

SLOVAKIA

Viktor Miškovský, one of the personalities involved with heritage preservation in Slovakia, in his Memorandum for Rescue of the National Cultural Heritage in 1898, defined the reasons why heritage buildings were being threatened and destroyed. Today, over 100 years later, we can list the same reasons:

- indolence and ignorance;
- greed, egoism and decadent tastes;
- false understanding of the aims of the modern era;
- efforts towards unsuitable innovations and 'beautifying' – in this case, heritage buildings sometimes end up with a more 'beautiful' presentation, but at the expense of their original shape and their authenticity – the end result is ultimately one of destruction.

To this list from the previous millennium we can today add:

- lack of cultural awareness;
- unsettled ownership, mostly caused by restitution, speculative businesses involving cultural heritage assets, together with inappropriate use and the absence of maintenance;
- absence of a motivational system with regard to investment in heritage buildings through the reduction of taxes – forcing owners to search for other resources outside of government assistance.

Due to the above-mentioned problems, many heritage buildings are in such a poor state that the real hope to safeguard them is slowly disappearing. The fault, however, is not only a lack of finances.

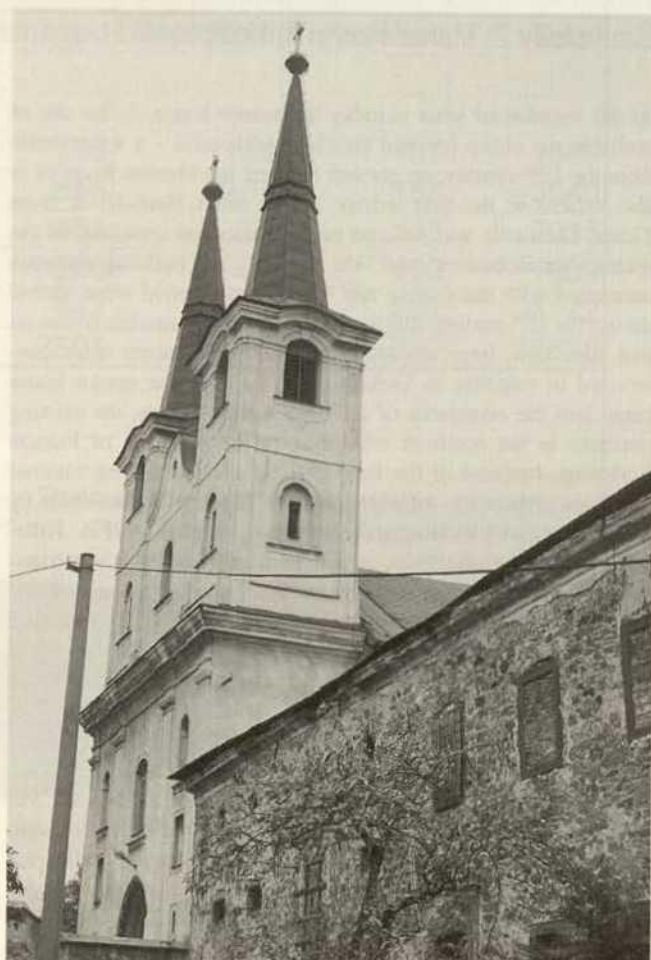
Case Study 1: Monastery of Premonstratensian in Šahy

The former Monastery of the Premonstratensian Order in Šahy is one of the oldest places in the history of the ancient region of Hont. Dating from the 13th century, it is represented today by both the Church of Assumption and the so-called 'corn-loft' – the other parts of the fortified complex have been destroyed during the last centuries, as a result of years of misusing the former monastery for other purposes.

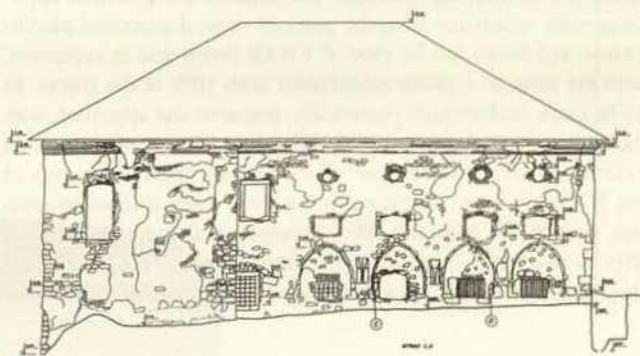
Since 1993 there has been a serious concern to protect and safeguard the corn-loft. A complex research project by the Institute for Monuments Preservation documented the present corn-loft. It was created in the 17th–18th century, probably by Jesuits, and during the mediaeval period was part of the inner yard of the Premonstratensians' monastery. Even earlier material has been excavated by archaeologists, documenting a more ancient history for this important place.

In 1236–38, the Monastery became the base of Ban Martin of Hont-Poznan. In 1443 it was fortified. The monastery was situated above the ford on a well-used merchant route, running from the south to the mining towns in central Slovakia. In 1546 the king ordered that it be strengthened (at the cost of the State) into a fortified castle, in response to the march of Turkish troops from the south-east. It is important to highlight that the monastery was part of a small group of places called 'Locus Credibili', and thus it was also an important archive.

There is a serious danger of the deterioration of this historical architecture, especially the roofing; stabilisation is the most important work to be done, due to the threat of structural collapse. The



Premonstratensian monastery in Šahy



Premonstratensian monastery in Šahy, corn-loft, documentation of the damages

poor technical state is partly caused by long neglect by the owner. During the period of planned economy, a part of the original structure was replaced by new buildings. The last authentic building of the ensemble, the corn-loft, together with the whole complex, was returned to the possession of the Roman Catholic Church at the start of 1990. The owner has no interest in maintaining or using the building, as it is without any practical advantage. Without a change of ownership, the safeguarding of the most valuable architectural element in the town is virtually impossible. On the other hand, according to recent Church internal rules on built properties, they cannot sell it.

This is a case that illustrates many similar situations, where due to a change of ownership there is a problem in finding any use for the monument.

Case study 2: Manor House in Holíč

At the location of what is today the manor house, is the site of probably the oldest fortified building in Slovakia – a water castle from the 12th century, on the left bank of the Morava River (it is also related to the first written notice about Holíč-Ujvár from 1256). The castle was situated near a mediaeval crossway of the routes 'Via Bohemica' and 'Via Amber'. The building elements connected with the Gothic and Renaissance period were altered during the 17th century, due to extensive building modifications. At that time new, huge star-shape bastion fortifications were constructed in response to Turkish raids. In 1736 the manor house came into the ownership of the royal family. Today, the existing structure is the result of rebuilding at the direction of Francis Lotharing, husband of the Empress Maria Theresa. The summer residence project was originated by J.N. Jadot, with decoration by J. Chamanti, and architectural innovation attributed to F.A. Hillebrandt. After the year 1918, as with all manor houses, it was transferred to the ownership of the State. Dealing with this remarkable complication of use is one of the basic challenges facing its rescue today. The manor house incorporates typical features of the start of the Theresian building epoch, and belongs to the most important works of Baroque architecture in Slovakia.

The whole building suffers from neglect and lack of maintenance – it is empty and without use. Commenced but never-finished restoration works are causing their own challenges. For example, the Chinese Hall was originally covered in leather wall-papering from the 18th century. The badly damaged wallpapers have been removed and today are carefully stored on wooden drums in the room itself. Their destiny is uncertain, as is the future of the whole building.

In 1992 the building was one of the first to be transferred to the ownership of the town administration. They received several proposals for purchasing contracts, but none of the potential applicants were acceptable from the point of view of proposed modifications and future use. In 1996 WYWAR Invest was incorporated, with the town as a minor stockholder with 10% of the shares. In 1998 a new architectural project was prepared and approved, with the idea to use the estate as a 'Congress Centre of Francis of Lotharing'; however, because of the lack of financial sources of the WYWAR Invest Company, it has never been realised in practice. In 2000 the company officially announced that was no longer able to financially support the reconstruction of the castle, and they decided to sell it. As a result, the plan to revitalise and protect

the manor house has been changed to another one: to sell. At present, the last applicant was a Swiss citizen. There is currently no possibility of finding any help, because the owner is now insolvent and has been declared bankrupt.

Case Study 3: Folk Architecture Conservation Area in Osturňa

In 1977, under decree of the Slovak Socialist Republic, a Folk Architecture Conservation Area was declared in Osturňa, in the district of Poprad. This decision was focused on securing the measures for State protection of unique, well-preserved rural areas with important urban structures, characterised by valuable architectural and constructional features. The aim was to protect the original character and traditional expression of settlements. Over time, ten such conservation areas were declared in Slovakia, representing various types of folk architecture. Osturňa is characterised by a typical concatenation of rural and domestic structures. Houses and farm buildings form one unit, with a 4-cornered/squared yard. They are constructed using a wooden log-cabin framework, with the result being one of beautiful simplicity. The houses have cellars and lofts, and are covered by pitched roofs. The village is today inhabited by ethnic Gorals, who are a mixture of Polish and Slovak inhabitants – their culture, language and architecture are also typical for other villages in this area.

Today this area – as well as other villages – is at risk. The dwellings and farm houses are mostly empty, unoccupied, without use, or are inhabited by elderly people. The younger generation is leaving for job opportunities in the towns. In particular, the country areas and east part of Slovakia are under the pressure of permanent unemployment, combined with economically weakened inhabitants. On the other hand, for those people who are in an economically better situation, there is a typical ignorance and lack of goodwill, shown in efforts to convert the originally small buildings to pensions with numerous apartments. This attitude is also found in relation to the protected cultural heritage. The Law on State Protection of Cultural Heritage, with its origins in the socialist era, is insufficient to deal with the current market-based economy – its sanctions are symbolic and the community control is minimal.

This situation illustrates the lack of awareness about many cultural values. This is particularly the case in rural areas, partly due to the earlier socialist approach that has now been officially proclaimed as reactionary and recognised as the uncomfortable witness of the sad destiny of Slovak peasants. The possibilities in this particular case include the slow but successful development of tourism in this area. The village itself is situated in beautiful natural surroundings, close to the High Tatras Mountains, but without a direct contact to bigger towns.

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Manor house in Holíč

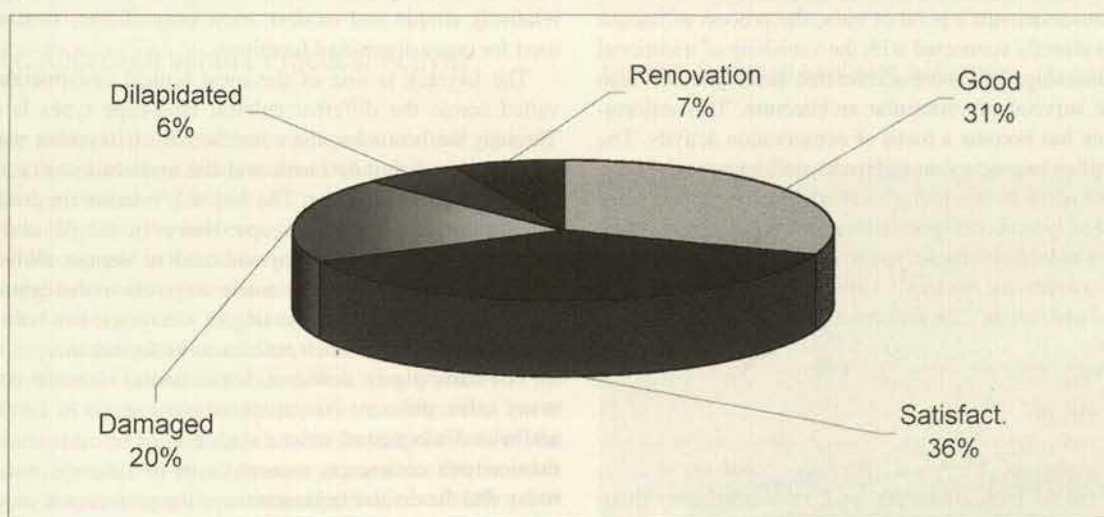


Folk architecture in Osturňa

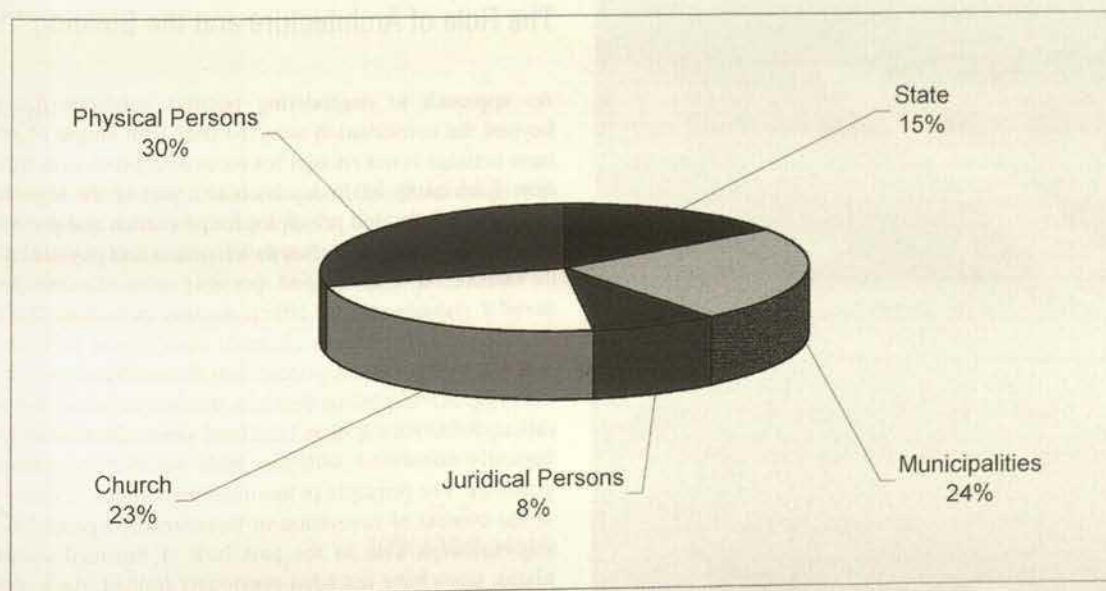


Immovable Cultural Monuments in Slovakia Technical Condition and Form of Proprietorship to January 1, 2001

Techn. Condition	Good	Satisfact.	Damaged	Dilapidated	Renovation	Total
Form of Proprietorship						
State	732	612	333	125	167	1969
Municipalities	1055	968	655	207	155	3040
Church	1001	1271	451	77	135	2935
Juridical Persons	294	307	220	58	130	1009
Physical Persons	851	1531	842	275	223	3722
Total	3933	4689	2501	742	810	12675



Technical condition



Form of proprietorship