

“Dorf” is the German word for village.

In the 19th century, the largely uninhabited forest-swamp area of Slavonia was settled by the inhabitants from numerous Central European nations (alongside Croats, there were Serbs, Hungarians, Germans, Austrians, Slovaks, Czechs, Ruthenians, Jews, and others). Austria-Hungary colonised these deserted areas, compensating military service with (Slavonian) land, so officers often brought entire families with them, followed by many others. The exploitation of forests and land initiated rapid economic development, which further stimulated immigration. Large and numerous villages became the fundamental demographic and urban units.

The German settlers exerted the greatest influence on local village life through their culture, crafts, language, and architecture, which remains the most visible relic of that period to this day. Numerous brick yards were established under their influence, and brick replaced the earlier construction methods using mud and timber, significantly improving the quality of life and housing. Two types of houses emerged: gable-end houses – developed by adapting existing traditional architecture and the agrarian way of life, and longitudinal houses – echoing urban architecture and adapted to the needs of craftsmen. The houses were built by peasants unfamiliar with architectural styles, who imitated urban architecture through façade ornamentation in their aspiration towards cultural and civilisational advancement. A single building might display a mixture of historicist and Art Nouveau styles, and façades often expressed the significance, social status, religious affiliation, ethnicity or occupation of the owner/builder and their family. This architectural style spread among all the inhabitants of Slavonia and persisted until the mid-20th century, and even today, it often represents the sole cultural and historical heritage of a place.

The current emigration of the population most directly contributes to the destruction of villages, as they do not provide an adequate quality of life. Post offices, health centres, shops, and schools are closing... houses are abandoned, yards overgrown with weeds. Historic architecture is the first to decay. Most of these structures are deserted and dilapidated, and some of the photographed buildings collapsed shortly after being photographed.

Inscribed in the rural architecture of Slavonia is the historical prosperity of the region, but also its present-day decline, a thread connecting two opposing migratory waves. The irony of history lies in the fact that Germans once settled Slavonian villages and improved the quality of life, and now it is precisely the rural population who are largely moving to Germany in search of a better life.

The series consists of photo-collages of buildings set against purified lowland landscapes, in order to emphasise the architecture and the emptied landscape, as well as the typology of houses within their real settings.

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