

Promprylad Workshop by Duane Bahia Benatti in collaboration with Duygu von Kaban and Elvia Wilk

Is it possible to transform an old soviet industrial building complex into a creative space and bring cultural, social and economic development for the local population *without gentrification*?

This was the main question driving the 14-day workshop “Promprylad – Industrial Heritage.” Promprylad is a factory located in Ivano Frankivsk, Ukraine, and has more than 100 years of history, throughout which it has served various purposes. In the past it contained industrial machinery for producing gas and gas meters, electronic devices, umbrellas, automobile gratings, and many other items. Some of the machinery is defunct, but some still serves the current needs of the region¹.

Because it is a legacy, its history provides important information about the surrounding area of central Ivano-Frankivsk. The industrial complex was a reference for mechanical engineers and a symbol of hope and nostalgia for much of the population. Currently some parts of the factory are used by local rock bands for music rehearsal, some are workshops, and some belong to a private company. Ivano-Frankivsk’s new generation is starving for culture, and the city lacks a modern meeting point with a dynamic, multicultural program and a modern technological infrastructure. Young residents do not want Promprylad to become another abandoned relic of past governments.

The workshop “Promprylad – Industrial Heritage” is one of a series of meet-up exchanges, in this case supported by EVZ, MitOst and Teple Misto. The first part of the workshop took place from August 12-20 in Ivano Frankivsk and the second from October 11-18 in Berlin. Half of the participants are from or currently reside in Germany and the other half are from Ukraine. In total 18 participants: designers, artists, town planners, architects and researchers.



¹ <http://www.prylad.com.ua>

Ivano Frankivsk, August 12-20

We the gentrification

Ukrainian-Russian curator Maria Semenenko led the group in the first part of the workshop. She proposed the group conduct interviews with current and former Promprylad workers, the Teple Misto team, and the inhabitants of the district. In conjunction participants conducted archival research.

The group split into teams according to their interests: the visual aspects of Promprylad, common and communication spaces, sounds of the space, interviews and others.

While in Ivano-Frankivsk, some of participants noticed the possibility that the group might be seen as “agents of gentrification.” It is well-known that when artists go to an industrial area, some years later this area often becomes more affluent. The project participants felt an ethical responsibility concerning the group’s real function there.²

After a few days, the group was encouraged by the curator to elaborate a presentation of our brief research, which would be viewed by the public on the last day of the workshop. We then decided to create critical and ephemeral interventions into the space, excluding the possibility of creating artworks that could be used somehow as “industrial decoration” in the present or future.

Our presentation occurred in the outdoors of Promprylad as a pop-up exhibition, among many events of the City Scanning Session Festival, which was curated by the collective Metasitu and included musical concerts, exhibitions, and talks about urbanism and heritage. We presented: an installation composed by factory signage in one of the building’s windows; an installation of posters showing interviews with the public about Promprylad’s future; sound experiments using the sounds of Promprylad’s machines; an artist’s book with pictures of recent workers; a talk of Ivano-Frankivsk-based writer Volodymyr Eshkilev; a gathering with food; a domino game with current workers; and a collage intervention on panels combining prints of Promprylad’s graphic elements and historical pictures of women workers.

²<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/28/hipsters-property-developers-gentrification-cereal-killer-cafe>
<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/may/23/demise-creative-class-regeneration-gentrification-city-links>



Berlin (October 11-18)

The group meetings took place in ZKU (Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik), a former railway depot that today receives international artists through self-financed residency programmes. Project coordinator Miodrag Kuč conducted the group. Some new participants joined for this part, replacing others from the first group unable to join again.

Through visits to heritage buildings selected by Kuč, workshop participants noticed the complexity of Berlin's architecture and cityscape. The buildings exhibit a range of distinct historical legacy usage types. Some of the places visited included the socially engaged convent REFO-Moabit, a historical industrial plant that is today property of the multinational Siemens, a "museum" of cars, a former print company currently housing the creative space Rota Print, and many others.

Though some legacy spaces in Berlin are currently part of a heated dispute between private companies and artists,³ cultural initiatives and creative spaces in Berlin are considerably secure due to an innovative financing system. To establish a registered association (e.V.—*eigetrager Verein*) is free and relatively easy. Once the e.V. is formed, one pays low taxes and is able to apply for funds offered by German public and private institutions. When associations are established and generate income, some then become non-profit organizations (GmbH—*Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung*), and are then able to apply for widespread grants and funds offered not only by German institutions but also EU institutions.

The combination of available industrial-scale spaces and financial support, plus well-structured institutions, social support, gender equality and anti-discrimination initiatives, and free education, are reasons for Berlin to attract qualified creative professionals and investors. Migration from creatives to Berlin is one of the reasons Berlin has so much cultural diversity as opposed to other cities also vying to become world creative capitals.⁴

There are interesting mechanisms and rules created over previous decades in cooperation between civil society organizations, the Professional Association of Visual Artists Berlin- (BBK (Berufsverband bildender Künstler*innen), and the government, which help to bring dignity, dynamism and better working conditions for artists and creatives. Examples include the fixed rental price for ateliers and co-working spaces, and the fact that doctors and lawyers can buy artworks from artists and deduct a portion of the payment from their taxes. Not only beneficial for artists, these practices can also play an important role for pro-gender equality issues and democracy in general. For example, many German universities reserve 50% of professorial and other positions for female professionals.

³ <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/berlin-uferhallen-studios-sale-1063823>;
<http://www.artnews.com/2017/11/10/2017-preis-der-nationalgalerie-finalists-speak-awards-practices/>

⁴ <https://news.artnet.com/market/which-cities-are-best-for-artists-333760>

New McDonald's

McDonalds is the nickname of the art university from Ivano-Frankivsk that is located opposite Promprylad.

Whatever future decisions are made about Promprylad, is clear that moral values need to be prioritized in the elaboration of ideas for it renovation. These values are related not only to its legacy in particular but to the public politics of democratization in Ukraine. What laws and rules might allow economic growth for creatives and the art market?

How can Promprylad resist market interests that do not serve citizens? How can the building's future reflect the interests of older and younger generations? Is the implementation of creative spaces the best way to deal with a legacy that is as important to collective memory and identity as Promprylad?

Considering these questions, Promprylad has the potential to become a university for cultural management, urban research, art and design: able to value and rescue old sustainable practices, and to develop and modernize activities such as typography, Ukrainian textile art, or ceramics.

ETC.

<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/oct/26/gentrification-richard-florida-interview-creative-class-new-urban-crisis>

<https://www.facebook.com/promprylad.renovation/>