

FILM REVIEW

The Maribor Uprisings, directed by Maple Razsa and Milton Guillén, 2017, 89 minutes, Slovenian with English subtitles. Contact: Maple Razsa, mjrzasa@colby.edu. <https://www.asnconvention.com/the-maribor-uprisings>. Shown at the ASN 2018 World Convention.

Tourist advertisements depict Slovenia as a peaceful and green country in the midst of Central Europe and its capital Ljubljana as a hidden gem that global travelers still need to discover. Scholarly literature as well as political public debates usually support this image describing Slovenia as a post-socialist *wunderkind*. It was the only country that underwent the post-socialist transition as well as Yugoslav disintegration without a major war conflict or an economic downfall. Yet approximately two decades after its independence, citizens of Slovenia demonstrated a different face of their country: by demonstrations, which by late 2012 grew into a popular uprising. A multitude of different people (ranging from students to retired people among others) joined the protests and raised their voice saying they did not get the best of the “Slovenian miracle story.” The protests indicated that corruption, precarious underemployment, and poverty were also a part of this story, no matter how successful Slovenia appeared to be. But it also signposted that citizens in Slovenia would not quietly take all the machinations of the political elites, and they can take control over their cities and their country.

A documentary directed by Maple Razsa and Milton Guillén traces the popular uprisings in Slovenia to the city of Maribor. The movie, entitled *Maribor Uprisings*, points out from the very beginning that Maribor, the second largest city in Slovenia with a population of around 100,000, portrays a different side of Slovenia. In the times of Socialist Yugoslavia, Maribor was a prosperous industrial city, but after Slovenian independence, many previously successful factories closed down. The unemployment rate in the Eastern part of Slovenia, where Maribor is situated, was and remains much higher than in the more prosperous Western and central part. Yet the drop over the edge for the people of Maribor seemed to be something very banal: the main slogan of the Maribor Uprising, “*Gotof je*” (which translates literally as “he is done with” in the Styrian dialect), was coined as an opposition to the project of Maribor’s then mayor. He surrounded the city with speed cameras, which were issuing a great number of fines, some as large as one-third of the Slovenian average salary. This was just the tip of the iceberg: as the documentary shows, the money collected from the speed cameras did not go back to the city budget, but to a private company connected to the mayor. The protests ended up spreading to the entire country of Slovenia and led to the resignation of Maribor’s mayor, followed by the fall of the rightist government of Janez Janša. The documentary also follows the story of a group of youngsters, who were detained after the protests, because they were (albeit without solid proof) considered to be violent protesters.

The documentary *Maribor Uprising* is exceptional in many ways. It is labeled as a participatory movie, but it takes the understanding of participation to a whole new level both with its artistic and political engagement with the audience. Namely it was not only engaged and participatory on the production level (with protesters in Maribor having a camera and filming), but also on the reception level. The audience could vote and discuss how the documentary should continue, and which narratives of the protest should unravel. Each next scene depended on the discussion of the audience. Artistically it seemed that the movie followed the post-structural poetics of Roland Barthes to new horizons: the readers or the viewers are the producers of the meaning and not the authors/directors. Here the viewers directly co-create the movie itself by the act of deliberation. Furthermore, this showed how the artistic and political ambitions of this documentary were embedded within each other and inseparable from one another. The viewers were not mere

audience anymore, but participants and co-creators of the narratives. We all became activist-citizens—a part of participatory democracy, which was the main feature of the protests from Slovenia and other countries in Southeast Europe, up to the Occupy movement in the US, as well as Arab Spring.

The screening of the movie itself could be best described by the ancient Greek proverb of Heraclitus: You can never step in the same river twice. As the audience co-creates each screening, it is important to comment on the one I have been a part of at the 2018 ASN Convention at Columbia University in New York City. The audience mostly consisted of participants of the convention, but of very diverse backgrounds: there were people who attended the protests in Slovenia, but also those active during the protests in Gezi park in Turkey. The audience debated whether we could draw parallels among the protests happening in different contexts, as some happen in nominally working democracies (with legitimate elected governments, as one of the participants commented) up to illiberal democracies and dictatorships. The question raised was, could we really draw parallels, especially considering the outcomes of protests? For example, the protest in Slovenia was successful with its short-term goals and did change the government, on one hand. On the other hand, there were other uprisings that ended up in civil war, as pointed out during the discussion. In addition, the protests are not necessarily used for progressive goals (for example, those of the alt-right).

The debate after the screening might have created more questions than it answered. However, at the same times it created a new political community of people who were, as equals, discussing what contributes to a better society. And in doing so, it brilliantly did achieve an act of connectedness between a wide variety of people who happened to be present at this screening.

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