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The Rog Autonomous Factory: A Conflict between Post-Socialist Self-Management and Public-Private Partnership

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Abstract The article discusses the Rog Autonomous Factory and the conflict between its users and authorities of the city of Ljubljana, which dates back to 2006. The Rog Autonomous Factory (*Avtonomna tovarna Rog*), or simply "Rog", was established by artists and alternative political activists. The large space houses numerous art activities and also serves as a social centre: artists have set up studios there, and it provides a meeting place for migrants, workers and refugees; it hosts lectures, public food programs, concerts, exhibitions and a number of other non-commercial activities. Its activities are coordinated through a users' assembly. The article will argue that Rog has become a provider of marginal public utilities in the field of culture and other services of common interest. Its very existence is proof that the mainstream institutional configuration in Slovenia (political parties, the state, municipalities, etc.) is severely limited in its capacity to integrate certain groups of young people interested in acting towards the common good. The city's plans for the space, which are based on public-private partnership, were not acceptable to the users of Rog, and serious conflicts arose. The article argues that in the conflict between Rog and the city, maintaining the status quo is probably the best solution.

Keywords: • public private partnership • autonomy • self-management • local governance • public utilities • public institutes • creative industries • alternative social centres • Slovenia

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1 Introduction

In late March of 2006, an informal group of artists and social activists entered the gates of the abandoned Rog bicycle and typewriter factory. The factory is located just a few blocks from the city centre of Ljubljana. It was shut down in 1991 and purchased by the city of Ljubljana in 2002, but the vast complex (more than 50,000 m2) remained unused. Since the spring of 2006, the activists have been using the empty buildings and storage facilities, and have converted them into artist studios, video production laboratories, exhibition spaces, dance floors, meeting places, clubs, lecture rooms, reading rooms, movie theatres, public kitchens and, most importantly, a social centre for undocumented migrants and legislatively excluded ("erased") Slovenian residents.[1] The activists initially defined themselves as "temporary users" of the facility (Piškur, 2006); in order to obtain access to electricity, water and sewage, they turned to city authorities and sought special, autonomous status – "special protection from the state" (*Delo*: 5 April 2006). The activists also presented a plan for renovations and activities at the facility to city authorities. Ever since then, the city's response has been an inconsistent blend of dialogue and repression: meetings between activist representatives and municipal authorities were held, but at the same time, the city of Ljubljana filed charges against prominent individuals and groups and even the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Ljubljana (certain professors were involved and allegedly responsible for the violation of the city property).

In 2008 the city made public its plans for renovation of the facility: Rog was to become a Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA). The plan would involve private housing, restaurants and parking facilities and was to be financed through public-private partnership (URL RS, no. 107/2009: December 24 2009). The municipality would provide the land, construction plans and other documentation, while a private partner would fully finance the renovation of the area. In return, the private partner would obtain the right to build and profit from commercial facilities at the space. The activists and alternative artists currently occupying Rog would be able to participate in the CCA, but strictly through official channels (public tenders). In other words, most of the existing alternative art and social activities were omitted from the plan. The city has yet to find a suitable private investor. With insufficient resources of its own, the city has had little choice but to put up with the activists. It has however made efforts to limit their activities by stationing security guards at the gates of the facility with the aim of preventing gatherings and events with more than 100 participants – supposedly for safety reasons. Permanent living quarters (housing) were strictly forbidden (MOL: 21 March 2008). The Rog activists have been engaged in an ongoing conflict with the security service ever since, and the authorities continue to use any legal means they can against them. A major conflict emerged in June 2016, when the city hired a construction company to open a building site in the middle of the Rog complex in order to have the legal grounds for the eviction of the Rog activists.

Public opinion was mobilised against the aggressive actions of the municipality, and the Rog activists resisted fiercely. Rehashing their previous statements, the authorities claimed that the use of Rog facilities by the activists was supposed to be temporary. The activists defended their resistance by citing the public interest. Namely, the city's proposed renovation plan was based on public-private partnership, but due to a lack of funds and a lack of interest from the private sector, it could not be implemented. The Rog activists, on the other hand, managed to provide, without any substantial financial resources or bureaucratic procedures, most of the very same activities and services that the city had promised. The activists further championed the advantages of the self-managing principles of the autonomous community and of horizontal, democratic decision making, voluntarism, etc. as opposed to bureaucratic, profit-oriented measures and policies that benefit only established artists and culture workers and exclude any kind of alternative and political radicalism.

The current system, whereby certain public utilities in realms of culture and entertainment and certain social services on the municipal level are provided for, has proved to be capable of integrating those individuals and groups who, in line with their precarious status in the labour market or informal principles of organisation, otherwise would have little or no opportunity to conduct permanent activities for the public good, since they do not have the time or resources, or, for that matter, any interest in competing for public tenders. The Ljubljana-based organisation Slovenian Philanthrophy – The Society for the Promotion of Volunteering (*Slovenska filantropija – Zveza za promocijo prostovoljstva*), whose members perform many similar activities, enjoys support from the city.

The aim of the following article is to investigate the deeper reasons why the activist community at Rog, while sharing some similarities with mainstream volunteer organisations, is unacceptable to the city's authorities. The answer lies in autonomy. Both sides invoked the principle of autonomy as a solution for the conflict, but their respective understandings of this principle are radically different. The article will first elaborate upon the concept of autonomy in social theory. It will examine the innovative strategies used in the 1980s in Slovenia (then still a socialist republic of Yugoslavia) to provide certain (marginal) public utilities. These strategies will help explain the main shortcomings of public-private partnership that are at the heart of the conflict between the city of Ljubljana and Rog.

2 Autonomy as a concept

Reliable documentary sources on the conflict between the Rog Autonomous Factory and the city of Ljubljana are difficult to obtain, since virtually all meetings between the parties were informal. The city's public statements regarding the conflict are short on substance and mostly address the legal obligations of the city

and the Rog activists' alleged violation of the agreements and rules. The public statements of Rog's users are somewhat more substantial. But the most interesting material are statements the city's negotiators made to the press immediately after talks with representatives of the Rog community in 2016. When the conflict escalated in June 2016 (the city appointed a building company and a security service for Rog), public opinion was clearly on the side of the Rog community. In response, the city's main negotiator, *Uroš Grilc*, gave the following statement: *"from our angle there are no reservations with regard to creating a Rog Centre management model that takes into account the specifics of the temporary users' autonomy."* At the same time, however, the city made it clear that all activities then at Rog would not be accommodated. The Rog activists were not satisfied with the city's response, stating that *"all the propositions regarding the extension of the activity program, but also the possibility of co-management and autonomy that would supposedly be granted to the users in the new Rog Centre, were extremely vague, so we find it hard to respond to the statements given by secretary Grilc"* (*Dnevnik*: 11 June 2016). The city remained committed to the public tender principle as the only way to obtain financial resources and access to the municipal property. Existing activities would have been transformed and separated into projects. As such, they would have to compete not only with established NGO and commercial bidders involved in similar services and activities, but almost certainly with other people and groups within Rog itself. The Rog activists knew this would completely ruin their community. These are obviously two distinct understandings of autonomy. And the distinction can only be understood in a historical perspective. The city's understanding of autonomy is clear. The Rog activists may practice and promote any activities they want and manage and coordinate them as they please, and they may promote any values they choose, as long as they do so as a private legal entity that respects the law and the rules of the game. Autonomy thus defined is basically little more than the freedom of economic initiative guaranteed by The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (Article 74). Legal grounds for issuing public tenders for financing cultural projects on the municipal level are found in the Act Regulating the Exercise of the Public Interest in Culture, Article 62 of which prescribes, among other things, competition between private entities for financial support for cultural projects. Young artists and other individuals wishing to perform activities in the public good are essentially forced to act as entrepreneurs. Competing for public tenders takes a great deal of time that would otherwise be available for the production of the cultural goods, but above all competition alienates cultural producers from one another. This is the essence of neoliberalism – the marketisation and commodification of social activities, production and even human relations to the greatest possible degree. It comes as no surprise that the activists at Rog have a different understanding of autonomy. For them, autonomy is rooted in the democratic assembly and informal association of producers, performers and activists working together to ensure material conditions for their activities. Like the entrepreneurial principle of autonomy, this democratic coordination of

activities is also time consuming, and the time spent could, of course, be used for other activities. A key difference, however, is that this autonomy presupposes solidarity instead of alienation. The history of this kind of autonomy dates back to the nineteenth century. It is the history of an alternative modernisation based on a resentment of state and municipal bureaucracies alienated from authentic public needs but in harmony with the interests of the capitalist ruling class. The Paris commune of 1871, the movement of workers' and solders' assemblies (the soviets) and peasants' communes during the Russian revolutions of 1905–1907 and 1917 and, more recently, autonomist movements in the cities of northern Italy in the 1970s have traditionally been viewed as examples of such alternatives (Anweiler, 1974; Wright, 2002; Gluckstein, 2006). The main idea behind all these historical examples lies in dissatisfaction with the separation of the management of common affairs – or, in our case, public provisions – and the beneficiaries of this management. Assemblies shouldn't be just legislate, they should also execute, and they should be the purview not of professional politicians (MPs), but of delegates with short mandates and in permanent contact with their communities and places of work that can be recalled at any time. The management of public affairs of any kind should be simplified to the greatest possible extent so that any literate person can partake in it. As Lenin put it in 1917:

All citizens are transformed into hired employees of the state, which consists of the armed workers. *All* citizens become employees and workers of a single countrywide state "syndicate". All that is required is that they should work equally, do their proper share of work, and get equal pay. The accounting and control necessary for this have been *simplified* by capitalism to the utmost and reduced to the extraordinarily simple operations—which any literate person can perform—of supervising and recording, knowing the four rules of arithmetic, and issuing appropriate receipts (Lenin, 2014: 140).

In practise, these historical attempts at radical democratic autonomism have for the most part failed. The Paris commune of 1871 was brutally crushed by government military forces in less than three months, and the Russian Soviets – as basic and autonomous units of the state "syndicate" Lenin had in mind – eventually gave way to a conventional bureaucracy completely alienated from its citizens. Italian autonomism, on the other hand, survived; its democratic principles for the management of small urban communities still have a place in a number of alternative communities around the world, including Rog. But these communities are marginal and all face similar problems; being an obstacle to neoliberal city planning, they usually find it hard to defend their claims on infrastructural facilities in the long run. Even though Rog has been fairly successful in this regard (the community has resisted for more than 10 years), it faces the same general difficulty as other similar autonomous communities, namely that its members are unable to meet their essential economic needs inside their community. Contemporary urban autonomous communities that can provide for only a limited amount of their members' needs differ considerably from the utopian self-

sustainable peasant communities of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, since their members have to earn a living outside the community. Constantly facing the threat of eviction and the exhaustion and disillusionment of their members, urban autonomous communities actually share some similarities with private enterprises, NGOs and volunteers, since their conditions of existence make them considerably more fragile than public institutions and institutes. For this reason, contemporary social theory tends to define the autonomy of the activities of social movements not as fixed, but as relational: *"there is no definitive ground for demands for autonomy to stand on. Instead, social movements' demands for autonomy are embedded in specific social, economic, political and cultural contexts, giving rise to possibilities as well as impossibilities of autonomous practices"* (Böhm & Dinerstein & Spicer, 2010: 17). These authors correctly highlight the tendency of *"incorporation of the social movement activities into the neo-liberal service provisions of the state"* (Ibid.: 18). This tendency is at the heart of the conflicts between Rog and the city of Ljubljana. Given the current systemic and institutional arrangements, the ideal outcome seems to be the continuation of the status quo, since radical social movements are currently in no position to change the systemic framework and thus overcome the neoliberal order. It is our hypothesis that the current institutional arrangement is capable of co-opting prominent alternative social activities and including them in the provision of public utilities, but only at the expense of the solidarity- and democracy-based social relations embedded in these activities. In other words: the current system has no capacity for democratisation. These capacities were lost in the transition from socialism to capitalism. Before we investigate the city's current plans for Rog, we will briefly look at this transition.

3 The Provision of public utilities and services on the margins of socialist Slovenia

From 1945 to 1990 the provision of public utilities and services in socialist Slovenia was based on public property: *"all legal entities were uniform, for they were all managed using funds from the people's property, which was indivisible and uniform, the distinction between public and private in regard to the people's property was out of the question; all assets were neither public nor private, but collective, belonging to the people. Public institutes or organisations of collective work had the same position as 'ordinary' organisations of collective work or companies"* (Brezovnik, 2014: 313–314). This legal arrangement was ideologically and politically rooted in the Yugoslav system of socialist self-management that took shape starting in the late 1940s as an immediate response to Yugoslavia's split with the Cominform and the Soviet Union. In the realm of the economy, socialist self-management in the 1950s and 1960s more or less meant vast autonomy for individual companies, which by the 1960s had evolved from production capacities of the Soviet type to those of typical modern companies, and which had to sell their products on the market and be accountable for workers'

wages. In other words, companies in Yugoslavia had to become profitable. In politics, socialist self-management meant decentralisation, the deepening of the autonomy of federal republics and local municipalities or *communes*, as they were originally known until 1970s. In theory, the leading political force in the state, The League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY), and its local branch, The League of Communists of Slovenia (LCS), were not supposed to exercise political power directly, but indirectly, through their ideological influence (Centrih, 2014). The LCY and LCS were defined as socio-political organisations (SPO), which meant they were legally equal to other official SPOs such as trade unions, The Socialist Alliance of Working People (SAWP), the Party's youth organisation and the League of Veterans. With the new constitution of 1974, SPOs were represented by a special chamber on the level of the federal and republic assemblies, but also on the level of municipal (communal) assemblies. The LC, the trade unions and the youth organisation also had cells at most companies and other institutions.

In practise, however, the LC never surrendered the power it gained in the revolution and national liberation struggle from 1941 to 1945. It became a mass organisation; it proliferated assemblies and peoples' councils in virtually all aspects of social and economic life in order to include more or less the entire active population in policy/decision making processes (Repe, 2015: 82; Centrih, 2016: 331 – 333; Zajc, 2017). The system for the provision of public utilities and services developed accordingly. In 1971, amendments to the federal constitution established self-managing interest communities (SICs). These communities were first defined as associations of producers and users of specific "*services in special social interest"* – these services would be later called "*public utilities"* (Brezovšek, 1983: 23; Brezovnik, 2008: 16). There were essentially two types of SICs: a) those in the fields of science, education, culture, child care, etc.; b) those dedicated to the utilisation of public goods such as road maintenance, energy, housing, communal utility services, etc. (Ribičič, 1973: 431). SICs were explicitly defined not as institutions of governance. They were supposed to *"enable the realisation of common needs and interests of associated stakeholders free from any interference from higher authorities, hierarchies and organisations"* (Brezovšek, 1983: 26).The institutional arrangements described above followed in the radical anticapitalist democratic legacy of the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Russian Revolution. In theory, the citizens were to be involved in absolutely all decision making procedures, especially in their municipalities (communes) and places of work. The main criteria for participation in decision making was not competence on a given issue, but the objective material interests of the individual. As a consequence, in the 1960s and the 1970s the Yugoslav state was flooded with assemblies, councils, boards of coordination, groups and committees. Federal and republic assemblies were involved in the hyperproduction of legislation and regulations regarding decision making procedures in municipalities and companies, which in practice severely limited the initiative and creativity of workers and citizens (Županov, 1983). One sociologist who investigated decision-

making processes on the municipal level noted that considerable amounts of time and effort were expended in the complicated working procedures of assemblies: *"Establishing a formal structure for the municipality we (...) created a more complicated structure than required by the tasks needing to be addressed"* (Jerovšek, 1969: 8). In order to achieve optimal efficiency these procedural obstacles were bypassed through informal structures at the municipalities, i.e. by informal groups of influential individuals at high-ranking positions at companies who were active in the SPOs (Jerovšek, 1969: 11). In other words: Yugoslav sociologists at the time discovered the "dark underside" of radical democracy. Its supposed advantage over Stalinist bureaucratic deformations, namely that it promoted the direct involvement of the masses in decision making procedures, generated deficiencies which reproduced the very non-democratic power networks which the official ideology regarded as the main obstacle to the further development of socialist democracy.

It is worth noting that pretty much the same "deformations" can easily be detected in contemporary radical social movements and non-parliamentary leftist political parties, especially in their initial ("idealist") phase of development, when they operate – at least nominally – in line with principles of direct democracy and consensus. In his work on municipal assemblies in Slovenia in the late 1960s and early 1970s, sociologist *Janez Jerovšek* observed that delegates in municipal assemblies represent different groups and social categories but that, above all, they occupy distinct posts in various hierarchies. In municipal assemblies these influential delegates may nominally be on equal terms with their peers, but due to their influence and control over resources of great importance for their municipalities, their real power is much greater (Jerovšek, 1969: 11). A similar social composition becomes apparent among the participants of the assemblies at alternative social centres like Rog. They may be equal in theory, but some members have more free time available to invest in the community's activities and are able to finance their personal activities at the social centre at least partly from external (usually NGO) resources; they have connections in the media and are able to promote their work publicly, or they know local firefighters and scouts and are able to use valuable and indispensable equipment for free. Reliable empirical data concerning conflicts and group dynamics within Rog is hard to come by since, to our knowledge, no research on the subject has been conducted. The Rog activists have however publicly stated that certain prominent personalities who have a noticeably negative effect on the facility, the user community and the surrounding area had been disabled. The assembly minutes also mention individuals and groups at the facility who do not cooperate with the assembly (Zapisnik izredne skupščine Rog, 7. June 2007; Javno pismo skupščine Tovarne Rog, 3. May 2016). The fact that the Rog website does not contain transcripts of the assemblies' minutes from late spring 2009 on is also telling: this is the period when the number and extent of activities, groups and projects at Rog were on the rise. Members and groups intervened decisively during the so-called refugee crisis

(autumn 2015 and spring 2016) by developing solidarity networks and facilities. According to public statements, however, assemblies were not frequently held at this time due to other meetings concerning the activities of individual groups (Javno pismo skupščine Tovarne Rog, 3. May 2016). At this point it is impossible to prove empirically that influential and powerful individuals were able to override assembly decisions, or even enforce their particular interests and form a closed circle of peers.[2] The internal dynamics of alternative social centres are often burdened with conflicts between such informal circles of influence and the assemblies. Sometimes this results in the disintegration of a collective into distinct clubs and centres; more often, the result is the disillusionment of individual community members. On the other hand, it is absolutely necessarily and only fair to emphasise that conflicts of this kind have a positive dimension: they have the potential to enrich the activities of the community. It is safe to assume that the 11th anniversary of Rog is proof in and of itself that the community's cohesion was strong enough to resolve any conflicts and that internal fragmentation had not led to disintegration. It might be argued that external pressure from the city of Ljubljana empowered the Rog collective, that is, the assembly as opposed to particular groups and their interests. Due to the threat of eviction, assembly meetings became frequent again (Javno pismo skupščine Tovarne Rog, 3. May 2016). In public debates, Rog's defenders were able to present the public benefits of their survival as a whole, and not only of individual projects or groups. The city's plans for a public-private partnership with Rog were, on the other hand, tailored to individual projects for a reason. We will investigate these plans in the next section.

The 1980s were a period of deep crisis for the Yugoslav economy and political system, and the SICs faced harsh criticism. These critiques detected pretty much the same deformations as earlier investigations on the workings of the communal assemblies. Alongside the formal SIC system of procedures there existed an informal parallel system of decision making based on alienated power structures and the executive boards of SPOs. The unequal powers, knowledge and interests of constitutive partners, that is, of service providers on the one hand and service consumers on the other, represented a structural deficiency of the SIC system for public utilities and service provision. While the interests of consumers typically varied, the interests of service providers were generally similar and allowed them act in unison; above all, providers possessed far greater knowledge of the utilities subject to bargaining procedures. This was especially true of health care services. In order to compensate for the weaknesses of the service users, professional services appeared. These services provided bargaining partners with data and propositions, but it turned out that these materials were not easily comprehensible. As a rule, the propositions were declined only in exceptional cases. The result was that consumer delegates had far more contact with professional services than with service providers, let alone with the social base of citizens/consumers they officially represented, who rarely received any feedback from their delegates

about the progress of negotiations. The real bargaining between SIC partners was over the price of services; the problem of their quality were hardly addressed. But during the economic crisis of the 1980s, these decisions were considerably curtailed by higher authorities. A lack of horizontal integration between distinct SICs was also observed, so the role of coordination was performed by SPOs or republic administrations, and this in practise demoted SICs to the status of para-state institutions (Brezovšek, 1988: 267–290). This status was essential to their disappearance during the transition to capitalism, which was already underway in 1989:

The tasks of the self-managing interest groups were transferred to the competent governmental and municipal bodies or services. In order to fill the void resulting from poorly adapted legislation, in the first year of changes, the former assemblies of the self-managing interest groups were transformed into bodies that had the task of monitoring the implementation of policy and decisions and of providing opinions and suggestions in the field (Brezovnik, 2014: 314).

SICs ultimately turned out to be a less than ideal institutional approach to providing opportunities for young people in Slovenia who wished to partake in social activities and projects that demanded far fewer bureaucratic obstacles and direct intervention from the SPOs or the state. If anything, involvement in the SICs was time consuming, and those involved in the alternative social movements and subculture groups which emerged in Slovenia during the 1980s were looking for different utilities that would meet their needs in a more autonomous way. Paradoxically, one such utility was to be found at the Alliance of the Socialist Youth of Slovenia (ASYS), an official SPO that over the course of the 1980s became more and more autonomous from its "grown up" counterpart , that is, the LCS.

The Yugoslav socio-political system is often simplistically perceived as totalitarian; after all, it wasn't possible to freely form SPOs that would be able to enter into competition with official regime SPOs under the control of the LCY/LCS. However, these views overlook the very essence and dynamics of the Yugoslav SPOs, which were mass organisations. This is especially true of the ASYS – its member base was virtually the entire youth population over the age of 14. Managing such an enormous group was a difficult task, especially when it came to activating members, so self-initiative was more than welcome, especially in smaller Slovenian towns and villages. Sociologist *Gregor Tomc* explained the phenomenon by noting that alternative groups were granted the autonomy to perform in those *"spheres of social and cultural life which were not considered strategically vital for the immediate self-preservation of the authorities"* (cit. in: Vurnik, 2005: 265). Emerging alternative youth groups and movements eventually took advantage of those circumstances. In the first half of 1980s the leadership of the ASYS began to notice that it was perceived by the youth as "a service facility to obtain public spaces and money" (Vurnik, 2005: 29). The ASYS supported the

punk subculture throughout the 1980s, most importantly by providing facilities for concerts, but also by shielding the punks from other SPOs and a cultural establishment that was hostile to their movement. In the second half of the 1980s, the ASYS established working groups for the peace movement, ecologists, etc. In provincial areas the ASYS proved to be an appropriate overarching structure for the establishment of autonomous alternative youth clubs. An excellent example comes from Trate, a small rural community in the eastern part of Slovenia. The youth of the town took the initiative in the 1980s and founded a basic local organisation of the ASYS as a way to establish an alternative rock club and publish fanzines. With minimum bureaucratic effort and involvement in mainstream politics, the youth of Trate were able to satisfy most of their immediate cultural and social needs. Ethnologist Rajko Muršič, who studied the Trate case, gave an accurate remark: *"The mere fact that it was actually possible to establish their own organisation, integrated into the system, was a pure manifestation of self-management, but at the same time it also meant its very end; in real, existing socialism of the self-management type everything went to hell when decelerated self-management actually came into being"* (Muršič, 1995: 109 – 110).

At this point we may conclude that the autonomy of movements and groups was preserved by the institutional arrangements described above; what's more, they were able to perform their activities for the benefit of the public good without being subsumed by time-consuming self-management structures. This shortcomings of self-management as a political system would prove to be fatal. As historian Marko Zajc put it: *"The creators of socialist self-management (...) didn't address two dilemmas which contributed substantially to the disintegration of the system: what happens when people resent active political involvement and don't utilise mechanisms of self-management; what happens when people want to be politically active and utilise mechanisms of self-management, but for the wrong purpose"* (Zajc, 2017: 189). Democratisation took place within the ASYS; by incorporating new social movements and groups, over the course of the 1980s it gained autonomy from its elders (the LCS) and became rather powerful in society in general. At the same time, the political system of socialist self-management became redundant. This opened the way for a conventional multi-party parliamentary system wherein the ASYS was downgraded – it became a separate political party in 1990 – becoming a conventional political enterprise with little sympathy for initiatives from below. As a consequence, social alternatives in Slovenia since the 1990s have had to look for another strategy. They eventually found it in alternative social centres in Italy. The story of Rog is an example of this strategic shift.

4 Public private partnership as the city's principal strategy in dealing with Rog

The city of Ljubljana delivered and began pursuing most of its plans and proposals for Rog from 2008 to 2012. It could be argued that the "occupation" by alternative groups and individuals in 2006, which substantially enriched Ljubljana with alternative cultural and social programs, also attracted the interest of the media and led to public debates, which ultimately spurred the authorities to do something about the city's property. Another important factor was a change at the top of municipal government. An ambitious new mayor, *Zoran Janković*, was elected in 2006, at roughly the same time Rog was occupied. Janković, The former CEO of Mercator – the largest retail chain in Slovenia – immediately proposed several plans to make the city of Ljubljana more attractive to tourists and investors. His first move involved closing the city centre to private transportation, renovating squares previously used as parking facilities and similar measures. Rog, which is located in the heart of Ljubljana, immediately became a challenge for Janković. Since financing most of his ambitious plans (a football stadium and basketball arena, for example) through the City's budget was out of the question, the mayor took up the instrument of public-private partnership. The process of forming a public-private partnership for the new Ljubljana stadium was fraught with difficulties but ultimately succesfull. The search for private partners for the renovation of Rog, on the other hand, would prove to be much more complex.

In May 2008 the City published a tender for the renovation of the Rog factory area. The area to be renovated through a public-private partnership was to consist of two parts: private infrastructure (hotels, apartments, restaurants, parking facilities, etc.) and facilities for contemporary arts and creative industries. The value of the investment being sought was estimated at 38,140,000 EUR.[3] Any Rog activities inconsistent with this commercialisation were precluded from the very start. In practise this would have meant, for example, that movements of The Erased and Invisible Workers of the World (an informal association of migrant workers who were not paid for their labour following the collapse of the Slovenian building industry) would almost certainly lose facilities vital to the survival of their support communities. Other Rog users would not have fared much better. In December 2008, MX–SI , an architectural firm from Barcelona, won the tender.[4] In December 2009, the city council cited the public interest in its proposal that the Rog Centre for Contemporary Arts (Rog CCA) be realised through public-private partnership.[5] Between 2010 and 2012 the city prepared project documentation, called for additional studies on the planned Rog CCA, which were to be financed through the European Second Chance project, commenced public discussions and even held an exhibition of the plan for the project. In January 2012 the city finally issued a public tender to find a private investor for the project.[6] A suitable partner has yet to appear, and studies on the issue speak volumes as to why that is. In 2011 the Institute for Civilization and Culture in Ljubljana published a study

entitled "SWOT analysis of revitalisation project for the former Rog factory",[7] which examined the business and social environment of the planned Rog CCA. An even more important study entitled "Utilization Concepts Draft of Rog Centre of Contemporary Arts – Analysis of Focus Groups" was prepared by environmental sociologist *Matjaž Uršič*.[8] The first analysis argued, with a certain degree of scepticism, that the Rog CCA project could be a success story for cooperation between the economy and culture and could be flexible enough to meet the challenges of the environment. The latter study, however, clearly revealed a number of obstacles. *Uršič* held six focus groups made up of different potential stakeholders in the Rog CCA project: temporary Rog users, experts in the field (from NGOs, institutes, etc.), public administrators, producers (artists, designers, architects, representatives from educational institutions), representatives of the economy (architecture, design, visual art) and international experts and artists. Most of the stakeholders agreed that the city's plans are too vague and that the plan for financing the project is unsatisfactory; their identification with the project was low. Uršič's study hewed closely to the city's agenda by focusing more on commercially promising architecture, design and visual arts and including stakeholders from such fields to the exclusion of social activists. Nonetheless, it became clear that the focus groups had considerably different visions for the future of Rog and its purpose and management model. While temporary Rog users, producers and, for the most part, international experts/artists advocated a bottom-up approach and local (grass-roots) production with an emphasis on unestablished producers, representatives of the economy and public administration and some experts advocated a business-friendly approach, in accordance with which the objective of Rog CCA would be to attract an international "creative class". The latter group further resented Rog's "alternative" image, while the economy focus group criticised the small share of private financial resources – only 20% – in the proposed Rog CCA. Temporary users, producers and international experts voiced concerns about gentrification, noting that the Rog CCA would exclude many groups of artists and that the accompanying loss of creative diversity would have negative consequences for the city. *Uršič* further noted a lack of knowledge of the current temporary users of Rog among certain focus groups and a lack of recognition for their artistic work. There were substantial differences in how the groups viewed the proposed management structure of Rog CCA. According to the city's plan, Rog CCA would be a public institute (*javni zavod*). As such, it would be run by a chief administrator who would coordinate work with a program council made up of domestic and foreign experts in the fields of architecture, design, research-education and creative industries. Current temporary users, producers and international experts viewed the proposed management structure as too rigid and hierarchical. Representatives of the economy, on the other hand, advocated for a more managerial approach in order to promote market orientation; experts and public administration representatives also wanted to a significant part of the activities of Rog CCA to be reserved for the private sector (Uršič, 2011).

In other words, the city's proposal for the Rog CCA was met with criticism or at the very least serious reservations from all stakeholders. While economic actors had their doubts regarding the profitability and market orientation of potential investments in Rog CCA, temporary users and producers criticised the rigidity of the proposed managerial approach and the lack of interest in current activities at Rog. Doubts and concerns about the economic aspects of the proposed renovation would prove to be well founded, as the city still hasn't found a private investor. But most importantly, the temporary users of Rog and independent producers (who are not personally involved in activities at Rog) were in agreement on most issues. It therefore comes as no suprise that the Rog activists were able to gain recognition for their activities – and their resistance – among the broader public and in the professional community.

5 Conclusion

At this point, Rog must be viewed as a marginal provider of public utilities in the field of culture and a panoply of other social services. But this marginality is relative. Compared to established and state/municipality-sponsored public utility providers in similar fields, Rog's size, assets and resources are negligible. Its potential for the future, however, is enormous, since it is a unique laboratory for the invention of new social relations and modes of providing public utilities in this part of Europe. As such it has already won a great deal of international recognition, not least of all from the international experts included in Uršič's study, who were critical of the city's plans. It is worth noting that Rog did not close itself off or become a ghetto. The divided opinions in the study presented above suggest that Rog enjoys the support of broad sections of civil society and has considerable potential to build new alliances and networks. By doing so, Rog could potentially establish a closer connection with the public, which would only further enrich its activities. It is reasonable to suggest that at this point, the current status quo is probably the best solution. Any attempts to renovate the Rog factory area pursuant to the city's vision, at least as it currently stands, would inevitably spell the end of this social experiment, even if some of Rog's current users were to be included.

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Notes:

[1] The term »erased Slovenian residents« refers to a 18,305 persons (almost 1% of the Slovene population) who were secretly erased from the register of permanent residents by the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Slovenia on 26 February 1992. When

Slovenia on 25 June 1991 declared its independence 200,000 persons (10% of the population) did not hold Slovene republican citizenship. On the basis of Article 40 of the Citizenship of the Republic of Slovenia Act the majority of this persons were able to obtain the citizenship status. However, those who for several reasons failed to apply in the short period of six-month, or were rejected by the authorities, lost their status as legal residents. The Erased consequently lost the freedom of free movement, right to work, social provisions, health care, education etc. Slovenian Constitutional Court in 1999 and 2003 declared legal framework for the erasure as unconstitutional. In subsequent years, approximately 12,000 persons received the status of permanent residents. Since 2002 the Erased had been organized as a movement and eventually found an appropriate place in Rog to coordinate their activities (Dedić & Jalušič & Zorn, 2003; Zorn & Čebron, 2008: 8 – 11; Zorn, 2013).

[2] Individual and group interviews would have been the best way to obtain appropriate data, but unlike in the 1960s and 1970s research on Slovenian municipal dynamics, the contemporary researchers will have to bypass the resentment of such interviews inside the community under investigation.

[3] See: https://www.ljubljana.si/assets/Razpisi/gradivo-rog-koncno.pdf.

[4] See: https://www.ljubljana.si/sl/aktualno/natecaj-za-urbanisticno-ureditev-obmocja-tovarne-rog-zakljucen/.

[5] See: https://www.uradni-list.si/glasilo-uradni-list-rs/vsebina/2009-01-4822?sop=2009-01-4822; https://www.uradni-list.si/glasilo-uradni-list-rs/vsebina/2009-01-4823?sop=2009-01-4823.

[6] See: https://www.ljubljana.si/sl/aktualno/center-sodobnih-umetnosti-rog/; http://www.secondchanceproject.si/raziskave-2; https://www.ljubljana.si/assets/Razpisi/navodila-za-izdelavo-prijave-1.pdf.

[7] See: http://www.secondchanceproject.si/wp-content/uploads/PSPN_povzetek_matrika_feb_2011.pdf.

[8] See: http://www.secondchanceproject.si/wp-content/uploads/Analiza_osnutek_ZU_FINAL.pdf; http://www.secondchanceproject.si/wp-content/uploads/UC_Summary_ENG_FINAL.pdf.

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