



Shops *Urša Jurman*
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Excerpt from a longer text

My neighbourhood is a rather non-typical council flat neighbourhood built in the socialist modernist style. The town planners and architects had the idea of using the ground floors of the tall apartment buildings for smaller shops and services. Of course, as the neighbourhood was being built on the edge of town, the basic infrastructure for everyday needs needed to be set up. However, under Socialism the link between council flats and private trade and service activities was unusual.

I have no idea how the idea functioned at the beginning of the 1980s, when the neighbourhood was completed, but a year ago they closed the last general store, which provided basic provisions. To be honest, the shop did not have a great selection. But why should they, as the consumer illusion of free choice was provided for by the large shopping centre that opened across the road only two years ago.

Regardless of the shopping centre across the road, a butcher, a hairdresser, a photocopying shop, a clothes' shop and a few bars still persevere. But most storefronts are empty, without a trace of their former occupiers. Now one only finds messages like 'For sale or rent' or 'We have moved to a new location' hanging in the shop windows. This has been the case ever since I moved to this neighbourhood two years ago. It has to be said that this gives the area a rather depressing image.

At one stage I opted to support the local economy and its 'colourfulness' for at least a bit. On a winter day I decided to visit the local hairdresser. Unfortunately this proved to be a bad choice. When I returned home, greatly dissatisfied with my new haircut, I decided that my solidarity with the local economy has its limits. I never stepped into this hairdresser's again.

What reasons do people have to return to the Jagoda greengrocer and the Laura fashion shop? The photographs alone do not explain anything about their motives, as they only show a group of people in front of the two selected shops.

Let's assume for a moment that the people in the images are hired extras. What effect would it have within a gallery context? Isn't it likely that the reading of the picture with extras would not truly differ from an image with actual clients? The iconography would look exactly the same. The photograph – which would probably be supported by

an accompanying text - would discuss the idea of supporting small trade initiatives in a period of globalised capital and mass consumption. It would discuss notions of proximity, cooperation, even a sense of belonging and a certain type of community as opposed to the alienation that characterises life in a contemporary urban society. It could make the viewers think about their own consumption habits and infuse the social bonds that they create during their own everyday practices with meaning.

Now, let us assume that the people in our photographs are actually customers of Amir and Jasmin Kulauzovič and Duška Sulejmalli. Eighty women, children, men and a few dogs in front of Jagoda and seven carefully dressed women in front of Laura express actual support: in first instance for the traders, but maybe also for the artists and their concept. These photographs also indicate great organisation and lots of communicational input. The traders needed to collaborate closely with the artists and communicate the intention of the project individually to everyone invited. The invited customers had to adjust their time schedules so that they could make the photo shoot and in some cases they might have persuaded someone else in their family, or among their friends or from their neighbourhood to participate. Such a photograph also indicates that through this unusual experience, the bonds between the traders and the participating customers might have strengthened and offered a reflection.

