

Bratislava gap sites - witness of an era but also of helplessness of the town

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Even though lot of things have changed in the metropolis on Danube in a meantime, the gap-sites are still haunting us. Urban structure of the city centre, even so inhomogeneous in its style as well as function, lost the last rests of unifying continuity and for a long decades mothballed the makeshift in a form of disorganised exterior, non-aesthetic forms of parking or fast food stands at the level of small lido architecture of 80s of twentieth century. On the other hand, through rehabilitation of private property land, the self-administration of the city as well as of the relevant city district, gained an argument for justification of their infirmity and lack of motivation and therefore inactivity in this field. Three most striking examples in the centre of Bratislava can serve as evidence.

Dunajská clear, Špitálska and Gorkého taboo

“Until present we have no information concerning possibility to build anything at gap-sites at Špitálska or Gorkého street,” said spokeswoman of city district Bratislava - Staré Mesto, Mrs Alena Kopřivová to Stavebné fórum.sk. However, gap-site at Dunajská, where apart from the demountable Eurocomp “exhibition hall” or parking nothing was built for many years, and which was for a decades under construction prohibition due to the possible construction of underground station, represent completely different case. Out of the three landed estates that belong to three owners, one is already built-up and the project is shortly before approbation. “It will be multifunctional building with business and services operations as well as administrative premises and the investor is AB Centrum. The building permit talks about one underground and three above ground floors,” specifies Kopřivová.

As remaining two lots are concerned, two zoning and planning decision have been issued already for two constructions. “Company Brigant intends to build a multifunctional building “Dunajská” on one lot, with prevailing administration function. The building will have one underground and six above ground floors out of which one floor will be offset,” said the spokeswoman. The second plot should be, according to the spokeswoman, used for multifunctional building “Dunajská”, however this time, applicant for zoning and planning decision is company named Centrum bývania. Here, the prevailing purpose will be housing, the building is planned with two underground and 8 over ground stores arranged in cascades with gradual offset from communication. The underground will provide 56 parking boxes; there will be shops at the ground floor, offices on I. and II. floor and apartments on higher floors.

Still there exist taboo and many unanswered questions over the two “undestroyable” gap-sites at Špitálska and Gorkého Street. During the past 15 years the undeveloped, morally and functionally degenerated land has been for several times subject of the announced investment plans. Plans were however, never realized, under circumstances that have never been explained. Experience with the gap-site at Špitálska can serve as exemplary demonstration of a case, when unclear ownership relation to a land and atomization of the overall interest of the town into particular goals of then participants (Regional Environmental Office, companies Javorina, but first of all those of Zdroj, Ministry of Privatisation, National Oncology Institute and the church - sisters Elisabeth order) can not only defeat construction of a multifunctional business centre, but at the same time it can devalue in the architectonic sense of a word the key premises right in the centre of a capital city of a country for an “indefinite period.”

A gap-toothed smile would enchant nobody

At the time of its then existence, the Bratislava Architectural Board (Útvar hlavného architekta - ÚHA) decided to deal with this thorny problem and to map it as a complex one. Result of this initiative became two conception materials - The data list of gap-sites in the city centre (1990-91) and The localities offer for housing development (1993). They positively contributed to the problem and dealt with it as a complex issue; singled out 36 priority gap-sites in Bratislava and prepared regulations (summary of basic urban-architectonic conditions) for construction in the central area of the town already negotiated with the city district Staré Mesto as well as historical monuments preservation bodies. Every gap-site has been elaborated at 3-4 sheets of paper legible for an expert as well as for a laic (development of the construction starting from its connection to buried services). However, before the ÚHA managed to finish its intention it was dissolved - out of decision taken by its rightful parent - the municipal government, at early as in the first half of 90s.

To the detriment of the cause, the city not only eased up its initiative and pressure on the landowners, but it lost track of their intentions. Though the city itself cannot choose from many possibilities, it can act in two levels: As an owner that has a detailed overview on restitution proceedings that have been concluded a long time ago, or as a self-governing body that is the initiator and creator of the investment conditions. Not to say that, it's long time since we left the phase of ravelling out of property knots behind us. As ownership relations of many plots - from the gap-sites to whole built-up areas - is complicated, as relation towards the town itself or city district is concerned (in case that self-government is not going to stay in the role of helpless observers or extras), there is nothing else to do, except to convince the "blend" of private owners about the need to procure construction. And vice-versa, the owners or investors who would acquire the said plots should observe the determined regulations of the zoning plan. How successful they can be, is obvious from the abovementioned multifunctional building at Dunajská, which exceeds the pedestrian walkway and almost goes to the Dunajská street disrupting its historical line.

Many of the empty areas that remained after the reckless demolitions are successfully healed up already - thanks to the strong, primarily foreign capital and constant presence of the developers sector. Noticeable changes had to survive also the streets where temporary gap-site and following construction were reasonable due to the inappropriately low height line and overall deterioration of housing originating from the turn of 19th and 20th century or from the period between the wars (ground floor winery houses at Obchodná, Dunajská or Grösslingová streets). In many aspects, Bratislava succeeded to achieve a really apparent progress. Regardless of this fact, disintegration and incompleteness of its face is still visible at many places and wins over the shy smile on the gap-toothed mouth. And this is nothing to enchant its visitors.

Photo - author

1, 2 - Gap-sites at streets: Gorkého (beside the historical building of the Slovak National Theatre) and Špitálska (opposite the Tesco store) are for decades used as unattractive parking areas. Their further destiny or their future functional purpose are not known even to the city hall.

3 - Thanks to the prepared multifunctional business and administration projects, the gap-site at Dunajská street (beside Omnia), where construction was prohibited for many years due to the possible construction of underground station would become a history soon.

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