

The Metelkova story

History

Metelkova is the commonly referred-to name of the former "Fourth of July" Military Barracks, along Metelkova street in Ljubljana. Urbanistically-architecturally speaking Metelkova is made up of two complementing parts: the Southern and the Northern section. The Northern Section is made up of buildings now owned by the Municipality of Ljubljana. It is comprised of six buildings, which are intended for non-institutional, young, production culture. The buildings in the Northern Section are: Pesci (Infantry), Lovci (Hunters), Hangar (Hangar), Hlev (Stable), Garaze (Garages), and Zapori (Prison). A great number (approx. 150) of young, independent artists, co-ops, socialization groups and production groups (music, photography, theatre, fine arts) are based here. The Southern Section is made up of six barrack blocks. Since the departure of the Yugoslav Peoples Army in October 1991, these buildings stood empty until the end of 1996. According to a decision of the Slovene government of July 1994, the Southern Section has been reserved for use by the Ministry of Culture. They renovated two buildings - The Ethnographic Museum and the Metelkova 6 building. The National Gallery and the Gallery of Modern Arts and Rectorate for the Protection of Natural and Cultural Heritage will also find space there. Only the structure marking the northern boundary of this site, the Metelkova 6 building, contributes to this report.

The story of the Northern section of Metelkova (today AKC Metelkova mesto) begins in the second half of the eighties, with strong national independence movement actuating a vibrant social - cultural scene. An initiative to convert military barracks along Metelkova street into a multicultural centre sprung up and joined over 200 individuals and groups into a Network for Metelkova. A good half a year after the Yugoslav Peoples Army's departure in the Autumn of 1991, in April 1992, the City of Ljubljana and the Government of Republic of Slovenia assigned the ultimate purpose of the barracks to be that of the program of Network for Metelkova. It all seemed to be going the way the protagonists of the Network had planned. Individuals already started to set up the foundations of an information and documentary centre, to define promotional and programme goals, to set up spatial simulations, to formulate the first petitions to the foundations, a Metelkova fanzine was started, ... But the legal procedure of the City authorities went too slow. The Network did not want another winter to take its toll on the buildings and foresaw an occupation of the buildings should legal attempts to acquire them fail. Under public pressure, the City Council promised to answer the unsolved matters. And it did - on 9th of September, the City Council replied with an unannounced, illegal and hurried attempt at demolishing Metelkova. As a response to this act, approx. 150 self-organised individuals occupied the Northern Section of Metelkova barracks. A week after that, the City Council ruled to disconnect power and soon also water supply. A cultural program and other activities that were organised at Metelkova mesto were nonetheless extremely rich and inspiring - only in the first few months (September to December 1993) there were over 200 happenings there

(art exhibitions, concerts, literary readings, theatre plays and performances, etc.). Some groups invested a lot of effort into securing proper conditions for work.

Deciding moment that led into an organizational crisis and depression was December 1993. After the original enthusiasm lost its energy, Metelkova witnessed apathy. A lot of people left Metelkova, some angry, some disappointed, some tired. Because of the impossible conditions (work and life in darkness and cold), there were vandalisms, burglaries and robberies. Only a few activities remained at Metelkova, but despite that some of them strengthened and revived themselves. In this atmosphere, a new enlarged assembly of Network for Metelkova was summoned, and there it reconstituted itself into an association of individuals, and legal entities were invited to join founding of a new organizational model - the institution of Retina. The job of Retina was to help settle the situation at Metelkova and then to become a kind of a service for non-governmental organisations. During January and April 1994, there was no formal organization at Metelkova, and the groups and individuals thus had to organize themselves.

The summer of 1994 brought however a new and crucial decision of the Slovene Government to assign the unoccupied Southern Section of Metelkova to the Ministry of Culture - to be used by the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, the National Museum, the gallery of Modern Arts and the Rectorate of Rep. Slovenia for the Protection of Natural Heritage. One building, though, the Metelkova 6, was assigned for needs of non-institutional culture. The idea of conversion was approaching its final realisation. At the end of 1994, the City authorities decided that the Northern Section needs settling, too. The people of Metelkova together with architect Kevin Kaufman from New York produced the Metelkova Development Plan (<http://www.ljudmila.org/retina/civilna/retina/metelkova/index.htm>), a plan with program solutions for individual buildings. On 10th of December the roof of Šola building burned down, and later water soaked the whole building. The squatters living there moved to other buildings, mainly to Pesci building, chasing some of the remaining artists out of their places.

In 1995, the mayor, the people of Metelkova and Retina signed a Protocol on settling Metelkova situation and made an agreement to arrange rental contracts and acceptable conditions for work. Lovci building, the best-kept building of the complex, was the first to get water and electricity - in September 1996. Channel Zero and Gala hall performance halls in Pesci building also got electricity and distributed it throughout the whole complex. This made it a lot easier to create and organize programmes at Metelkova.

In April 1997 dialogue with the Municipality came to a halt again over announced demolition of some buildings in the Northern section of Metelkova - namely, Hangar, Hlev, Garaže, Zavori. These were also the buildings most damaged by the City Council back in 1993. The people of Metelkova managed to halt this plan, but situation is far from perfect. In April 1998 further problems are to be expected regarding this issue.

Only a month later, in May 1997, the Municipality - in agreement with people of Metelkova - proceeded with demolishing the heavily-damaged Šola building.

A small part of the city budget for 1997 was assigned for reconstruction of Pešci building, which included electricity installations, water supply and replacement of heavily damaged interiors. The squatters had to leave and after reconstruction was finished, in July 1997, the empty places were given to artists already active at Metelkova before. All of the users signed contracts with the Municipality for the next five years.

The main objectives of Metelkova mesto are:

To stop demolishing any of our buildings and to stay as long as we could on this location. If those buildings will be demolished we will ask have for another appropriate location.

Our job is to help settle the situation at Metelkova and to establish useful service for organisations and individuals from Metelkova mesto (negotiations with the City Government, reconstruction of some buildings, fund-raising, programme coordination, any kind of advices...)

A problem is we have not enough people to work because we don't have another incomes as incomes from different project (very low honorars if any).

More about the Metelkova mesto

Like any other real city, Metelkova mesto (mesto =city) also embraces public spaces intended for association, amusement, flow of information and inspiration. Although sometimes the opinion prevails that Metelkova mesto is one single artist's studio, the place actually offers a whole bunch of other adventures. Namely, if Metelkova did not have any open public space, the majority of us would not have anything to do there, would we? Who would like to hang around in a studio? By the way, studios would not perform their function either.

Open spaces at Metelkova, which host various events, certainly are of considerable quality: lectures, debates of all kinds, film day-dreaming, sports competitions, feminist workshops, homosexual bars, planning of more direct forms of activism. Not to mention concert halls and all-sorts clubs. No time for boredom!

Along with that, open space at Metelkova mesto contributes significantly to the growth of social (political) awareness of both the Metelkova mesto dwellers and the visitors. As we all know from experience, we have never grown enough awareness of that kind neither for ourselves nor to be exported (let's say to Ljubljana).

So go ahead and get a peep at the SOT-24 Club (youth handicapped deprived club), Monokel Club (lesbian), Tiffany Club (gay), Elf's Reading Room (anarhist's library), 100% Mizzart Club (party), Channel Zero (concerts, parties), Gala Hall (concerts, parties), Club Gromka (concerts, parties, movies, talks, theatre, performances), Menza pri koritu (concerts, movies, talks, theatre, performances, youth activities), Jalla Jalla (daily open bar, arabic music) and Kunilingus (bar gallery and DJ).

And don't forget to cultivate your awareness!