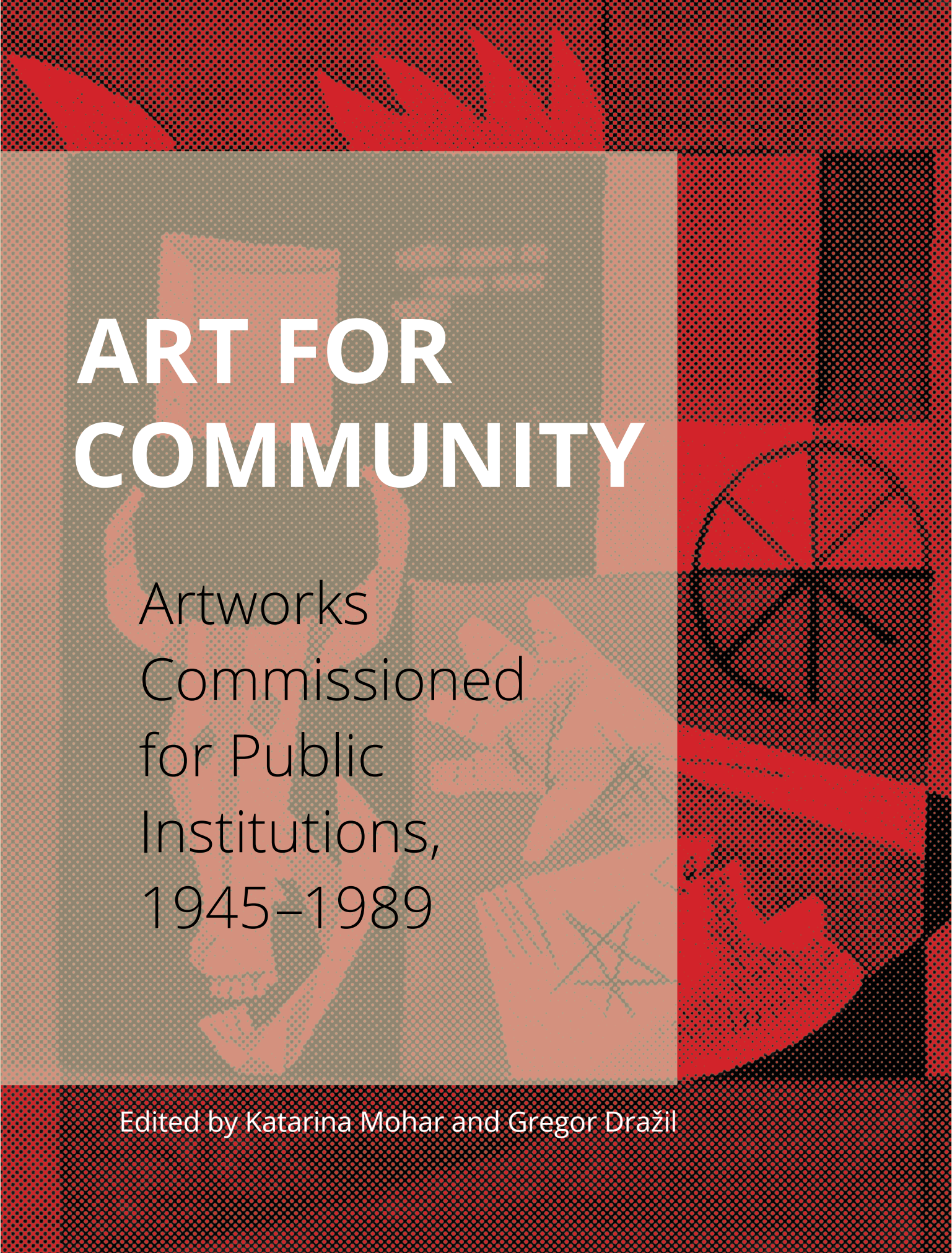




ART FOR COMMUNITY

Artworks
Commissioned
for Public
Institutions,
1945–1989

Edited by Katarina Mohar and Gregor Dražil



Založba ZRC



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Ljubljana, 2026

Opera Instituti Artis Historiae

Art for Community

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Cover image: Ivo Šubic, unrealised sketch for the mosaic in the building of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia.
Photo: Andreja Rakovec, ZRC SAZU.

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CONDITION AND RISK ASSESSMENT OF SOCIALIST-ERA MOSAICS IN SLOVENIA

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The preservation of cultural heritage relies heavily on systematic monitoring and evaluation of heritage objects and their environments. Condition and risk assessment serve as the two primary pillars of cultural asset management, providing the empirical data necessary to ensure the longevity of physical artefacts. Condition assessments focus on the present state of an object, documenting existing damage or degradation, whereas risk assessments identify potential future threats to the object. Condition assessment methods consist of visual inspection, non-destructive testing, material analysis, and environmental monitoring.

Work at the Research Institute at the University of Ljubljana's Academy of Fine Arts and Design (UL ALUO) over the past two decades has created a database of specific segments of publicly accessible artworks in Slovenia. These include wall paintings, sgraffiti, mosaics, and sculptures from various periods. The digital database contains photographic documentation and key information, including data on techniques, technology, iconography, conservation, endangerment, and past interventions. The data are obtained through visual inspection, the study of literature, and other sources (archives, inventories, oral sources, etc.). The result is an inventory of artworks, including a record of their condition and the risk factors.

Although works of art in public spaces are highly exposed to various harmful natural and human factors, there is generally no comprehensive inventory of these works at the national level, nor is there a system for systematically monitoring their condition and alerting relevant protection services to potential threats. Therefore, the main purpose of this work is to highlight the importance of further improvement of preventive conservation through research-supported data analysis.

This research can also be useful in art-historical, archaeometric (examining historical materials and techniques), etiological-phenomenological (identifying causes and forms of deterioration), axiological (assessing the value and significance of fine art conservation), and other in-depth studies. The insights gained are also valuable for educational and promotional purposes and for direct conservation-restoration work on the artworks examined.¹

The first result of the research presented in this chapter is an inventory of preserved and destroyed works of art created between 1945 and 1990 in

Slovenia, but for the time being it is comprehensive only for mosaics. The sgraffito art in the Ljubljana area has been rather extensively researched and inventoried, and it has already been partially presented,² but it covers a wider time span of artworks from the Renaissance to the late 1960s. The inventory of mosaics recorded their basic identification data and historical information concerning past conservation-restoration and other interventions on buildings and their artworks. This was followed by a visual inspection of the condition of the artworks in situ. Risk factors were also identified, including an assessment of their likelihood and impact. The results of the risk analysis are presented in this chapter, although these are not necessarily the definitive results because the inventory of mosaics is continually being updated and improved. However, they provide clear insight into the current general state and endangerment of the mosaic heritage of public buildings and monuments from Slovenia's socialist period as a Yugoslav republic. Some preliminary results of the analysis were already presented at the ICCM conference in Plovdiv in autumn 2022,³ but here the data have been updated and completed to a significant extent.

On the significance of socialist art preservation

Slovenia has many surviving sculptures, frescoes, mosaics and other architectural decorations of buildings and monuments created by Slovenian and foreign artists during the socialist era. Especially in the early socialist period after the Second World War, the political authorities and society in general considered it important that public buildings, squares, and parks should be furnished with works of art. These works had not only an aesthetic function but also a symbolic or ideological function because they could be used to communicate intrinsic and instrumental human values such as freedom, comradeship, resistance, homeland reconstruction, community participation, work, progress, and prosperity. The manner of socialist realist depiction was particularly appropriate for communicating these values, which are also evident in the titles of some works: *Uporniki* (Rebels), *Ljubljana v borbi* (Ljubljana in Struggle), *Mladina se vključuje v proizvodnjo* (Youth Engaged in Production), and so on. Later, as artistic representations became more poetic and abstract, more intrinsic human values, such as beauty, harmony, playfulness, and serenity, became more prominent. Such examples include mosaics with the titles *Alegorija podeželja* (Allegory of the Countryside), *Sončno mesto* (Sunny Town), and *Pokrajina* (Landscape). Even today, socialist artworks reflect certain human values that are considered worth preserving and

can inspire,⁴ although many can recognise content that is not necessarily positive, such as obligatory optimism, indoctrination, forced labour, and repression.⁵

According to the human values (Sln. *vrednote*) reflected in artworks, these works on their own possess certain qualitative and quantitative values (Sln. *vrednosti*): financial, aesthetic, historical, symbolic, ideological, commemorative, and so on.⁶ In any case, the artworks do not create these fragile values (Sln. *vrednosti*) by themselves, as Jonathan Ashley-Smith points out with the metaphor “only people bleed,”⁷ but it is people who assign values to them; these values are subject to change at different times and under different circumstances. Therefore, when evaluating art heritage, it is reasonable to distinguish between two basic meanings, which are quite clearly distinguishable in Slovenian. One is human values (Sln. *vrednote*) as ideas in the sense of psychological categories that people recognise in artworks or in the preservation of artworks (e.g., social welfare, community involvement, solidarity, and memory keeping), and the other is values (Sln. *vrednosti*) of things as characteristics that are assigned to the artworks themselves (e.g., symbolic, material, or historical value). In a similar way, the distinction in meanings is expressed by Randall Mason:⁸ “*Values* is most often used in one of two senses: first, as morals, principles, or other ideas that serve as guides to action (individual and collective); and second, in reference to the qualities and characteristics seen in things, in particular the positive characteristics (actual and potential).”

As artworks with a certain value, they are deserving of physical preservation. The activity of conservation-restoration of cultural heritage is especially essential because it preserves or restores their values and meanings. Appropriate action must be taken to prevent the deterioration and destruction of the artworks, otherwise their values will be diminished or destroyed.

From a sustainable heritage protection perspective, it is crucial to make the best possible use of the resources available for protection and conservation. Timely and regular preventive action is generally more sustainable than delayed curative interventions. The cornerstone of sustainable prevention is record-keeping: regular monitoring of the condition and endangerment of artworks, together with the environment in which they are located. Especially in terms of socio-cultural sustainability, public information and awareness-raising, as well as the active involvement of interested individuals and groups, are also important for the conservation of art heritage. A good example of such an activity is the ZRC SAZU researchers’ invitation to the public to contribute any information on the

art heritage of the period within the national research project *Art for Community*,⁹ which is a form of citizen science. The feedback may also help estimate the extent to which the public recognises and appreciates this art heritage.

Studying sources on socialist-era mosaics as a basis for an inventory

Postwar mosaics are only now becoming the subject of in-depth art-historical research. Postwar murals have been examined in detail by Donovan Pavlinec,¹⁰ but he focuses only on the art of socialist realism and has not dealt with mosaics in his studies. As he notes, the problem with studying the art of this period is the lack of a comprehensive list of artworks.¹¹ However, this is also true for the older, prewar artistic periods.

The initial task of compiling a list of mosaics from 1945 to 1990, which would form a basis for analysing their condition in situ, was rather difficult due to the poor documentation and near-anonymity of these works. One reason is certainly that artworks on architectural surfaces are often seen as artistically inferior because the artist is not completely free to create but must usually adapt to the wishes of the client, the constraints of the architectural surface, and the purpose of the space. This might explain why such works are often mentioned only briefly or are ignored altogether in many volumes and in analyses of works by individual artists. For example, in the chapter “Pregljeve človeške postave v kontekstu evropske umetnosti” (Pregelj’s Human Figures in the Context of European Art) in which Jure Mikuž discusses Marij Pregelj’s work,¹² particularly the artist’s gradual transformations of reclining and other figures, it is unclear why the analysis does not include his large-scale figurative mosaics in Trbovlje (which received the Prešeren Award, the highest Slovenian recognition in art) [Figure 1], his mosaics at the significant Yugoslav memorial complex on the island of Rab, and a smaller family grave mosaic at Dravlje Cemetery in Ljubljana [Figure 2]. The author only briefly touches on the monumental mosaic in the Palace of the Federal Executive Council in Belgrade. Sometimes it seems that mosaics are considered inferior, even compared to wall paintings. In an article by Donovan Pavlinec,¹³ which admittedly focuses on wall painting, Pengov’s painting at Villa Bled is presented in detail; however, his equally monumental mosaic in the same complex is not even mentioned. This is why truly comprehensive art-historical studies of individual historic buildings are very valuable. Such is the study by Katarina Mohar in the case of Villa Bled.¹⁴ The next reason for the neglect of mosaics from this period is ideological.



Figure 1. Marij Pregelj,
mosaic, 1957, *Workers'
Home, Trbovlje*. Detail.
Photo: Andrej Furlan,
ZRC SAZU, 2015.



Figure 2. Marij Pregelj,
Bog je videl in sprejel
(*God Saw and Accepted*),
mosaic, date unknown,
Dravljje Cemetery,
Ljubljana. Distant view of
the mosaic on the Pregelj
family grave. Photo: Blaž
Šeme, 2023.

Socialist realist public artworks had a certain indoctrination and manipulation function, and the artist was even less free to create. Following multiparty democratisation and Slovenia's secession from Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, a tendency emerged among artists, the public, and the ruling authorities to undermine the value of socialist-era creativity by silencing it, covering it up, and rebuilding it.¹⁵ However, even earlier, the ruling Communist Party authorities were not sympathetic toward certain artists. Their public works were therefore sometimes ignored or destroyed, even though they dealt with socialist themes. From a review of the literature, it is possible to identify two indirect factors that, to some extent, threaten the mosaics of this period even today: lower awareness of their artistic significance and value, also due to the scarcity of studies on the subject, and potentially ideologically driven reasons for their neglect and destruction.

Field investigations of socialist-era mosaics as a basis for condition and risk assessment

Before documenting the situation on site, it is necessary to check the accessibility of the artwork. Some are outdoors and therefore usually freely accessible, whereas access to those inside buildings often needs to be arranged and contact details need to be sought. At least for the first field inspection, no special equipment is used, apart from a camera with various lenses (normal, wide-angle, zoom, and macro) and perhaps a tape measure to measure the dimensions. Condition-record forms tailored to a specific type of art heritage are helpful during the survey. They make it less likely that important data will be overlooked during inspection and facilitate subsequent data analysis. Due to time constraints during the field inspection, the data were often entered later in the office when reviewing the photos taken, but it is still advisable to do this in situ. About half of the mosaics in the inventory were inspected and photographically documented in situ between 2022 and 2025; for some mosaics it was possible to assess the condition based on recent photos of sufficient quality taken by other photographers, and at least sixteen sites still need to be documented. Although the goal was always to photograph both the details and the entire mosaic, the latter was not always possible due to its size or because it was obscured by furniture and other objects [Figure 3]. For this research, photos of mosaics that include other objects within the space are even more important because they reveal the current function of the spaces (waiting lounge, furniture storage area, etc.), which can affect the condition and at-risk status of mosaics. Due to the nature of the fieldwork, which involved attempting to survey as many mosaics



Figure 3. Lojze Spacal, Alegorija podeželja (Allegory of the Countryside), mosaic, 1955, building of the former Main Cooperative Union (Glavna zadružna zveza), now the District State Prosecutor's Office, Ljubljana. The view is partially obstructed by security equipment at the entrance. Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2020.

as possible within a limited timeframe in a certain geographical area, it was often not possible to obtain the highest-quality photos, particularly in terms of lighting. Nonetheless, photos of mosaics with partially shaded areas can also be very valuable for the research because they reveal which parts of the mosaics are more exposed to artificial or natural light, and in the case of exteriors to precipitation.

The types and extent of damage are recorded, and the cause of the damage is deduced from its form because this helps in the subsequent risk assessment

of the mosaics. In some cases, such as difficult access, remoteness, large dimensions, or coverage with furniture and other objects, it was not possible to obtain all the data. The different dimensions of the mosaics (from 183 m² to less than 0.5 m²) require different inspection times. Some mosaics are located on two or more walls of the same or adjacent buildings. Field visits are a chance to obtain additional useful information from the personnel contacted and from random passersby.

The condition of socialist-era mosaics

To study and systematically preserve modern mosaics on a national scale, it would certainly be advisable to first create a mosaic register and then regularly monitor their condition so that action can be taken quickly in the event of a threat. Based on this research, we first created a list of mosaics in Slovenia. The list of mosaics includes all currently known mosaics created between 1945 and 1990, regardless of their artistic quality

or other selection criteria. Thus, the inventory also includes mosaics that are more decorative (e.g., the monument in Mislinja or the façade of the basilica in Brezje), illustrative (e.g., in Kostanjevica na Krki), or informative (e.g., in Log pri Brezovici). The inventory currently records sixty-four mosaic units (as of April 2025), which are part of fifty-eight buildings and monuments at fifty-six sites. The collected data form the basis for an initial assessment of the condition of these mosaics. The mosaic inventory records the following attributes for each mosaic: authorship, mosaicist, title, year of creation, dimensions, mosaic material, mosaic and building type, architect, building name and address, building register number, type and protection status of the heritage (if any), information on previous treatment and conservation-restoration, condition and risk assessment, sources, and literature. For several mosaics, individual data are still missing and are gradually being added. It is expected that the number of registered mosaics will increase significantly in the future because the number of mosaics from religious and private commissions is still poorly studied, and eastern Slovenia is particularly neglected.

Attribution

Of the twenty-three artists listed, only Đorđe Andrejević and Aleksandar Rukavina were not Slovenian, and only one – Helena (Kottler) Vurnik, who was of Austrian origin – was a woman. The authorship of mosaics is most often attributed to Ivan Seljak Čopič (ten mosaics), Stane Kregar (five), Ive Šubic (four), Rafael Nemec (four), Marij Pregelj (three), Jože Ciuha (three), and Karel Pečko (three). All seven artists together designed half (thirty-two) of the total mosaics. At least twenty-three mosaic units come from the workshop of the mosaicist Alfio Tambosso. All mosaics designed by one artist and executed by one mosaic workshop in a particular building are counted as a single mosaic unit; for example, in the Flower Pavilion at Villa Bled there are four mosaics, based on artistic designs by Andrejević and created by the Tambosso workshop,¹⁶ but for the sake of simplicity they are only counted as one mosaic unit in this study. In 1959, the sculptor and mosaicist Slavko Krajnc completed a mosaic by Lojze Spacal in the Venetian House (*Benečanka*) in Piran. For the painter Jože Ciuha, the mosaicist Luciano Petris¹⁷ created two mosaics in Ljubljana in the 1980s. At least nine mosaics were made by the artists themselves (Helena Vurnik, the brothers Ivan and Bogdan Čobal, Tomaž Kržišnik, and Jože Spacal), and no information is yet available about the rest of the mosaics.



Figure 4. Pages from *Znidarčič*, "Kamenček pri kamenčku."

Materials and techniques

In the case of the fifty-four mosaics, the material composition of the mosaic pieces could be determined: twenty-six are made of smalto, twenty-one of natural stone, five of a combination of both (in these cases, stone predominates), and two of ceramic. It is possible that brick was used instead of stone for some of the reddish tesserae, as might be the case with the mosaics in the Flower Pavilion at Villa Bled, but a more detailed investigation would be needed to confirm this. In an interview in 1958¹⁸ [Figure 4], Alfio Tambosso, who opened a mosaic workshop in Ljubljana shortly after the Second World War, explained his traditional method of making mosaics, from the painter's sketch to the final gluing of the mosaic to the wall with a cement binder. He mentioned that he preferred to use tesserae from pebbles collected along the Sava River because they have a great variety of colours. The analysis shows that after 1960 Tambosso was much more likely to use smalto, a coloured glass material, for tesserae. He had already used smalto to create Lojze Spacal's mosaic *Alegorija podeželja* (Allegory of the Countryside) in Ljubljana in 1955 and Pregelj's large mosaic at the Workers' Home in Trbovlje in 1957. The relief

mosaics by Rafael Nemec have a distinctive artistic expression, in which the mosaic background stands out from the plain ground surface of the dancing figures (on the façade of Kanal Primary School, 1962) or the mosaic outlines of the figures stand out from the ground surface (on the façade of Dobrovo Primary School, 1966). His more conventional mosaic depiction of Our Lady of Consolation on the portal of the church in Kromberk from 1970 also has an interesting relief shift between the figure and the background. *Mozaik slovensko-hrvaškega prijateljstva* (Mosaic of Slovenian–Croatian Friendship), or *Mozaik Tito* (Tito Mosaic), in Log pri Brezovici is similar in relief to Nemec’s mosaics on school façades, but it is more colourful and made of a combination of pebbles and crushed stone on a concrete foundation [Figure 5]. The ceramic mosaics by Tomaž Kržišnik from the 1980s are also quite unique from a material and technical point of view. In the case of the Emerik Bernard mosaic, in addition to smalto and stone, pieces of utilitarian objects were also used, sometimes simply glued to smalto [Figure 6].

Date and place

Close to a third of the mosaics (twenty-two) were made in the 1960s, and eleven of them are from the 1950s, whereas six to nine mosaics date from other decades. Ten mosaics have an unknown year of creation. The period from 1956 to 1966 was apparently the most stimulating for mosaic production because at least twenty-six mosaics were made then. The great majority of mosaics, namely twenty-four, are found in Ljubljana, four in Bled, and three each in Idrija, Nova Gorica, and Slovenj Gradec. Up to two mosaic sites are in Brezje, Kranj, Radovljica, and Zagorje ob Savi, and one each at Brdo Castle near Kranj and in Dobrovo, Dražgoše, Ilirska Bistrica, Kanal ob Soči, Kostanjevica na Krki, Kromberk, Krško, Lipica, Log pri Brezovici, Maribor, Mislinja, Novo mesto, Piran, Renče, Trbovlje, Velenje, and Vodice Pasture (*Vodiška planina*) near Kropa.

Types of buildings and mosaics

Most of the mosaics are on the walls of buildings, with only two examples of floor mosaics in Bled and Nova Gorica. At least forty-nine buildings are public: the parliament, municipal buildings, other state institutions, state protocol buildings, buildings of public companies, cultural centres, schools, and so on. A recently listed mosaic by an unknown artist (the “HOKEJ 66” sign is based on a design by the Bosnian artist Dževad Hozo) is located in the Hala Tivoli sports complex in Ljubljana¹⁹ [Figure 7]. Only



Figure 5. Unknown artist, Mozaik slovensko-hrvaškega prijateljstva (Mosaic of Slovenian–Croatian Friendship), also known as Mozaik Tito (Tito Mosaic), mosaic, date unknown, Log pri Brezovici. The mosaic was restored in 2010; in recent years, it has been partially obscured by a lamppost. Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2023.

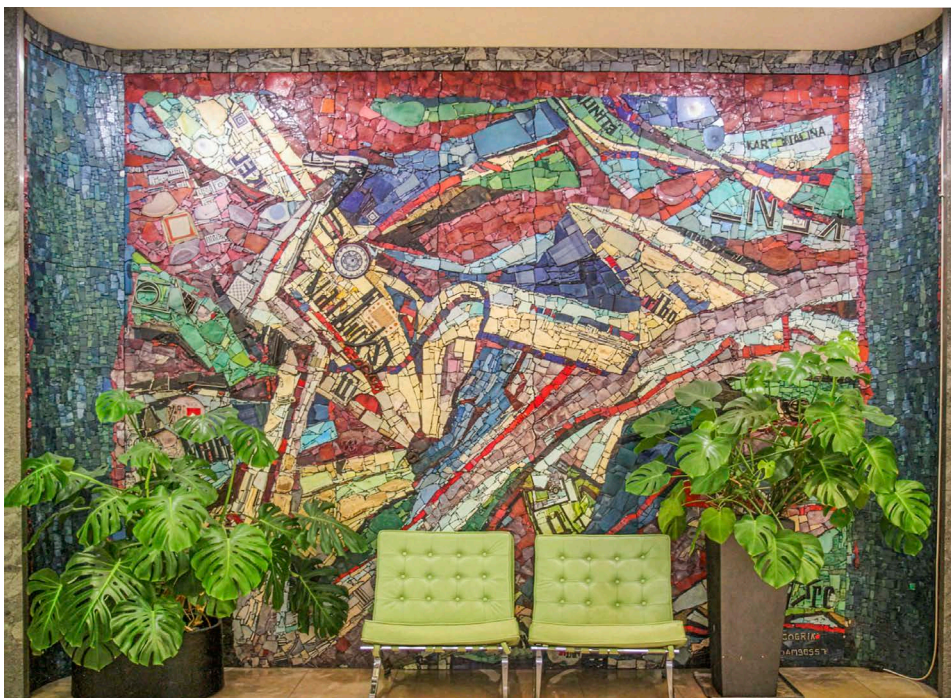


Figure 6. Emerik Bernard, mosaic in the entrance lobby of Petrol's headquarters, Ljubljana. Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2022.

Figure 7. Unknown artist, mosaic, ca. 1964, Tivoli Hall, Ljubljana. The photograph shows the left half of the mosaic in the entrance lobby, including the sign for the 1966 Ice Hockey World Championship. Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2025.



three are in private locations, and eight are in religious buildings. In addition, eight mosaics are part of outdoor memorials. Otherwise, twenty-two mosaics are commemorative in content or function. Sixteen mosaics have a socialist theme, and eleven have a religious character.

Legal protection

Of the fifty-six sites with mosaics, only twenty-four are listed in the state Register of Immovable Cultural Heritage: sixteen buildings, six memorials and places, and two settlements and their parts. As far as monument protection status is concerned, two mosaics are found at monuments of national importance (at Brdo Castle near Kranj and in Dražgoše), twelve at monuments of local importance, and ten at registered cultural heritage sites. According to the definition of the Act on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, registered heritage is heritage that is listed in the register but is not considered a monument.

Past interventions and destruction

The mosaics at the Petrol station on Trieste Street (*Tržaška cesta*) in Ljubljana and by Karel Pečko in the Ljubljana bank building in Slovenj Gradec are known to have certainly been destroyed, although the mosaic at the Petrol



*Figure 8. Karel Pečko, mosaic formerly installed in the Bellevue restaurant, Legen, date unknown. Removed from the wall and covered with a protective sheet, it awaits reinstallation near the swimming pool complex in Slovenj Gradec.
Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2023.*

station was recreated around 1990, using ceramic tiles on which an imitation of mosaic tiles is painted. During the renovation of the unstable load-bearing Ljubljana bank wall, more than fifty thousand colourful pieces of an 18 m² mosaic by Pečko were thrown away, without the knowledge of the artist.²⁰ A few years ago, his mosaic in the Bellevue restaurant in Legen was taken off the wall, and now it is waiting to be presented near the swimming pool complex in Slovenj Gradec [Figure 8]. It is not known whether Debenjak's mosaic *Morsko dno* (Sea Bottom) from 1957 in the former Tavčarjev Hram restaurant in Ljubljana has been destroyed or simply covered over. The existence of mosaics by Maksim Sedej at an unknown location and by Ivan Seljak in Lipica has yet to be verified. A major loss occurred to a mosaic in the Ljubljana City Savings Bank. Originally, the mosaic covered three walls of the branch, but, when the premises were renovated in the 1980s, the mosaic decoration on the wall around the bank windows was destroyed. In 2017, the owner again planned a major remodelling of the premises, demolishing

the remaining two walls with mosaic. To reconcile the owner's wish to remodel the branch according to contemporary needs with the conservation authority's preference to retain the artworks in situ, a compromise was reached: at least half of the mosaic would be preserved and transferred to the new walls of the branch. Our Department of Restoration at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design took on the challenging task of removing the 20 m² mosaic, transferring it to a new movable support, and installing it on the new walls²¹ [Figure 9]. We also removed and stored the sections that were not transferred to the new walls so that the mosaic from the two walls might one day be reassembled and presented as a whole.

In the last fifteen years, conservation-restoration has been carried out on at least four other mosaics: in Dražgoše (a monument), in Idrija (the façade of a primary school), in Log pri Brezovici (a roadside inscription), and in Kostanjevica na Krki (the façade of a primary school). Probably in 2000, the mosaic on the façade of the Workers' Home in Trbovlje was also conserved/restored. In all five cases, the mosaics are exposed to the open air, suggesting that outdoor exposure increases their vulnerability. More detailed information on treatments would need to be verified

Figure 9. Unknown artist, mosaic, ca. 1962, Ljubljana City Savings Bank, Ljubljana. Protection of the mosaic surface before detachment during the 2018 conservation-restoration treatment. Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2018.



in the conservation archives. It seems that only the conservation-restoration work in Kostanjevica²² was presented to the Slovenian professional community.²³ This mosaic is the largest mosaic in the country (measuring 184 m², 800 cm × 2,300 cm) and one of the most exposed to weather conditions because only four years after the intervention it was noticed that many new pieces had fallen off.

Physical condition and risk assessment

Of the sixty-four mosaics in the inventory, a more detailed risk assessment analysis was carried out for fifty-five because data of sufficient quality are not available for the others. On a scale of 1 to 5, thirty-three mosaics were assessed as 5 (very well preserved) [Figure 10], fifteen as 4 (fairly well preserved), and three as 3 (less well preserved) and in need of conservation-restoration mainly due to mosaic pieces falling off. The last group includes Seljak Čopič's mosaics on the monument in Mislinja [Figure 11] and in the Zagorje ob Savi Cultural Centre, and Bernard's mosaic at Petrol's headquarters in Ljubljana [Figure 12]. An intervention on Seljak's mosaic in Zagorje ob Savi is urgently needed because part of the mosaic around the air vent has already fallen off [Figure 13].

The mosaic at the Ljubljana City Savings Bank is rated as 2 (severely damaged) because, despite the recent successful relocation and presentation

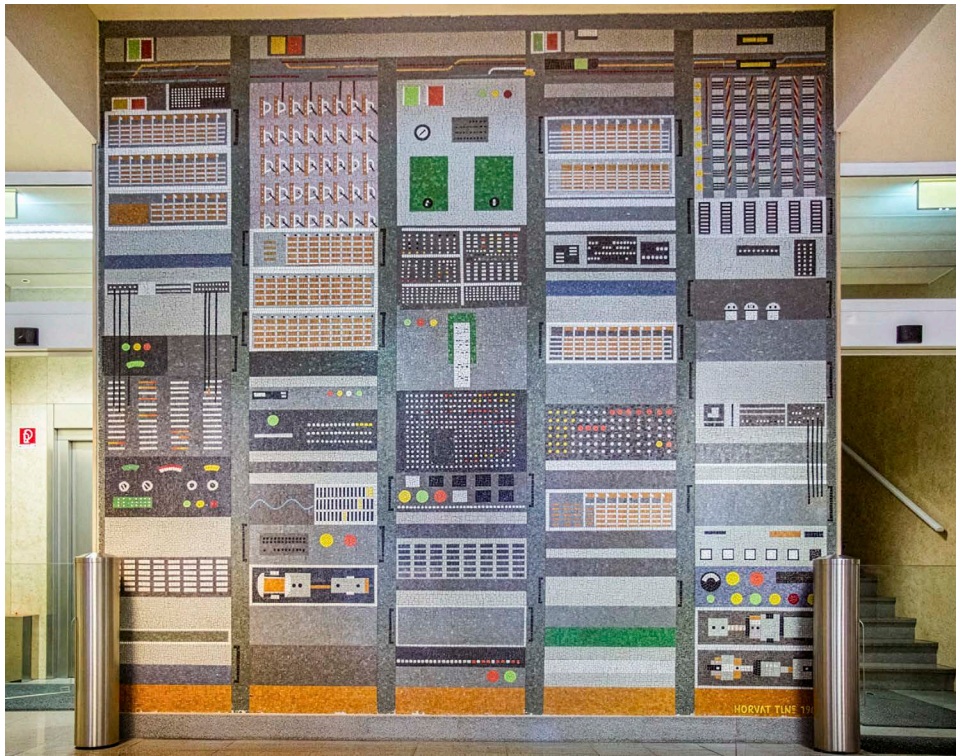


Figure 10. Tine Horvat, mosaic, 1964, entrance lobby of the Telekom Slovenije headquarters, Ljubljana. The mosaic is very well preserved (condition rating 5). Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2022.

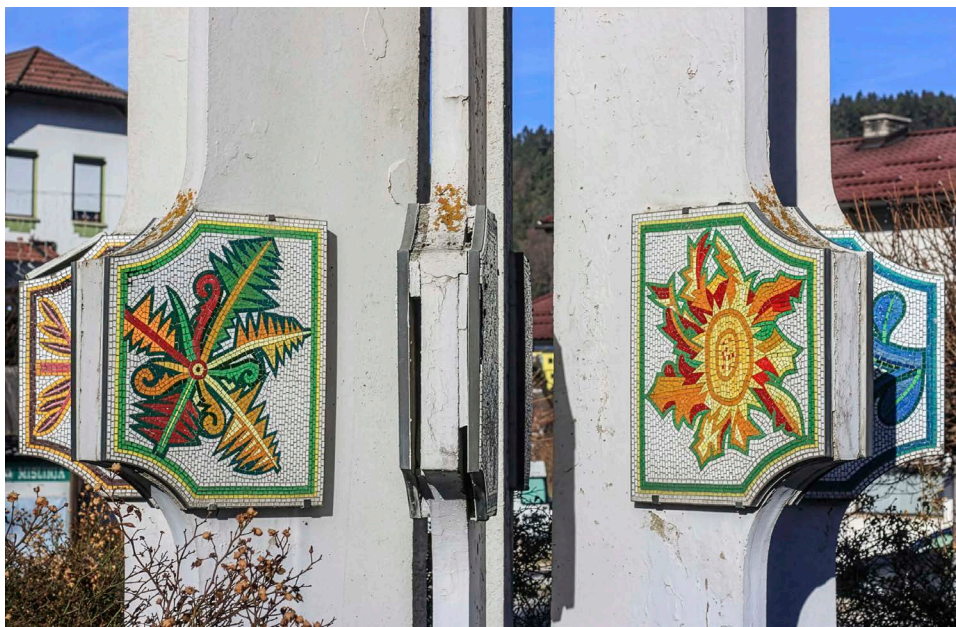


Figure 11. Ivan Seljak Čopič, mosaic panels on the monument to the National Liberation Struggle, Mislinja. The monument shows signs of neglect. Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2023.

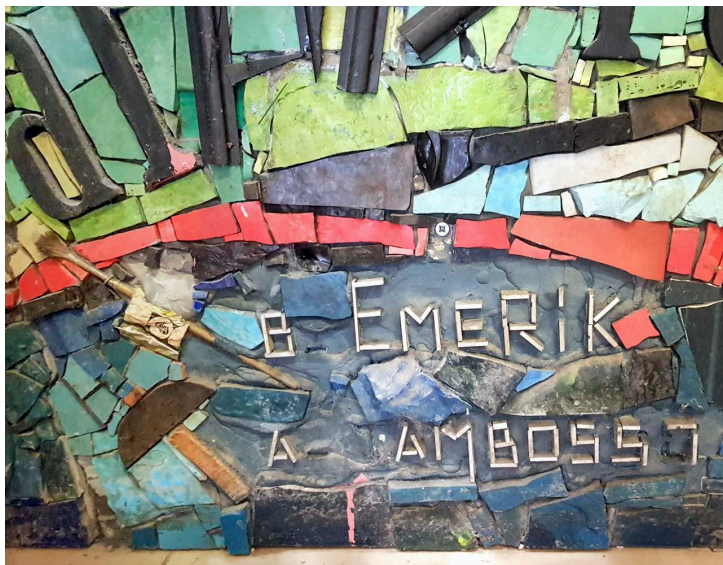


Figure 12. Emerik Bernard, mosaic in the entrance lobby of Petrol's headquarters, Ljubljana. Detail showing missing tesserae around the artists' names. Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2022.

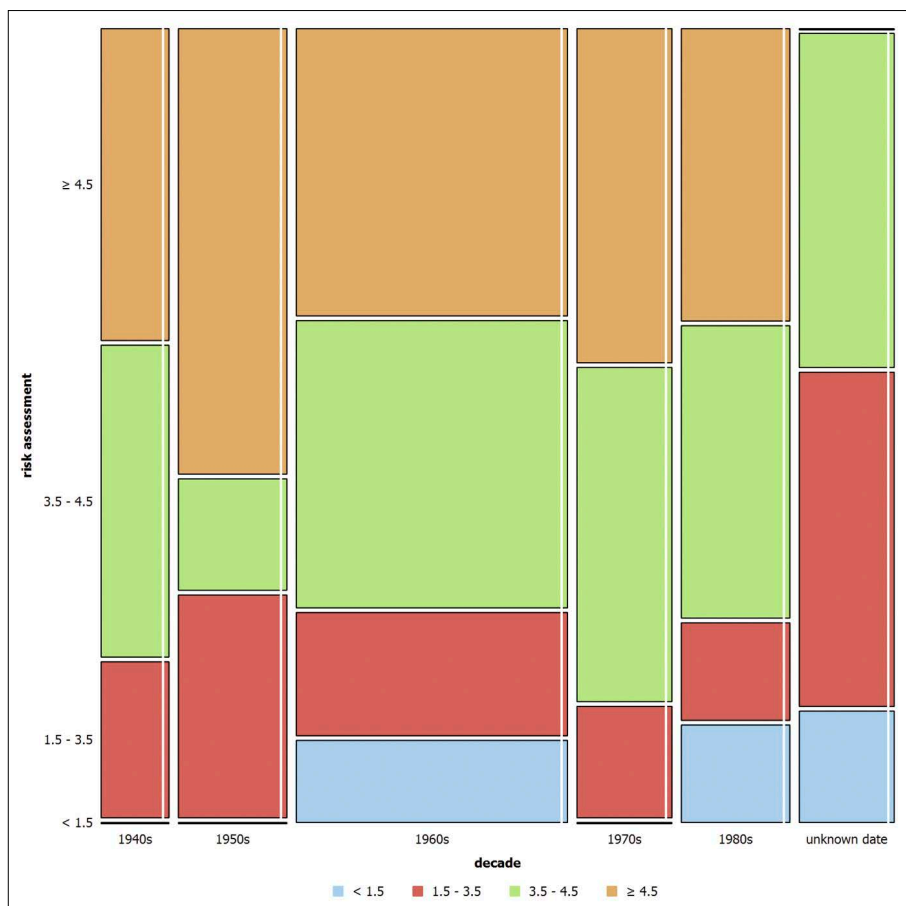


Figure 13. Ivan Seljak Čopič, *Protest rudarjev* (Miners' Protest), mosaic, 1961, Cultural Centre, Zagorje ob Savi. Detail. The mosaic is particularly at risk around the air vent, where part of it has already detached. Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2023.

of part of the mosaic, much of the remaining mosaic is either destroyed or awaiting further conservation-restoration in the studio of UL ALUO. The condition of the largely destroyed mosaics at the Petrol station on Trieste Street (*Tržaška cesta*) in Ljubljana and of Pečko's mosaic in the Bank in Slovenj Gradec was rated as 1 (destroyed). Otherwise, in the risk assessment, eleven mosaics are assessed as being at higher risk, mainly because they are exposed outdoors, two of them are indoors but in a location where they are likely to be physically damaged, and two are floor mosaics subject to permanent foot traffic. Some of the mosaics have presentation problems because they are partly covered or less visible due to furniture, storage of various objects, changes in use, alterations, and so on. The analysis shows that, among the mosaics created in the 1950s, there is a higher proportion of very well-preserved mosaics (rated 5) than among those from other decades, but at the same time there is also a slightly higher proportion of poorly preserved mosaics (rated 2) [Figure 14].

We further analysed the condition of the mosaics (rated from 1 to 5) in relation to the following characteristics: material composition (stone/smalto), type (floor/wall), location (indoor/outdoor), period of creation (by decade), content (socialist vs. non-socialist), and type of monument and

Figure 14. Condition ratings of the mosaics (1 = destroyed; 5 = very well preserved), grouped by decade of creation. Chart: Blaž Šeme, created using Orange Data Mining (University of Ljubljana).



protection status by analysis of variance (ANOVA). When considering the influence of age in correlation with condition assessment, the mosaics from different decades are in different condition, with mean values from 4.25 (1950s) and 4.30 (1960s) to 4.71 (1970s) and 4.75 (1980s). From a material point of view, the smalto mosaics are on average as well preserved (mean value 4.44) as those made of natural stone (mean value 4.28). There is also no significant difference in preservation between mosaics with and without socialist themes (mean values 4.50 and 4.28). The analysis of the collected data confirms that mosaics are better preserved in interiors (mean value 4.37) than on exteriors (mean value 4.29), and wall mosaics (mean value 4.41) are better preserved than floor mosaics (mean value 4.00), but in both cases the differences in preservation are not as significant as might be expected. The mosaics on Second World War monuments (mean value 4.00) are worse preserved than on churches (mean value 4.67) and other buildings (mean value 4.41), and mosaics at registered heritage sites (mean value 4.00) and sites without protection

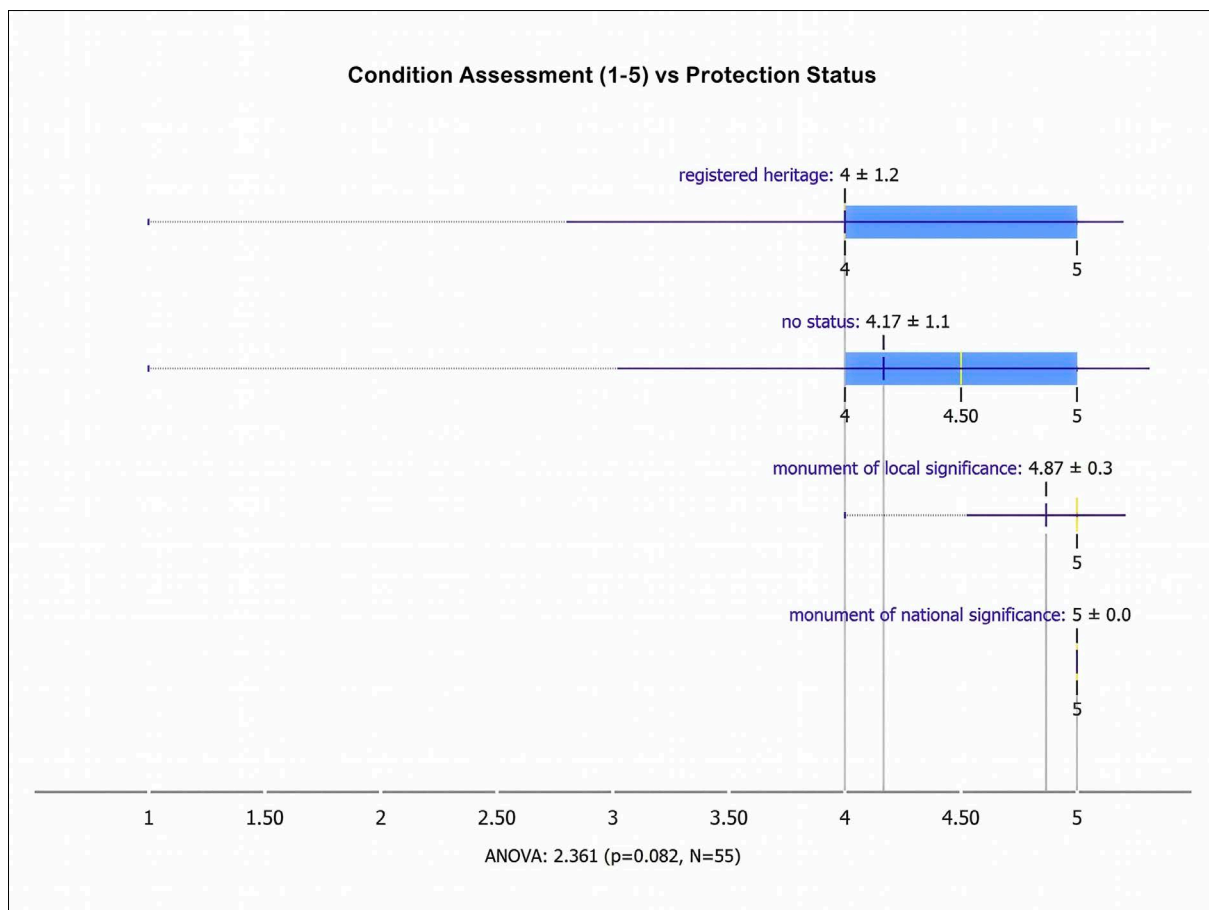


Figure 15. Condition ratings of the fifty-five analysed mosaics (1 = destroyed; 5 = very well preserved) by heritage-protection status, analysed using ANOVA (p = p-value; n = sample size). Chart: Blaž Šeme, created using Orange Data Mining (University of Ljubljana).

status (mean value 4.17) are significantly less well preserved than those at cultural monuments of local (mean value 4.87) or national importance (mean value 5.00) [Figure 15]. Accordingly, mosaics at registered heritage sites are considered to be at a similarly high risk to those at sites without protection status.

Discussion

Several factors influence the condition of the socialist-era mosaics to varying degrees. These factors include age, material and production technique, content or theme, exposure to weather and vandalism, neglect, building renovation, building function, and monument protection status. The influence of some factors is easier to assess than others. A detailed analysis of the impact of each factor on the condition of mosaics is important because it also provides a more credible risk assessment. Analysis of the fifty-five mosaic units shows that the older mosaics are on average in slightly worse condition than the newer ones. Surprisingly, the outdoor mosaics are not in much worse condition, probably because of conservation-restoration work in recent years.

Based on previous experience with condition analyses of other artworks, we had assumed that mosaics were mostly threatened by exposure to weather, modifications and poor maintenance of buildings, insufficient legal protection, and, to some extent, ideological reasons, but there is no evidence that the socialist-themed mosaics are less well preserved or more endangered. The analysis shows that a building's status as registered heritage does not generally provide more protection for mosaics. However, designating a site as a monument of local or national significance notably helps reduce the threat to the mosaics.

The study also reveals that mosaics are particularly at risk in commercial buildings, in restaurants, banks, and shops, because all known instances of destruction (or possible covering over) occurred in such buildings: the Tavčarjev Hram restaurant in Ljubljana, the NLB bank branches in Ljubljana and Slovenj Gradec, and the Petrol station in Ljubljana. Although the mosaics are generally well maintained, the presence of more noticeable damage highlights the need for conservation-restoration on the mosaics of the monument in Mislinja, the Zagorje ob Savi Cultural Centre, and the Petrol office building in Ljubljana.

A review of the literature suggests that lower awareness of the artistic significance and value of these mosaics, as an additional risk factor, may be due to a lack of studies on the mosaics and their promotion.

Conclusion

Between 1945 and 1990, numerous mosaics, wall paintings, sgraffiti, reliefs, and sculptures were created in Slovenia, especially on public buildings and in squares and parks. Over the years, the research work of documenting and monitoring the condition of artworks in Slovenia has gradually led to the creation of a digital database of artworks with pho-

tographic and written documentation on techniques, technology, conservation, endangerment, and past interventions. The main purpose of collecting such data is to create a basis for broader heritage studies, the practical purpose of which is to improve approaches to the conservation and restoration of art heritage. All this effort makes sense when some value is recognised in these works of art.

This study presents the results of an analysis of the state of art heritage of the socialist era, which is currently limited to mosaics. Many of the earliest mosaics are in the socialist realist style and show figurative depictions of the Second World War and the development of the working and peasant classes in the postwar period. In the 1950s, more abstract representations also began to appear. The most typical and monumental mosaics of the socialist era can be found at Villa Bled, the Workers' Home in Trbovlje, the National Assembly building in Ljubljana, the Dražgoše monument, and the primary school in Kostanjevica na Krki, which is the largest mosaic in Slovenia. The mosaics were mostly designed by Slovenian artists and created by the Italian mosaicist Alfio Tambosso, usually with natural stone and smalto tesserae. Through research, it was possible to compile a list of sixty-four mosaics and to analyse the condition and endangerment of fifty-five mosaics. The mosaics are generally in good condition and regularly maintained, and some have recently been conserved/restored. The older mosaics are on average in slightly worse condition than newer ones. There is no evidence that socialist-themed mosaics are less well preserved or more at risk. The analysis of the collected data confirms that mosaics on buildings of national and local significance are better preserved. Surprisingly, mosaics on buildings with registered heritage status are significantly worse preserved compared to mosaics on buildings of local or national significance and therefore at greater risk. Moreover, mosaics dating from the socialist era are clearly more at risk in buildings with commercial activity.

Funding

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Endnotes

- 1 In the last ten years, the UL ALUO Department of Restoration carried out conservation-restoration on several publicly accessible works of art from the socialist era mostly in Ljubljana, for which often no or minimal initial documentation about the creation date, authorship, technique, technology, and previous interventions could be found. These conserved/restored artworks were the following: two murals created at the end of the 1940s by Maksim Sedej at the Secondary Hairdressing School (intervention in 2016) and at the adjacent Technical Secondary School (intervention in 2024), which was formerly part of the Litostroj industrial complex in the Šiška neighbourhood, the stone sculpture *Drvar/Sekač* (Woodcutter) by the sculptor Jakob Savinšek from 1949 to 1950 in front of the Forestry Institute in the *Rožna Dolina* neighbourhood (intervention in 2024), Slavko Pengov's mural from 1950 to 1951 in the lobby of the University of Ljubljana's Faculty of Natural Sciences and Engineering on Aškerc Street (*Aškerčeva cesta*; partial intervention in 2022), a mosaic in the Ljubljana City Savings Bank on Čop Street (*Čopova ulica*), created in around 1962 by an unknown artist (intervention in 2018), six murals on the central staircase of Jože Plečnik High School on Šubic Street (*Šubičeva ulica*) painted by Vasko Pregelj in 1967 (intervention in 2020 and 2021), student forma viva stone sculptures from the 1970s in the park of the student campus in the Rožna Dolina neighbourhood (interventions from 2018 onward), and a mural of unknown date by Jaka Torkar in the hallway of Jesenice Secondary School (intervention in 2025–2026).
- 2 Blaž Šeme and Urška Šeme, "The Ljubljana Sgraffiti: A Diversity of Architectures, Techniques of Executions, and Degrees of Preservation," in *Sgraffito in Change: Original Realisation vs. Secondary Interventions*, ed. Jan Vojtěchovský (Litomyšl: University of Pardubice, 2022), 84–101.
- 3 Blaž Šeme, "Conservation of Socialist Era Mosaics in Slovenia," in *Conserving Mosaics in a Changing Environment: Challenges and Opportunities: The 14th Conference of the International Committee for Conservation of Mosaics* (Florence: Edifir Edizioni Firenze, 2025), 199–212.
- 4 For example, in her art video *Beacons of Resistance* (2023), the Slovenian artist Jasmina Cibic included clips showing Slavko Pengov's mosaic in the Belvedere at Villa Bled. The video was acquired by the Irish Museum of Modern Art in 2023.
- 5 For example, Donovan Pavlinec, "Slovenski inženirji človeških duš: monumentalne stenske poslikave socialističnega realizma," *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, n. s., 44 (2008): 134.
- 6 This relationship is reciprocal because the things we value reinforce our internal belief systems, and our internal belief systems determine which things are worth pursuing and preserving.
- 7 Jonathan Ashley-Smith, *Risk Assessment for Object Conservation* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2011), 10–11.
- 8 Randall Mason, "Assessing Values in Conservation Planning: Methodological Issues and Choices," in *Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage: Research Report*, ed. Marta de la Torre (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2002), 7, https://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/pdf_publications/pdf/assessing.pdf.
- 9 Maja Kač, "Vsakega namiga bomo veseli.' Iščejo se umetnine, ki so med 1945 in 1991 nastale za javne ustanove," *MMC RTV Slovenija*, 2 May 2025, <https://www.rtvlo.si/kultura/dediscina/vsakega-namiga-bomo-veseli-iscejo-se-umetnine-ki-so-med-1945-in-1991-nastale-za-javne-ustanove/744210>.
- 10 Pavlinec, "Slovenski inženirji človeških duš."
- 11 Pavlinec, "Slovenski inženirji človeških duš," 118.
- 12 Jure Mikuž, *Slovensko moderno slikarstvo in zahodna umetnost: od preloma s socialističnim realizmom do konceptualizma* (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 1995), 118–173.
- 13 Pavlinec, "Slovenski inženirji človeških duš," 114–130.

- 14 Katarina Mohar, *Vila Bled*, Umetnine v žepu, vol. 13 (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2016); Katarina Mohar, "Art Representing the State: The Villa Bled Official Residence," in *Art and Politics in the Modern Period*, ed. Dragan Damjanović (Zagreb: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, FF Press, 2019), 83–91.
- 15 Pavlinec, "Slovenski inženirji človeških duš," 117–118, and Milček Komelj, *Kronika Marjana Pogačnika o zaljubljenih v umetnost*, Elektronska knjižna zbirka, e-55 (Ljubljana: KUD Logos, 2005), 337–338, https://kud-logos.si/knjige/e_55_Kronika_MP.pdf.
- 16 Mohar, "Art Representing the State," 86–88.
- 17 Luciano Petris, who mainly works with glass tesserae (Venetian smalto), continued to create mosaics for Jože Ciuha also after 1990 – a total of about thirty works in Slovenia, Italy, and perhaps elsewhere as well; see "Luciano Petris," Homo Faber, accessed May 8, 2025, <https://www.homofaber.com/en/discover/luciano-petris-mosaic-making-italy>.
- 18 Asta Znidarčič, "Kamenček pri kamenčku," *Tovariš*, 26 October 1958, 1138–1139.
- 19 "I. nagrada 300.000 gre v Bihać," *Polet*, 13 July 1964, 12.
- 20 Andrej Makuc, "Med Orlico in Uršljo se je zgodil ves svet," in *Karel Pečko*, ed. Janez Komljanec (Slovenj Gradec: Fundacija akademskega slikarja Karla Pečka; Cerdonis, 2006), 85.
- 21 Blaž Šeme, *Mozaik v poslovalnici Mestne hranilnice ljubljanske na Čopovi 3 v Ljubljani: poročilo o konservatorsko-restavratorskem posegu* (Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Akademija za likovno umetnost in oblikovanje, 2018).
- 22 Tadeja Kajzar Trajkovski and Alja Fir, "Konserviranje-restavriranje mozaika Bitka na Krškem polju v Kostanjevici na Krki," in *Konservator-restavrador (20 let): Povzetki mednarodnega strokovnega srečanja 2020*, ed. Nataša Nemeček (Ljubljana: Društvo restavradorjev Slovenije and Skupnost muzejev Slovenije, 2020), 186.
- 23 That is, not counting our presentation on the conservation-restoration of mosaics at the Ljubljana City Savings Bank to an international audience of experts at the ICCM conference in Plovdiv in 2022 and the SEE Mosaics conference in Budapest in 2024.

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Ocena stanja in ogroženosti mozaikov iz obdobja socialistične Slovenije

Povzetek

V prispevku so predstavljeni rezultati analize stanja na področju mozaične umetnosti iz obdobja socializma v Sloveniji. S kabinetnim delom in raziskavo na terenu smo ustvarili evidenco več kot 60 mozaikov ter proučili njihovo materialno sestavo, tehnike in pretekle posege, pa tudi njihovo stanje in ogroženost.

V obdobju med letoma 1945 in 1990 so v Sloveniji nastali številni mozaiki, stenske poslikave, sgraffiti, reliefi in kipi, ki se nahajajo zlasti na javnih stavbah, v parkih in na trgih. Dolgoletno raziskovalno delo, posvečeno dokumentiranju in spremljanju stanja teh umetniških del, ki poteka na Raziskovalnem inštitutu Akademije za likovno umetnost in oblikovanje v Ljubljani, je postopoma privedlo do vzpostavitve digitalne podatkovne baze umetnin, ki vključuje fotografsko in pisno dokumentacijo o tehnikah in tehnologijah izvedbe, konserviranju, ogroženosti ter preteklih posegih. Glavni namen zbiranja teh podatkov je vzpostaviti podlago za širše raziskave dediščine, katerih praktični cilj je izboljšati pristope h konserviranju in restavriranju umetnostne dediščine. Vsa ta prizadevanja pa dobijo smisel, ko je tem umetninam priznana določena vrednost – zgodovinska, estetska, simbolna, spominska ali druga.

V študiji so predstavljeni rezultati analize stanja umetnostne dediščine iz obdobja socializma, ki je za zdaj omejena na mozaično umetnost. Številni najzgodnejši mozaiki so nastali v slogu socialističnega realizma in prikazujejo figuralne prizore narodnoosvobodilnega boja ter razvoja delavskega in kmečkega razreda v povojnem obdobju. V petdesetih letih 20. stoletja so se začele pojavljati tudi bolj abstraktne upodobitve. Najznačilnejše in najmonumentalnejše mozaike iz obdobja socializma najdemo v Vili Bled, Delavskem domu Trbovlje, stavbi Ljudske skupščine v Ljubljani, na spomeniku v Dražgošah in na osnovni šoli v Kostanjevici na Krki, kjer je tudi največji mozaik v Sloveniji. Mozaike so večinoma zasnovali slovenski umetniki, izvedel pa jih je italijanski mozaicist Alfio Tambosso. V okviru raziskave smo evidentirali 64 mozaikov, pri 55 pa smo analizirali njihovo stanje in ogroženost.

Mozaiki so večinoma sestavljeni iz kamnitih in steklenih (smaltnih) ploščic (*tesserae*), pri čemer se je izbira materialov skozi desetletja nekoliko

spreminjala. Na splošno so mozaiki dobro ohranjeni in večinoma redno vzdrževani, nekateri pa so bili v zadnjem času tudi konservirani-restavrirani. V zadnjih letih so bili konservatorsko-restavratorski posegi izvedeni predvsem na mozaikih na prostem. Ugotovili smo, da so mozaiki v notranjščinah bolje ohranjeni od tistih na zunanjščinah in da so stenski mozaiki bolje ohranjeni od talnih, vendar razlike v ohranjenosti v nobenem od obeh primerov niso statistično pomembne.

Starejši mozaiki so v povprečju nekoliko slabše ohranjeni od novejših. Mozaiki iz steklenih ploščic, ki so bili pogostejši v poznejših obdobjih, so v povprečju enako dobro ohranjeni kot mozaiki iz naravnega kamna. Za trditev, da bi bili mozaiki s socialistično tematiko slabše ohranjeni ali bolj ogroženi od mozaikov z drugačno motiviko, ni dokazov. Analiza zbranih podatkov kaže tudi, da so mozaiki na stavbah, ki so bile razglašene za spomenike lokalnega ali državnega pomena, bolje ohranjeni. Mozaiki na stavbah, ki so zgolj vpisane v register kulturne dediščine, pa so podobno kot mozaiki na objektih brez kakršnega koli varstvenega statusa bistveno slabše ohranjeni in zato bolj ogroženi. Posebej ogroženi so mozaiki v zgradbah s komercialno dejavnostjo, kot so restavracije, banke in trgovine.

A substantial body of postwar art created for institutional environments remains hidden in plain sight: in schools, hospitals, municipal offices, factories, hotels, shops, and other spaces of everyday life. Some works remain intact, others survive in altered interiors or as partial material remains, and still others are known only through scattered archival records, photographs, and uncertain

memories. Many have been covered, relocated, destroyed or forgotten, even though they formed an important part of postwar public space and visual culture.

This volume contributes to the transnational study of art

commissioned for public institutions, a field that remains unevenly researched across national contexts. The chapters show how institutions used art to shape their environments and how later changes in use or ownership affected the works' meanings and prospects for preservation.

