

Jemniště Castle: from the Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship Exhibition to a hotel

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The castle is currently also used as a hotel, a wedding area and a restaurant. A part of the building and the adjacent park are also open to the public. Jiří Sternberg says that the dilapidated condition of the castle was surprisingly a good starting position.

What was the condition of the castle when you obtained it from the state?

We took over Jemniště in October 1995. The building as such was not in such a bad condition; I mean - the roofs were relatively good, repaired in 1974. Although the roof covering was at the end of its lifetime, there were no leaks into the building, or no dramatic leaks. The facades were shabby and showed signs of insufficient maintenance. In general, the castle made the impression of an old, unoccupied house that had not been meaningfully repaired for many many years.

However, Jemniště underwent at least one reconstruction during socialism, and a rather extensive one at that time..

It is true that in 1974, parts of the roofs and the external shell on the side of the honorary courtyard were repaired. They were opening the permanent Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship Exhibition, which remained here until 1986. The then construction budget amounted to about CZK 15 million. However, not all building modifications were suitable. For example they blocked air vents with concrete, which resulted in a higher humidity in almost all castle buildings.

So there were things to improve...

Quite paradoxically, the gloomy condition was a good starting point for reconstructions and the subsequent use of the space, because we were not limited by anything too much. We launched repairs in 1997 and have managed to repair many parts of the castle since then, in particular the facades and the roofs of the individual buildings. Three apartments underwent a complete reconstruction and the toilets were reconstructed. The castle park was enclosed with a fence. We also repaired areas on the ground floor of the castle, which are now used for weddings. We invested a total of over CZK 30 million into the repairs, and that without ordinary maintenance.

Where do you get the money for the repairs?

A part of the original country estate was returned along with the castle - namely 80 hectares of farm land, 75 hectares of lakes and 1,100 hectares of forests; and also a sawmill and a farmstead. We pay the reconstructions from the revenues of these facilities. We also managed to obtain about CZK 1.8 million from public subsidies for the repairs of the roof and the facade in the stable.

Can you give an example of a specifically demanding repair?

The last repair was probably the most demanding - the roof of the former garden pavilion. It is a single-floor building built in 1720, with a Baroque frame that was totally damaged by leaking water in many places. After consultations with experts from the monument care institute, we decided to replace the individual trusses one by one. In my opinion, this proved to be unsuitable, as it was necessary to

replace almost half of all timber elements.

Some repairs require assistance from artisans and conservators. How do you search for them? What are their salaries?

So far we have had experience with conservators in connection furniture and paintings. We usually choose them on the basis of recommendations from persons for whom they have already worked. The reward varies and depends on experience, on the volume of work and other factors. Their hourly salary is not usually obvious from the price proposals.

What other principal repairs are planned in Jemniště?

We have plenty of plans with Jemniště - for example we have to solve the side facade on the northeast and the wastewater treatment plant, scheduled for this year. We have also started to deal with smaller details, such as the surface treatment of doors and windows - there was not too much time for these activities in the last several decades. And I also have to add that we pay a lot of time and investments to improving the adjacent twelve-hectare park, which has been changed almost beyond recognition.

The repair of the castle is certainly demanding in terms of finance as well as administration. What permissions do you need? Have you encountered any administrative barriers?

The administrative part is actually simple. We have to ask the competent municipal authority with extended powers for the Binding Opinion on Monument Repair. This authority asks the conservation authority for its opinion and, accordingly, grants or does not grant a permit for reconstruction. In case of larger repairs, there are inspection days in place and when the work is completed, final approval has to be granted and a protocol drawn up.

How do you evaluate the scope of monument protection - do you think it is exaggerated?

Based on the applicable laws, the owner of the monument is obliged to ask for a binding opinion for all repairs, without any distinction between roofs or interior paints. Both require an application. I think that most owners (including me) have a provident approach to this law and agree with the employees of the monument care authority only on important things. Many details are solved with some sense of history, possessed definitely by everyone willing to invest large money into an "old house".

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