

Subotica Synagogue

Country or territory:
SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO
REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Name of organisation
compiling the information:
Inter Municipal Institute for
Monument Protection Subotica

Contact name(s):
Jagoda Alavantić, arch.
Gabor Demeter, arch.

Email address:
mzzksu@eunet.yu



Name and address of building(s) or site:

SUBOTICA SYNAGOGUE
Trg Oktobarske Revolucije 6.
24000 Subotica, Republic of Serbia, Serbia
and Montenegro.

Inventory reference number(s):

National registry (02-241/2-75, April 08,
1975); outstanding national importance
(December 03, 1990), Inter Municipal
Institute for Monument Protection Subotica
reference number: 16.

Building type(s):

Religious building - Synagogue

Main date(s):

Beginning of the 20th century

Current use(s):

The building is mainly not used. The local
Jewish community uses it for religious
purposes for the main religious events.

Significance:

The synagogue, built by the Hungarian architects Marcell Komor and Dező Jakab in 1901-1902, is one of the most beautiful in Central Europe. While most of the synagogues in this region were built in the second half of the 19th century, in the style of historicism, this one, built relatively late, is Art Nouveau style, and therefore very rare. Komor and Jakab were excellent architects and the building they designed is an outstanding work of Hungarian Art Nouveau. (Subotica used to be part of Hungary until 1918, and was later called Szabadka.) The synagogue was such a success that, as a result, the Town ordered from the architects the design of the new Town Hall, which indeed was built in the 1910s, to become an internationally renowned masterpiece of Art Nouveau. Between 1923 and 1926, considerable renovation and some alterations were carried out on the synagogue, but these did not alter the essential character of the building.

Its architectural value: The synagogue has a central structure crowned in the middle by a huge dome, together with smaller ones on the four corners. There were 850 seats for men on the ground floor, and 850 seats for women in the galleries on the three sides. Two staircases on the west side provide access to the galleries, while, besides the main entrance of the west front, there are direct entrances to the ground floor on the south and north fronts as well.

The pleasing sight of the exterior of the synagogue is enhanced by the rich variety of plastered and plain brick surfaces. Ornamentation is provided for by the decorative pyrogranite (glazed terracotta) elements produced by the Zsolnay Factory in Pécs, R. Hungary, renowned all over the Carpathian Basin, working up to the present, and by the architectural details built of shaped brick. Mainly the gilded gypsum stuccoes constitute the rich interior design, but the wall paintings of the interior were also colorful. Craftsmanship and the conscious design of every tiny detail, characteristic of the period, are apparent (joinery, ironwork, etc.).

Its spiritual value: originating from its sacral function as a place of gathering and praying under the cupola. The building is again in use as a synagogue over the last few years, by the small local Jewish community.

Its historical value: leading back to the specific atmosphere of the early 20th century, when the Synagogue with its specific architecture - modern and provocative at that time - represented the early beginnings of the town's architectural development.

Its artistic value: stemming from the fact that the Subotica Synagogue is one of the rare synagogues in the region that was built in a so called "Hungarian Art Nouveau style" originating from the Transylvanian vernacular architecture. The decoration of the building unites the elements of this style with floral motives of the East and the impact of the "modern" trends advocated by the contemporary architect, Ödön Lechner (1845-1914) from Budapest who is also known as the "father" of the unique "modern" Hungarian national architecture. Among his faithful and ardent followers were Marcell Komor and Dezső Jakab the well-known designers of the synagogue in Subotica.

Its town planning value: is reflected in the location of the building on a square once called after Széchényi, with the already constructed building of the Grammar School very close to the Vrba stram. This spot is even today one of the most attractive places in the town. The building is standing on a large corner and is, according to the dominant practice, detached, built further in from the street-lines. There were three other single-storey buildings standing on the plot: two smaller ones, the Kosher butcher's house and that of the caretaker (these are still standing there), and the considerably bigger building of the Jewish school, which was pulled down in the 1950s. The two-storey building of the Jewish community is standing right on the plot adjacent to that of the synagogue. The building is still in use, as a preaching-house, where the faithful Jews of Subotica gather up to the present day.

The spatial and constructive values of the building are inseparable and stem from the central spatial concept as well as from the simple and modern structure of steel, wood and Rabitz that was at the time a rarity in the region. As the neo-logist wing of the Jewish community used the synagogue, there is no *bima* in the centre, and an organ was situated above the thora-case. (Part of the organ is still there) .

Its monumental value: in 1975 the synagogue was listed as a highest-class monument of outstanding national importance, approved of by the Serbian Parliament on 30 December 1990. The building became of international importance in 1996 when it was included in the 100 Most Endangered sites by the World Monument Watch programme.

Categories of significance:

The Synagogue has a clearly definable local importance and had been declared a protected monument of culture as early as 1974 and later, in 1990, after the visit of the UNESCO Delegation to Subotica it was declared a monument of culture of outstanding national importance.

The building's regional importance is linked to the building circumstances, and destiny of the Synagogue in Szeged, Hungary.

The building became of international importance in 1996 when it was included in the 100 Most Endangered sites by the World Monument Watch programme.

Categories of ownership or interest:

Jews have been living in the town since 1775. In the 1940s the town had about 60,000 inhabitants; out of which about 5,000 were Jews. Not all of them were deported to Auschwitz, and about 1,500 survived the shoa. The community, which from the beginning had been mostly Hungarian speaking and still is, presently has 200 members.

In Hungary there was no Crystal night, the synagogues went through the hard times of Nazism and the War just like any other kind of buildings. (From March 1941 till December 1944 Subotica belonged to Hungary again). As there were no great war events in the town, the synagogue was left untouched. Its slow deterioration was started off by neglect.

As the surviving local Jewish community did not have the money for maintenance, and no religious service was held in the synagogue after the end of the War, in 1979 the Community decided to transfer formally the right of ownership of the building to the Town Council, which then took possession of it. We say formally, because the Town Council had already previously been dealing with the building: it was upon their recommendation that in 1975 the synagogue was listed as a highest class monument, approved of by the Serbian Parliament on 30 December 1990. Certain renovation work was also begun. From time to time, the local Jewish community uses the building for religious purposes.

Documentation and bibliographic references:

1. Available documentation of the Inter Municipal Institute for Monument Protection Subotica, with detailed architectural and technical analysis of the building, displays its present condition.
2. Web-site: (www.SOS-SINAGOGA.org.yu)
3. Az új zsidó templom, Bácskai Hírlap, 1902. szeptember 30.
4. Bela Duranci: A vajdasági építészeti szecesszió, Forum Könyvkiadó, 1983, Szabadka
5. Bela Duranci: Umetnost na prekretnici vekova u južnim prostorima Austrougarske Monarhije „RUKOVET” , 5-6-7-8. szám / 2002. XLVIII.
6. Gerle János – Kovács Attila – Makovecz Imre: A századforduló Magyar Építészete, Szépirodalmi könyvkiadó – Bonex, Budapest
7. Kata Martinovic Cvijin: Subotički opus Komora i Jakaba, Subotičke novine – edicija STUDIJE, Subotica, 1988.
8. Rudolf Klein: THE SYNAGOGUE IN SUBOTICA, Grafoproduct, 2003, Subotica
9. Dömötör Gábor: Gondolatok a szabadkai zsinagóga jövőbeni rendeltetéséről, „ÜZENET”, 1999. május-augusztus, XXIX. Évfolyam, 5-8. szám
10. Demeter Gábor: Szabadkai zsinagóga – pusztulás vagy helyreállítás?, „MŰEMLEKVÉDELEM”, XLIV. Évf. 2000. 4.szám

11. Mr. Viktorija Aladžić, mr. Gordana Prčić Vujnović, Mirko Grlica: Subotica - Kuća po kuća GRAD, Subotičke novine, Subotica

Condition:

According to the listed categories, the present condition of the building can be described as poor:

- The roof made of glazed "Zsolnay" tiles is inadequate, and improvised.
- The roof construction of the dome requires structural interventions and repair.
- Wall attics made of profiled bricks are damaged and are not covered with sheet flashing.
- Most decorative elements of the facade made of "Zsolnay" terracotta are damaged or missing.
- Wall surfaces of facing bricks as well as the joints are damaged.
- Plastered wall surfaces are damaged and the decorative profiling has disappeared.
- All the stained windows are damaged.
- The decorative capitals of the round pilasters of the central dome are missing.
- Wooden parts, locks and fittings of the portals are damaged.
- The coating of the quarter domes made of original zinc sheet is fully damaged.
- In the interior, the entrance as well as the anteroom is in a critical state because of leakage.
- The restored central dome dilapidated because of leakage and damp condensation due to the lack of thermo insulation of the Rabitz construction.
- All other wall surfaces are in a bad condition.
- Aaron Hakodesh also requires restoration.
- The pews and the floor covering were raised when concreting the floor.
- The wooden floor of the balcony is dilapidated as well as the gypsum decorations on the columns.
- The joinery of the interior requires restoration.
- The coarcer spaces of the stairs are in critical condition etc.

The building did not suffer direct war damage, but repairs are needed on windows, doors etc., following damage, condition is poor, and the roof is damaged, but can be repaired. Available documentation of the Inter Municipal Institute for Monument Protection Subotica, with detailed architectural and technical analysis of the building, displays its present condition.

Risk:

Despite the efforts of the experts of the Inter Municipal Institute for Monument Preservation Subotica, The SOS SINAGOGA FONDATION, Subotica, the Local authorities, and the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Serbia to improve the preservation of the building, the Synagogue is seriously endangered by

- Vandalism,
- Fire,
- Erosion,
- Lack of financial resources,
- Natural aging, and others.

Condition risk:

Immediate risk. It is in a high danger of rapid deterioration, although in 2003 the SOS SYNAGOGUE Foundation (a non-profit Foundation that collects donations, for restoration works) accepted the proposal of Gábor Demeter, arch. expert associate of the Inter Municipal Institute for the Protection of Monuments in Subotica, to re-use the Synagogue in Subotica as an international / regional (with Hungary & Romania) cultural centre for Jews and others;

In 2003, the design documentation for undertaking protective measures on the external surface (roof construction, and belonging elements, and the facades) was completed by the experts of the Inter Municipal Institute for Monument Preservation, Subotica with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture and Media of Republic of Serbia.

Technical assessment and costing:

The Synagogue was built within two years, from 1900 till 1902. In October 2002, the 100th anniversary of the Synagogue was celebrated, while its restoration has been going on ever since 1974. In 1974, it was declared a cultural monument.

In 1926, after a heavy storm in which the building was considerably damaged, the first restoration works were carried out. At that time, most of the stained glass windows of Miksa Róth (1865-1944) were replaced and only a few were left from the original Tiffany glass. On that same occasion the wall surfaces were stripped and re-plastered but without the decorative profiling and original colors. The repair of the windows was undertaken by János Szanka (1879-1927), a glass and window painter from Szeged, who moved to Subotica in 1905. After World War II, the building became so critically ruined that in the 1970s the damaged roof construction led to the rotating inclination of the central dome threatening to collapse, which would have caused the whole building to be ruined. The issue of reconstruction became urgent. In order to settle the ownership over the building before the works started, the local Jewish Community drew up a contract with the Subotica Municipality in 1979 transferring the ownership rights to the local government on condition that the building should be restored and reconstructed within a foreseeable time and that in the future it would be used only for cultural functions.

The first steps in restoring the building after it was declared a cultural monument were a photogrammetric survey and the preparation of documents for static repair in 1978. During the same year, the inclined dome was restored and after that the wooden roof was reconstructed as well as the roof and part of the sheets on the gutters, together with a partial replacement of sheet covers on the main and four lateral domes from zinc sheets to cooper sheets. Also the sheets of horizontal and vertical gutters were changed and a new lighting installation was mounted. These works, as well as the later ones lasted for years due to the lack of funds.

From 1985 on, the building was left at the will and mercy of its new user, the National Theatre whose activities negatively affected the overall condition of the building.

In the period between 1987-88, based on the expertise on the content and structural stability of the Rabitz construction dome, the condition and structural stability of the steel columns, foundation analysis, defining the causes of wall leakage etc. the wall paintings were restored in the inner central dome together with the decorative gypsum floral elements of the columns and vaults on the balcony, the lower two circles of painted glass and the semi-circle painted glass on the ground floor of the central space. At that time supplementary works on the existing hydro insulation were also accomplished and some parts of the roof above the staircase were repaired. In the lateral staircases next to the main entrance toilettes were installed for the theatre.

In 1989, more intensive preparation allowed the gathering of all the necessary elements for the restoration of the Synagogue. New elements of profiled and facing bricks were ordered and supplied from the brick factory, Osijek OOUR "Trudbenik" from Djakovo (now R. Croatia), and these were made after the original ones. Also, all terracotta decorative elements for the lateral parts were manufactured by the Pécs, Hungary based "Zsolnay" Factory.

In September of the same year the UNESCO Commission visited Subotica and the Synagogue as well as the exhibition that was presented by the Inter Municipal Institute for Monument Protection, Subotica, about the works accomplished on the Synagogue.

In 1992 the central lighting was restored and fixed in the interior of the central dome.

In 1994 the company, Razvoj Janjic for the investor and the Inter Municipal Institute for Monument Protection Subotica, accomplished the following works on the Synagogue: dismantling and removing the seats and furniture, raising the floor tiles, excavation and removal of earth from the building, sewage channel digging, gravel layer filling, earth fill, concreting floor, building sewage pits, excavation of sewage trenches, dismantling the existing sewage, making hydro insulation in layers: cold "bitulit" coating, a layer of insulating material ("Kondor"), hot bitumen coating glazing, removal of extra earth, thermo-insulating and placing reinforced mesh and mounting of gaigers and rainwater heads.

In 1996 World Monuments Watch enlisted the Synagogue among the 100 most endangered Sites in the world.

In April 1999 Mr. Samuel D. Gruber invited four experts: András Román, architect, Klára Deák restorer, Tamás Fejérdi, architect and Viktorija Aladzic architect, with an assistance of Jagoda Alavantić, architect (expert associate of the Inter Municipal Institute for the Protection of Monuments in Subotica) Gábor Demeter, architect, and László Király, constr. engineer, who made a report on the present state of the Subotica Synagogue supported by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation in which they describe in detail the condition of the building. Based on this report, it is obvious that urgent preventive measures need to be taken up in order to stop the dilapidation of the Synagogue, i.e. repairs of the roof, the water drainage system, and covering the holes on the Rabitz construction.

In 2002: The technical protection of the building was completed, which includes urgent measures on the repair of the roof construction, exchange/repair of the gutters and repair of the roof above the staircase. (700,000 SCD).

We can now state that all of the listed measures have failed because of inadequate (partial) financing and the eleven year civil-war period in former Yugoslavia, when nothing significant happened on the site.

In September 2003, Gabor Demeter, arh. expert associate of the Inter Municipal Institute for the Protection of Monuments in Subotica held a multi-media presentation of the Programme of the restoration and rehabilitation of the Synagogue in Subotica.

At the same time a website, about the Subotica Synagogue, has been created for people interested in the future destiny of the building: www.SOS-SINAGOGA.org.yu

During the last days of 2003, the glazed plain tiles arrived in Subotica from the ZSOLNAY CERAMICS MANUFACTURE in PÉCS, R. of Hungary.

At the end of 2003, the design documentation for undertaking protective measures on the external surface (roof construction, and belonging elements, and the facades) has been completed by the experts of the Inter Municipal Institute for Monument Preservation, Subotica with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Serbia. 1,914,761 SCD (US\$ 34,192). At the same time, a competition was completed on the

construction of a temporary protective fence around the building site of the Synagogue, to stop further threats by vandalism. (70,000 SCD).

According to the preliminary assessments:

- to complete the documentation for undertaking protective measures in the interior, with designs of all the correct plumbing, heating and electricity installations, supporting functions related to the new purpose of the object, would cost 60,000 EUR
- undertaking protective measures on the external surface (roof construction, and belonging elements, and the facades) would cost approximately 690,000 EUR
- undertaking protective measures in the interior of the building with all of the installations would cost appr. 960,000 EUR
- the construction of the underground building, which ensures the supporting function of the new purpose of the synagogue would cost approx. 1,000,000 EUR
- The TOTAL amount of money needed for the complete restoration and rehabilitation of the building would be approximately 2,710,000 EUR

Ownership:

The local Jewish Community drew up a contract with Subotica Municipality in 1979 transferring the ownership right to the local government.

Occupation:

From time to time, the local Jewish community uses the building for religious purposes. There is no other occupation of the building.

Management:

The "SOS SINAGOGA" SUBOTICA FOUNDATION (www.SOS-SINAGOGA.org.yu) is responsible for the management of the building - an international Foundation to oversee and promote the restoration and rehabilitation of the Subotica synagogue was established in 2001. Its Board includes local officials, representatives of the Jewish community and experts on Jewish heritage and architecture. The board approved the Statute of the Foundation at its first meeting, held in Subotica on September 29, 2001.

BOARD MEMBERS

Jozsef Kasza, president
Ruth Ellen Gruber, vice president
Ištvan Išpanovic, member
Estera Fenjves Votaw, member
Giora M. Lebl, member
Jehuda Elkana, member
Viktorija Aladžić, member
Andras Roman, member
Mira Poljaković, member

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Geza Kucsera, president
 Jozsef Kasza, honorary member
 Mira Poljaković, member
 Viktorija Aladžić, member
 Laslo Kiralj, member
 Becak Marija, member

In case funding were to be made available, The “SOS SINAGOGA” SUBOTICA FOUNDATION would be responsible for administering the funds. The experts of the Inter Municipal Institute for Monument Protection Subotica (under the professional control of the Republic Institute for Monument Protection Beograd) would be the coordinating organisation of the conservation and preservation activities, and would oversee the works, as well.

Summary:

The building of the synagogue in Subotica is categorised as a cultural monument of outstanding national importance. Despite the efforts of the experts of the Inter Municipal Institute for Monument Preservation Subotica, The SOS SINAGOGA FONDATION, Subotica, the Local authorities, and the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Serbia to improve the preservation of the building, it is still seriously endangered, and needs different levels of conservation, preservation, and rehabilitation.

A project for the restoration and rehabilitation of the Subotica Synagogue has been prepared by the experts of the Inter Municipal Institute for Monument Protection Subotica, following a strict conservation – restorative approach, accomplished through 3 PHASES:

Phase 1. – Preparing the documentation for the entire project.

Phase 1.1. - Documentation for undertaking protective measures on the external surface (roof construction, and belonging elements, and the facades) – completed during the year of 2003, (experts of the Inter Municipal Institute for Monument Preservation, Subotica) with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture and Media of Republic of Serbia.

Phase 1.2. - Documentation for undertaking protective measures in the interior, with designs of all the correct plumbing, heating and electricity installations, supporting functions related to the new purpose of the building - Inter Municipal Institute for Monument Preservation, Subotica applied for financial assistance from the Ministry of Culture and Media of Republic of Serbia, for the year of 2004.)

Phase 2. Undertaking technical protective measures (conservation, restoration & reconstruction) on the external surface of the site.

Phase 2.1. – Technical protective measures on the roof structure, cover and related elements (*planned for the year 2004*)

Phase 2.2. – Technical protective measures on the facades. (*planned for the year 2005*)

Phase 3. (Phases 3.1. & 3.2.) Undertaking technical measures in the interior, with designs of all the correct plumbing, heating and electricity installations, supporting functions related to the new purpose of the object.

The ultimate strategic goal of the restoration and rehabilitation of the Synagogue in Subotica is that the revitalised Synagogue in Subotica would keep its sacral function used by the small Subotica Jewish Community. Besides, it could become an international / regional (Hungary & Romania) cultural centre for Jews and others, with such cultural contents, which would not endanger the primary sacral function of the building.

The potential priority level of intervention is *high*.

Sign. and date:

Gabor Demeter, arch., director

Jagoda Alavantic, arch.

Subotica, March 2004.