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The Solution of the Space Requirements of State Archives in Slovakia

PETER DRAŠKABA AND JURAJ SPIRITZA

Abstract: The Archives of the Slovak Socialist Republic, with a tradition of many centuries, is facing a space problem due to the enormous growth of records and to the inadequate and often antiquated archival buildings. The Central State Mining Archives and the Regional State Archives have successfully renovated historic buildings to serve as archives. The Central State Archives and the District State Archives have chosen to construct new buildings as archival depots.

About the authors: Peter Draškaba is director of the Regional State Archives in Bratislava. Until September 1988 he worked in the Slovak Archives Administration of the Ministry of Interior and Living Environment of the Slovak Socialist Republic (SSR) with responsibility for the district state archives in Slovakia. He received his Ph.D. at the Faculty of Philosophy of Comenius University in Bratislava.

Juraj Spiritza has been special chief worker and head of the organization department of the Slovak Archives Administration of the Ministry of Interior and Living Environment of the SSR. He received his Ph.D. at the Faculty of Philosophy of Comenius University in Bratislava.

THE ARCHIVES OF THE Slovak Socialist Republic, one of the two national republics forming the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic has a tradition several centuries old. Municipal archives and archives of trustworthy places (*loca credibilia*) that fulfilled public notarial functions began in the Middle Ages. County archives have existed since the sixteenth century. The professional post of archivist has been certified since the eighteenth century.

The system of archives in Slovakia includes the state archives, archives of significant organizations such as Matica Slovenska, archives of significant institutions such as the Slovak national museum and Comenius University, and the archives of cultural and business enterprises.¹ Parish and diocesan archives follow the procedures for state archives.

The leading role of state archives in the archival system of Slovakia was legislatively enforced by a 1954 government decree. The present archives legislation of the Slovak National Council dates from January 1976. The preeminent archival institution is the Central State Archives of the Slovak Socialist Republic in Bratislava which fulfills the role of the national archives. Other archival institutions include the regional state archives in Banská Bystrica, Bratislava, Bytča, Košice, Levoca, Nitra, and Prešov; thirty-six district state archives; municipal archives in Bratislava and Košice; and the Central State Mining Archives in Banská Štiavnica. Because of the enormous growth in the number of records and the unsuitable location of many of the archives, great attention is being given to the solution of the space requirements for the archives in Slovakia. New archives have been built and historical buildings have been renovated for archival purposes.

The Central State Archives is housed in

new facilities, composed of a twelve-story building, a two-story underground film vault, and a conference hall that is the connector between the two parts. The building was ready for use in 1983 on the occasion of the XXII International Round Table Conference on Archives (CITRA) held in Bratislava. The central archives building is composed of four coordinated, inter-connected records depots which are ringed at their outer circumference by study rooms, laboratories, and public spaces. This design provoked objections during the planning stage, due to the dominating character of this solitary building, located at the top of the hill at the entrance to the city. After its completion the new building was named "construction of the year" in 1983, signifying that the architect had successfully translated the functional demands of the building into an architectural effect which met with the favorable response of archivists and the majority of the citizens of the capital of Slovakia. The new building's international status was confirmed by its inclusion in the International Council of Archives publication, *Modern Buildings of National Archives/Archivum*.²

The Central State Mining Archives, located in Banská Štiavnica, which was the leading center of mining in the second half of the eighteenth century, occupies a singular position in the system of state archives because of its unique collection. The large holdings of written records, maps, and plans document almost five centuries of national and private undertakings in mining, metallurgy, forestry, minting, and mining education, especially in the central Slovak and east Slovak mountain regions. The archives include information on the territory of Bohemia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. Since its establishment

¹Matica Slovenska is an organization promoting Slovakian culture and national identity.

²International Council on Archives, *Modern Buildings of National Archives/Archivum* 32 (Munich, New York: K. G. Saur, 1986): 123-32.

in 1950 the archives has had to struggle with insufficient storage space and with intolerably high moisture in the late-Gothic building in which it is housed. There was little hope of solving the situation by the construction of a new building; the solution seemed to be in the adaptation of suitable historic buildings. During 1980-81 a sixteenth-century school building was renovated and at present the rector's office of the former Mining and Forestry Academy is being renovated. In both buildings the reconstruction of roofs and outer walls, strengthening of ceilings, fitting of new electrical wiring, and other works necessary to meet the specific requirements of archives were carried out. The facade with its mining and forestry emblems is being restored to its original majesty. The authorities are considering the renovation of a third building in the center of the town which would provide adequate storage for current archives groups and space for future accessions.

Good results have also been obtained by the renovation of historic buildings for the use of the Regional State Archives. Two examples are the renovations of a stately Renaissance castle in Bytca for the Regional State Archives in Bytca and the renovations of two Gothic houses rebuilt in the sixteenth century for the Regional State Archives in Levoca. These examples are used even by conservationists to prove that it is possible to meet the specific demands of archival construction while taking care to protect historic monuments. In all these renovations priority was given to the repair of roofs to match the original construction, the securing of subterraneous and ground floor areas against moisture, and the construction of interior shelving so as not to obstruct architectural and decorative interest.

In the storage depots of the Regional State Archives in Kosice, which is housed in the former state administration building from the beginning of this century, ceilings were

strengthened without wet processes. The building was reinforced by a steel construction that is anchored in the basement and supports all the upper floors. The Regional State Archives in Nitra will be housed in an older mansion, which will have an addition built according to the plans of the original owner, who for financial reasons did not complete the house. When completed, the building will be three separate three-story depots that link with the mansion to form a four-wing building.

The renovation of historic buildings, although successful in many instances, has not proven to be the easiest or the most economical solution to the space requirements of archives. Therefore the various district state archives have decided that construction of new buildings for archival depots is the better solution; they have continued to adapt older buildings for administrative purposes.

L. Vlček's "Study of the building of District State Archives" (1971, unpublished) has become the basis for the first building project of the District State Archives begun in Topolčany in the early 1970s. Vlček proposed a flat building site as ideal, with the building to be composed of two cubes, one the working administration cube, the other a depot for archival material. The study has positively influenced the construction of buildings for archival purposes and it has become the model for other district archives.

This conception of a two-cubed archival building with the depot outfitted with self-supporting shelves based on prefabricated components allowed for the optimal loading capacity in the cube. To have a depot cube constructed independently of the working-administration cube offered the possibility of adding depot cubes in the future. The first archival building following this model has been in use more than fifteen years. During this short period one-fourth of the District State Archives have obtained new space. All the new buildings

are varieties of the type built in Topolcany. Atypical are the buildings of the archives in Dolny Kubin and Trencin, which are pavilions. None of the new archival buildings are being planned as one-cube buildings.

At the present time there are seven new proposed archival constructions for the District State Archives (DSA): the DSA Nove Zamky, a two-cube building connected by a passage; the DSA Roznava, a

four-cube building connected by passages; the DSA Rimavska Sobota and the DSA Bardejov, projects respecting the existing architecture of the towns; the DSA Ziar nad/Hronom, a three-cube building in which the depots are connected by the working-administrative sections; and the DSA Povazska Bystrica, a two-cube building connected by a passage. An atypical structure is planned for the DSA Komarno.