

Four pillars, sheet above

With the exhibition Tinker, roofer, shower, builder by Katerina Duda

During the past decade, after the Law on the Treatment of Illegally Constructed Buildings had been passed in 2012 and after it was possible to apply for legalization of buildings built without valid building permits in two rounds - until June 2013 and June 2018, in the Republic of Croatia, almost one billion square meters were legalized, i.e. 974,260,497 illegally built square meters. In the first round, more than 825 thousand requests for legalization were received, and about 75 thousand requests in the second round. According to the mentioned law, an illegally constructed building is legalized by the Decision on the finished construction. The decision is made by the administrative body of the regional or local self-government unit. According to a special law, it performs the tasks of issuing acts for the implementation of spatial planning documents and construction of the area where the illegally constructed building is located. Due to the large number of requests, after the first round, the Agency for the Legalization of Illegally Constructed Buildings (AZONIZ) was temporarily established as a public institution. AZONIZ started operating in February 2014 and ended on July 1, 2019. Although the ten-year legalization process, which is still ongoing, was based on previous estimates of about 150,000 illegal buildings, more than 880,000 have been legalized so far. That figure is not final given the remaining 20 percent of unresolved claims. And while the number of illegal buildings is almost six times higher than estimated, the revenues from legalization are inversely proportional. Of the planned ten billion kuna, less than two billion kuna was earned. More than 80% of illegal construction is accounted for by housing, vacations and rentals.

The conditions for legalization in both rounds were the same - the building that was created, ie visible on the digital orthophoto map of the State Geodetic Administration, made on the basis of aerial filming that started on June 21, 2011 and on which the least rough construction works (foundations with walls, ie columns with beams and ceiling or roof construction) with or without a roof, at least one floor have been conducted, can be legalized. In order to determine the facts relevant for making a decision on the derived condition, the competent administrative body is obliged to inspect the digital orthophoto map and conduct an on-site inspection. According to available data, 75% of the decision on the derived situation was made at the level of regional or local self-government units. The Law on the Treatment of Illegally Constructed Buildings, better known colloquially as the Law on Legalization or Just Legalization, should, in the broadest sense, bring order to space. Among the criticisms of legalization (which are not lacking, unlike more comprehensive analyses of the phenomenon of mass illegal construction), apart from the more general sloppiness, contradictions and vagueness of the law itself, the absence of statutory

urban renewal and rehabilitation of areas affected by illegal construction (which should have been financed in part by legalization revenues, mostly eaten up by the administration) stands out, the creation of a kind of “Bribery Eldorado” and a number of new niches for potential bribery by selling requests for legalization) which finally and consequently had a paradoxical effect, that is, that legalization gave the wind in the back to illegal construction. It is the latter that has been filling Istrian local chronicles in recent weeks. These are illegal, mostly weekend settlements along the coast of southern Istria, in the vicinity of Premantura, also on the edges or within the boundaries of the protected landscape of Kamenjak.

According to estimates, in the area managed by the Kamenjak Public Institution, there are about 50 to 70 illegal buildings in the protected landscape of the Kamenjak Peninsula, while 200 to 230 of these buildings are located in the Medulin Municipality, on the Premantura Peninsula near Stupice Camp. Although the case of Premantura (Medulin Municipality) has been more frequent on the front pages lately, it is not isolated. If we administratively limit ourselves to the Istria County, some of the most prominent are the Municipality of Marcana - until recently a much better known mecca of illegal construction on the eastern coast of Istria (Pavičini, Peruški, Kavran), neighbouring Municipality of Ližnjan (Šišan), then Vodnjan (Proštin, Peroj, Barbariga, Betiga), the cities of Rovinj and Umag. In addition to the fact that illegal (additional) construction on and around Kamenjak (as well as along the Istrian coast) is not slowing down, the recent dismissal of the ruling party in the Municipality of Medulin is one of the factors that made the Kamenjak case a staple. The new mayor of Medulin confirmed that in the part of the protected landscape of Kamenjak there are about 30 buildings that have been legalized by final decisions issued by AZONIZ and the competent administrative department of the Istrian County. However, many of the legalized buildings do not meet the basic condition of legalization – that is that they are visible on the orthophoto map - nor that “the building cannot be legalized if it is built as a complex permanently connected to the ground (caravan, container, etc.) , ie in a manner and from materials that do not ensure the longevity and safety of use (barracks, etc.). Most of the mentioned legalized buildings on Kamenjak are caravans with canopies that were subsequently closed with various improvised materials. The flood of news about the “fiasco on Kamenjak” essentially brings nothing new. The achievements of the announced fight against illegal construction have yet to be seen, and in the meantime the obvious poor coordination of different levels of government has been confirmed and the usual, tedious daily political ping-pong about (in) jurisdiction has begun.

In that sense, different views on the process of legalization, this “institutional fraud”, and the reality of space and life in these flourishing unplanned colonies turn out to be important. Katerina Duda’s complex multimedia exhibition Tinker, roofer, shower, builder is the result of artistic research into illegal construction and apartmentization of the coast, a kind of case study of illegal settlements around Premantura (Stupice, Pod Lokvom, Močile). This exhibition is a confirmation and continuation of the artist’s long-term interest in the topics of tourism, space and architecture, and research

into how broader social changes are reflected in space. Although it is an artistic research, a carefully developed methodology confirms what Duda has successfully demonstrated in her work so far, and that is the productive complementarity of artistic and sociological approaches in the production of a different view. The exhibition is built from video projections, photographs, objects, installations and documentation of in situ actions. As a filmmaker, Duda is mostly interested in documentary form, so the starting point and central motif of the exhibition is a “trick for the camera”, i.e. a widespread strategy that simulates solid construction for aerial footage. In this process, she recognizes a valuable meta-moment - re-examining film image and documentary language as a by-product of a series of creative attempts to find hitherto non-existent or objects of non-existent qualities on, for legalization, relevant footage. Visibility in these images is the basic condition for the legalization of illegal buildings. The “trick for the camera” testifies to the negotiation with the text of the law and the (im)possibility of its implementation. The text of the law is opposed by the levers for towing caravans built into the walls, which pretend to be solid construction, while pine trees spring from some “first hand” facades.

In the words of one of the dissatisfied residents of Premantura, who is taking a TV crew around in the settlement “four pillars, a sheet above or that green net and that was it”. Duda decides to deal with the content and relationships hidden behind a seemingly simple “and that was it” circuit, such as: experimenting with materials, ingenuity, sharing knowledge and skills, and therefore solidarity and creativity. Plywood, nylon, tarpaulins, boards, blocks, styrofoam, in short: recycle and reuse masterclass from below, without conceptual and EU project.

With this project, Katerina Duda conceptualizes the phenomenon of illegal construction and maps certain elements in her familiar space - all the way to intimacy.

In addition to modelling the process of building and “negotiating” with the legislature, Katerina Duda recreates the “trick for the camera” and installation in space and a series of previous in situ actions, which she presents in the form of video. Using equally ephemeral materials as weekenders and caravan owners, such as roof tarpaulins or styrofoam that casts the front of a caravan in the right environment and / legal colonies - in the woods, by the sea - look for a suitable location for a fictitious dwelling. The elements of humour are emphasized when, like the Surrogate, she stretches the roof-to-go or when she boldly colonizes the first row with a styrofoam facade - in the sea.

The series of photographs are exhibited in the form of objects (flipbooks) and thus underline the conductive motif of the exhibition, the tension between the aerial shot and the volume. Photos are organized according to details and patterns. In a series of cottages, different phases of transformation from caravans to solid cottages can be discerned.

There are also details of construction, imagination of “patching”, landscaping and of course the ultimate symbol of working class leisure - barbecue. Solar showers (black water heater), as an indispensable detail of agricultural land and camping, therefore

the lack of electricity and water connections. Padlocks, fences, recycled or improvised traffic signs testify to self-organization due to lack of (communal) infrastructure. The road to the sea with many ("private") obstacles here acts as an initiation into a secret society. Marking of private property is emphasized; bars on the windows are protection from burglary during the winter months (on the door a piece of paper with the message: "There isn't any jewelry! No gas bottles!"), but also from the rage (permanently inhabited?) of the local community, as evidenced by traces of devastation - burning caravan and cottage. The repertoire is common: chauvinism and sexism. But such an articulation of the problem is not only in the form of graffiti but also in official communication from different levels of government in the County: the state as a stepmother and foreigners (across Učka or the state border) who do not respect "ours". However, when (state) institutions do their job (such as the Environmental Protection Inspectorate in the case of the City of Vodnjan which devastated the natural rocky coast by miles of gravel), and local sheriffs retaliate with threats and lawsuits for breach of official duty, such rhetoric is hardly convincing - this is a county in which the subdivision of plots and building apartments (not only) on the coastal zone is de facto the basis of the political and economic program of the ruling party.

The artist is intimately connected to the space of Premantura. There is a family house of her grandparents, created as a joint project of her grandfather and his brother, who even painted his early phase of construction as an amateur. After clearing the terrain, a "barrack" was built, built to protect the construction material from the weather. Over time, the ways of using the barracks, which resemble illegal houses in size, have changed - from a storage room, it has become a place of occasional housing, a resource for additional income and holidays. Metaphorically, from the perspective of the family yard, a view opens up towards the transformation of the place itself. The house has been under construction for years. The first floor, meanwhile, has lost its view of the sea: an apartment building has sprung up on the adjacent plot. From there, the drive begins to the apartment complex, which is characterized by apartment buildings, rebuilt plots, in winter ghost villages where empty parking lots gape in front of which the greenery has receded. Non / existing urbanism is perhaps best described in the text of the advertisement for the sale of a plot for a holiday home near Kamenjak, with basic information about the area and location: "And most importantly, the first neighbour next to the plot has a house number, registered building in the cadastre, ie legalized building (...)". The drone shot underscores the juxtaposition of the concrete colossi and the weekend settlement at an air distance of only a hundred meters. Legal apartment settlements opposite illegal weekend colonies. These contradictions obviously do not reflect the quality as opposed to the poor quality of the landscape. The cottage is a correlation as a space of leisure, socializing and creativity and an opportunity for relatively quick earnings from tourism (categorized apartments and holiday homes), but also a wider transformation from social to family tourism, apartment and corporate megaprojects.

The author ends the autobiographical narrative on the southwest coast of Istria, in Betiga, one of the previously mentioned hotspots of illegal construction. In the auto-

reflective procedure, Duda uses a telephoto lens that she bought with the money she received from the sale of the land to film a plot of land, once owned by her family, which has been cleared and is ready for construction. She suggestively aims at the heart of neoliberalism, and that is to reduce responsibility to personal responsibility. However, with this project, Katerina Duda, skilfully manoeuvring between extreme intimacy, micro level and mezzo-view from above, makes visible the assumption that only within a system that plans space, cares for the public good and guarantees the basics of quality community life can the issue of personal responsibility be assessed. Without that insight, mocking the kitschy facades with the obligatory quasi-expertise for the “real, indigenous Mediterranean” (because the Mediterranean is both Lebanon and apartmentized Spain) is a tiring, superficial look. Katerina Duda’s multimedia exhibition Tinker, roofer, shower, builder allows us to move away from the surface of the phenomenon of coastal legalization.

Marta Baradić

KATERINA DUDA

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