05 2016

Ljubljana: Call for support for Autonomous Factory ROG

Autonomous Factory ROG

The autonomous factory Rog is under threat of being evicted and destroyed by the municipal authorities which are pursuing their project of renovating the area into a centre for creative industries. Municipality plans to demolish 4 buildings at the end of may or beginning of june and then – depending on their financial capabilities – continue with the removal of all additions to the main factory building. For now, only one atelier is under threat of being demolished, but once the construction yard is established, the authorities can easily remove the skate park, a gallery, concert hall, circus space, social centre and other places. The municipality does not possess the financial means for the overall renovation and is pushing with demolition works only because the building permit issued for demolitions will expire on the 14th of june, 2016. We call for support for the autonomous factory Rog as much as you are able. You can help us in various ways:

- Sharing this call through your channels, networks and personal contacts.
- Writing a statement or letter of support
- Sending your statement or letter to municipal authorities
- Signing the petition

- Organising events in Rog or using our spaces for your usual activities between 26.5 and 14.6.
- Physical presence in the complex when the bulldozers come
- Your proposal

For question, suggestions and infos, you can contact us at:
skupscina [dot] tovarne [dot] rog [at] gmail [dot] com
You can track our activities on http://tovarna.org/

Important dates:

18.5. From 12:00 onwards: Working action – construction of all-Rog-toilets and spring cleaning
20.5. From 12:00 – Block party – groove&BBQ
21.5. At 17:00 – Meeting with support network
25.5. At 17:00 – Youth parade for unlimited use of Rog factory
14.6. – Expiration date of the building permit issued for destruction of additions
15.5. – 14.6. – Critical period when construction works will start

Since many of the people/collectives, who support us, know little of our history and because some brothers and sister organisations asked us for a model text that they can use for their support letter, we wrote a basic informational text below:

INTRO TO AUTONOMOUS FACTORY ROG

Rog factory is an industrial complex on the east edge of Ljubljana centre, which produced the famous Rog bicycles and was shut down in 1991. Since then it has laid abandoned, empty, and in deterioration for 15 years. In 2006 the area was occupied by engaged students, artists and activists, as a critical response to the post-socialist transition process (privatisation and de-industrialization), and erosion of public and social spaces

(individualisation and atomisation of society). The occupation pulled legitimacy from the need for places for non-formal artistic, cultural and political activity (autonomy, alternative culture, horizontal political organising).
Users secured and cleaned the spaces and established ateliers, workshops, galleries, skate-park, concert hall, recreational facilities and social centre among others. Despite the municipal efforts to block or disable the grassroot activities (refusal to sign the legal contract for temporary use, and not allowing the community to tap into public electricity network), the users used their self-initiative, collaboration and resourcefulness and in 10 years created one of the main locales of urban culture, critical thought and political activism on the level of city, state and beyond.

Today, there are around 15 organised collectives and around 15 individuals active in the factory in 30 spaces that are relatively self-sufficient and autonomous. The community is bound together through assembly which is the main political body following the principle of direct-democratic decision making and consulting. The activities taking place in Rog can be summarised as:

Artistic and cultural production – figural, contemporary, multimedia and performative arts, sculpture, graffiti, street theatre, circus, music production, ecological urban farming and permaculture, art theory, philosophy and political theory;
Recreational and motoric activities – skateboarding, rollerblading, and BMXing, kung fu, tai chi quan, silk dancing, break dancing and football;
Activism – grassroot political organising, networking, education and training, direct actions and building of horizontal political structures;
Social and music events – jam sessions, concert, club events, experimental musical-performative-social events, picnics,

gatherings, flea-markets, ect.;
Handy craft – construction works, repair and assembly of electronic and music equipment, recycling and manufacturing of furniture, permaculture workshops, clothes exchange, dressmaking/sewing and traditionally – bicycle repair, etc.

One year after the occupation – in 2007 – the municipality began with the plan for the renovation of the complex into "Creative Centre Rog" with the emphasis on redeveloping the space into an attractive area for international artists and tourists. With the help of EU-led project devoted for revitalisation of ex-industrial zones, they first proposed a public-private partnership to renovate the main factory building, construction of a design hotel, up-standard apartments and commercial programmes. The public to private ratio was 20:80%. One of the proposals also proposed the relocation of 3 art academies to Rog, but the deans opposed the proposal because of non-defined relations between the academic and commercial programmes and because they didn't want that their students – who are active in the factory – to lose their ateliers.

The municipality was never able to find an investor following the global recession, so they downscaled the project into an all-publicly financed "centre for architecture, design and visual arts" with the emphasis on developing the creative industries economic sector and helping the young designers with entering the labour market. The community of Rog users criticise the municipal project in following points:

Financially demanding project – the municipality doesn't possess enough funds to realize the project, and has not yet applied for EU funds. There is no guarantee that the municipality will finish the renovation project in the near future. There are enough

construction caves in Ljubljana already;
Spatially unnecessary – creative hubs already exist with developed social and business networks in Ljubljana that the municipality could infrastructurally and financially support instead of establishing new facilities ad nihilo which will need years to become functional
Commodification of artistic and cultural practices – Economic instrumentalisation, commercialisation, precarious jobs, low wages without security;
Gentrification of the city centre – beautification of space, shift of focus from citizens to tourists and consumers, surveillance and restriction of free use of public spaces, relocation of non-profitable uses and populations, etc.;
Top-down led project – current users were never included in concept-formation stage of the renovation project and were used only for testing the already formed programmatic and architectural proposal. They were only allowed to give opinions and suggestions, which were not thoroughly considered and included into the municipal plan;
Aversion toward grassroot practices – Municipal top-down approach is unwilling to recognize the existing practices, unables a opportunity for collaboration and creates antagonism between Rog users and municipal authorities;
Right to the city – city users and dwellers contribute to urban dynamics and therefore have a legitimate claim towards city matters.

We, the users of autonomous Rog factory do not accept the agreement for temporary use because of these facts:

There is no contract or other signed legal document between the municipality and the users. The users were prepared to sign such document, but the city officials refused and therefore prevented

legalisation;
The municipality never provided the minimal infrastructural and material conditions. The users used their own time, material resources and money to secure, maintain and manage the spaces;
After ten years of working in precarious conditions, regenerating the area with cultural activities and producing content in public/urban interest, we have a legitimate right to use and manage a property which is not legally ours;
Existing activities and horizontal mode of organisation carry greater potential for further development than the municipal proposal with rigid organisational structure and commercial orientation.

We demand that the municipality step down from their project which is destined for failure and recognise the potentials of existing activities and organisational structure. The municipality should provide the minimal infrastructural and physical
Taping into public electrical network, adaptation of protected south facade, restoration of windows, ecological sanation of galvanisation room and removal of asbest roof panels conditions and should respect the autonomy of the user community. The users are capable of further self-renovation of buildings, providing new contents and self-manage the already existent and working creative factory Rog.

We do not fight for the preservation of current state of affairs, we are struggling for our future autonomous development!

https://en.squat.net/2016/05/19/ljubljana-call-for-support-for-autonomous-factory-rog/#more-17172