the region took place in the middle of the century. This was after World War II, the time of a wrong and unjust policy towards the village, peasantry and

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agriculture. Industrialization and urbanization were animated, aiming at taking us into the happy future, while everything traditional was considered as backward and obsolete. Soon, such a collective consciousness was created that even village residents themselves were ashamed of their tradition.

The State was interested in and experts monitored only the development of larger cities, while smaller settlements were left to fend for themselves. That situation had a negative effect on small settlements. That is especially apparent in Vinica, due to its rich heritage. Thus the castles and timber-framed country houses were used to the exhaustion of their usefulness, and then left to disrepair. The other historical and civil houses are not maintained, while those traditional as well as street fences, especially on the main street, are mercilessly torn down. Newly built ones do not have the least bit of quality, when compared to the old. The town so loses its regional recognition, its identity and image.

The wide asphalt road may be the most picturesque example in Vinica of how consciousness forms man's environment. This is the time of some sort of automobile cult to which everything else is subordinated, including man himself. A road wrecks a line of trees, dispossesses a footboard, and, instead of civilized standards and the flow of roads, noise, fuel vapours and all other dangers that accompany fast traffic take place. For the sake of cars and roads, the little bridge on the square was pulled down and the stream was covered with concrete. Both the bridge and the stream, that is, water, are elements which any settlement would desire to have. It is clear that we are in favour of cars and all other achievements of civilization, but only that they might serve man, and not the other way around. In a world that takes care of its living environment, the roads passing through a settlement are made so that curves are involuted, roundabouts are made, artificial obstacles are placed on a flat part of the road and so on, and all with the aim of slowing down the traffic through the settlement. There is a saying, which is the truth, and it goes: people build towns, and towns build people. It is really not irrelevant in which environment a child (man) grows up. It has been proved that a noble environment creates a noble man, while an inhuman one exerts a destructive effect on the human psyche.

Today, Vinica is a municipal place, so that the people of Vinica, and the municipal leadership, become responsible for the further development of the settlement, including the Vinica they will leave to the coming generations.

Every valuable building should be respected and attempts should be made to preserve and renew them. There are few examples that this can be done, but some fortunately do exist in Vinica, such as the ideally maintained Rajner family house. Vinica will not be a comfortable place to live in, until its streets, and especially the main one and the square, become what they should be — streets and places of communication, gathering and joy. This will happen to the main street, if the footboards, bicycle paths,

treelines are brought back, the square renovated, the little bridge rebuilt and the stream re-opened and all the new buildings in important places in the settlement subjected to strict control.

With no support of the society and expert help in Vinica, as well as in other small places, people build as best they know; and it is not their fault that they build badly. They do not follow their own tradition in building houses, but rather seek their ideals in city suburbs or, lately, abroad. New houses naturally have to comply with modern, in particular hygienic, standards, but have to be adapted to people's needs, which are somewhat different from those in a city. We are aware that traditional life is vanishing, and therefore Vinica should think about having its own regional museum. This is to be done in a way that the still preserved traditional house yard is preserved and equipped with traditional exhibits and instruments which certainly still exist in Vinica. This is the way of preserving the memory of traditional life and their own roots for future generations.

These are just brief notes about what Vinica was, what it is today and what it should become in the future. This is an occasion for the wider elaboration of the problem. However, the experts gathered in ECOVAST will be happy to help you with anything you may want to know. We know, that today Vinica has no means of commencing more significant work on anything we have pointed out here. Nevertheless, this is not most essential nor most important for the success of this action. What is important is that the people of Vinica be convinced of what we are pointing out. This is the first ECOVAST action of its kind here, and the fact that it is to be Vinica we hope will be appreciated by the people of Vinica. We are not doing this for some imaginary interests of ours, but rather for the people of Vinica themselves.

Opeka Arboretum

This is a famous park with a baroque historicist castle, in the immediate vicinity of Vinica. It was declared a specially protected monument of landscape architecture in February 1961. Designed with a wealth of horticultural and aesthetic knowledge, it represents a remarkable value for the whole Vinica region. It is also one of the most valuable horticultural objects in central Europe and Croatia. Its basis is made of decorative oak trees and sweet-chestnut trees embracing the hilly area behind the park. The flat area in the park including a small lake, is planted exclusively with exotic plants. The wide and open park panoramas are of special value and stretch deep between groups of woods with which they make up an extraordinary aesthetic entity. Unfortunately, the Arboretum is presently insufficiently appreciated and the park as a whole has been neglected. It is emphasized by the Opeka castle, which, being in its centre, stands as a warning of the neglect and ignorance that has devastated Vinica's historical monuments.

Vinica wells

Of special value in Vinica are the sources of fresh water in its very centre, testifying to the possibility of the healthy life of citizens in a still rather clean environment. Architecturally formed monuments with plastic ornamentation made of stone and wrought iron on the main square of Vinica, which are extremely valuable buildings for the ambience, complement the beauty of the settlement. An urbanistically valuable collection of historical buildings, in the centre of which there is a well with a statue of St. Ivan Nepomuk, has unfortunately been destroyed by the construction of the overly large shoe factory building of a disharmonic form, which, with its visual obtrusiveness, ruined the genuine ambience of the place. This is a serious example of unplanned construction of the economic facilities in a historically precious space, the preservation of which could have brought significant prosperity to future tourism. Vinica wells are of great value and they must be appropriately protected. Their hydrologic and artistic reconstruction should be a result of well-planned projects which will enable the return of the wells to their original state. The well by the bus station needs the original flatness of the land, reconstruction of the walls and substitution of missing parts of the wrought-iron fence, while at the well by the Jesuits' villa, brick parts and the Ivan Nepomuk Statue need to be renewed, taking particular care that, with proper maintenance of the pipes, there is a constant flow of water during the summertime.

Former Jesuits' villa

A symbol of the market-town of Vinica, the most significant historical building situated in the very centre of the town. The former country residence of Varaždin Jesuits, later the property of the Patačić noble family, a harmonically dimensioned three-floor building with a row of gables on its eastern and southern facade. This building has lately been ruined by inappropriate use and absolute neglect after the construction of factory facilities in the area of its former garden and yard. Despite its dilapidated look, it is still statically firm enough to be preserved. Existing construction plans enable the return of this building to its original state, and its culture-historical value justifies all future investments in its being protected and designed for a useful modern purpose. The former Jesuits' villa should be preserved at any cost, because it is an inseparable part of the urbanistic identity of Vinica, without which this place loses its historical value and significance for the future.

Rajner family timber-framed country-house

Located in a carefully chosen place up the hill above Vinica, this is a harmonic ground-floor house with a pretty gabled hall in the southern facade.

The building that by its size and form ennobles the countryside, giving it a special significance. Its beauty is preserved owing to the consciousness of owners, who are familiar with its monumental characteristics and they try to live in it a life which does not ruin its spatial and architectural peculiarities. This is a rare example of the correct relation towards Vinica's architectural monuments, a result of the knowledge and respect for traditional values of architectural heritage, a good expression of understanding and respect for the past. A similar positive attitude towards the heritage is shown by the Hošnjak family, who, with the meagre resources, are trying to preserve their nice house in Vratno Dojlnje. These two good examples are a real contrast to the fashionable construction of the 'gastarbeiter' houses emerging in the Vinica region and ruining the ambient values of settlements with their obtrusive forms. These houses, unconvincingly and ridiculously designed, built with basic synthetic materials, are a real mockery of the remaining harmonically designed traditional ground-floor houses built of precious Vinica stone. They represent a miserable expression of contempt towards Vinica's skilled constructors of the past, an expression of ignorance and irresponsibility toward the inherited values.

The Vinica stylized shrines

Architectural and ambient monuments which with their small dimensions and meagre artistic value greatly affect the significance of the settlement. The ruin of the stylized shrine in Vratno Dojlnje testifies to the lack of understanding of their value, and the attitude of neglect towards existing monuments of that kind. Its historical and ambient value require the return of the stylized shrine to its original shape with all of its architectural parts and ornaments. The construction of a new stylized shrine along a road side leading to the church of St. Mark in Marčani is an example of how the lack of understanding of the existing values and their easy rejection for the sake of new ones. The erection of the new stylized shrine along the road towards the church cannot justify the destruction of the already existing small stylized shrine, regardless of the constructors' good intentions. That architecturally modest monument, with nice dimensions and a wonderful wrought-iron bar that closes off the space of the small altar, with its form and ambient value outshines the newly built stylized shrine. By its destruction, the region of Vinica will lose a significant characteristic which the population unfortunately is not even aware of.

Wall paintings in the Dolansky timber framed country-house

These are well-preserved frescoes with mythological scenes in the rooms of the flat on the first floor in the west wing of a timber-framed country-house. Very valuable paintings with scenes of architecture and figures,

the work of an as yet unidentified painter of the 18th century. Those frescoes are a rare preserved example of worldly wall painting, and with their artistic and cultural-historical value reach far beyond the place of Vinica. Fortunately, they are preserved, the reason being that the family living in the flat where the paintings are understand their value, so they did not paint over them, despite the fact, that the communal office issued an opinion that this can be done. The Dolansky timber-framed country-house is a historically valuable building and is one of the most significant architectural monuments in Vinica. Unfortunately, it is completely dilapidated due to the ignorance and poverty of other inhabitants, who, with their resources, are not able to improve its condition and protect it as a monument. Alterations in the roof of the western part of the building show a complete unfamiliarity and disrespect for the timber-framed country-house as a distinguished monument of culture. A new roof which was placed underneath the line of the gable is a true shame for this unjustifiably neglected building.

Pranger ¹

A particularly interesting and rare cultural-historical monument, a measure for corn and the stone of shame to which cheats used to be tied. Triangular, the upper part of the monument above the oval bowl for measurement is decorated with stylized human heads and a note in the Latin script from 1643 warning merchants to measure fairly. Those symbols of the former significance of Vinica used to be placed in a public place as a visible warning to every passer-by, while today, it is entirely hidden behind the big wall of the factory yard. Its cultural-historical significance requires an open space, well chosen on the central Vinica square, where its monumental role would come to full expression. The Pranger is as interesting a sculptural work, as are the preserved original stone benches in the Arboretum, which are valuable sculptural decorations of the park. Their genuine form, made of materials from the nearby quarry, has in many places been replaced by badly copied and unconvincing concrete casts which do not have the charm of the original and their lack of authenticity diminishes the impression of the countryside.

The Vinica houses

The basic characteristics of the architecture of the settlement, accommodation buildings of the typical people's edifice with architectural forms from the turn of the century, which kept a traditional three-room floor plan, but were built taking civil architecture as a model. There are several completely abandoned valuable buildings of this kind in Vinica, so that they are in real danger of being destroyed because of the creation of modern architectural

¹ Pillory (Ger.)

forms which do not fit into the ambience of the settlement. The unfamiliarity with the value of the architectural legacy led to the destruction of Ciglar house, the most valuable building of ethnic construction, a perfect example of the traditional people's construction. The systematic protection and conservation of already existing buildings of that kind, as well as the construction of new ones, by precisely prescribed building conditions would help the preservation of the basic historical and ambient characteristics of the settlement. In some of the preserved residential edifices, a presentation of the very valuable ethnographic collection, currently located in the primary school in Vinica, could be organized for tourist purposes.

House-yards

House-yards of Vinica depend on the orientation of the residential building toward the street, and are spacious, or very narrow. The accompanying premises, stables, corn sheds, and hen houses make up a harmonious spatial and architectural unit. Preserved examples of traditional woven corn sheds and wooden agricultural premises united into a common edificial form can even be used today for everyday purposes, and with a little care and restoration can be a precious expression of the life of industrious people of the Vinica region. Water sources and streams which, as a part of the natural heritage enrich the environment of this region, became a part of the ambience of the Vinica settlements. The still preserved stream between Vinica and Marčani, which at some places unfortunately become lost under the heavy asphalt of the road, at some open spaces, beautifully complete the ideal picture of the old settlement and represent a great value of nature. That value must be recalled by the people of Vinica and carefully nurtured with appropriate care and awareness of the need for a clean natural environment.