

SLOVENE CASTLES – FINANCING, ECONOMICS, GOVERNANCE

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Slovenia – being for some centuries the southern shield of Europe – has more than a thousand castles, of which many just exist as a trace that can be seen from the air or are only known through historic sources. About a third of them are ruins and another third are more or less preserved buildings.

In feudal times the economic power of the castles based on the belonging landed property and belonging righteouses, as customs, tollages, bridge tools etc. The castles were therefore economic entities, and the lords of the castles were at the same time economists and soldiers. So the basic functions of the feudal castles were defensive, residential and governmental. As time passed and the properties lost their primary functions their owners maintained them poorly or even stopped to maintain them in many cases. Additional blows were dealt to the estates in Slovenia during the two World Wars. Especially in the second World War some precious castles were burned down either in the battle or to make sure that the enemy would not be able to move in. After the second World War most of the castles – standing as symbols of feudalism and bourgeoisie – were left to decay. The buildings, having been plundered first, were transformed into social apartments for the poor, who consequently misused the architecture and furniture that was left to such an extent that today the original equipment of the majority of our castles has disappeared.

Also the Slovene history of arts somehow more or less oversaw the artistic importance of the castles. Only about thirty years ago the professional attitude towards this monuments began to change and until now plenty of scientific works on the topic of castles and other feudal architecture have been published, which pertained to elaborate these estates from the perspectives of art history. Also the public attitude towards the castles has become more and more friendly. Yet, problems came up, when the once restored buildings began to decay once again. Only then it became clear that solely the re-establishment through a constant human presence in the buildings, constant maintenance of the castles themselves and of the surrounding property can guarantee that the estates would not go to ruin again. Thence the need arose to look at the castles also from the economic point of view.

In 1998 *The Ministry of Culture* and the *Ministry of Science and Technology* financed the first broadly designed research-project on the castles from the economic point of view in Slovenia: *The Models of Financing, Economics of Preservation and Governance with the Cultural Heritage: Slovene Castles – Financing, Economics, Governance*. The project brought together the researchers of two Ljubljana faculties – *The Faculty of Economics* and *The Faculty of Philosophy* – and some other experts. The two years' work was professionally overseen by *The Office for Preservation of the Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Slovenia*.

The research aimed at determining the present position of Slovene castles from the point of view of financing, economics and governance, to find out their major weaknesses and to make proposals how to cope with determined problems. The analysis of the present position was made by means of a questionnaire that was sent to the governors of Slovene castles and by personal interviews. The sample was selected on the basis of a list of 1182 remaining and destroyed castles and similar profound buildings and with the aid of qualifications, such as age, type, location, cultural importance etc., in which the official lists have been supplemented by some additional monuments mentioned in several sources. This meant an important step forward in elaboration of the evidence of profound architecture in Slovenia.

The research revealed some great problems in connection with financing, economics and governance of Slovene castles. The main results of the study were:

The ownership of most of the Slovenian castles is still not known: After the Republic of Slovenia was established some castles became property of the state or of the Church, enterprises and private owners and others local property, but in most cases the ownership isn't solved yet, and it seems that some privatisation and denationalisation processes will not be concluded soon.

There is a great problem with the finances, since the basic obligations of an owner of a historic monument are to preserve it, to maintain it and to protect it, not to misuse it and to give the public the opportunity of enjoying the cultural monument as it is prescribed by the

law. In order to finance the restoration and re-establishment of these historic buildings researches and studies by experts should be done. To provide the documentation, physical restoration as well as current maintenance and revitalisation are necessary. This can be afforded by public funds, because the castles are cultural monuments. But after the year 1991, when Slovenia became independent, the direction towards a market economy became more and more obvious, and at this time it was also observed that the castles needed much more funding for restoration and maintenance than the young country Slovenia could afford from the public funds. Even the national importance of cultural heritage is acknowledged by the law, and many historical buildings under the patronage of the state or local authorities are not able to secure enough financial means. The castle governors will have to find other ways to (co-) finance the restoration, such as sponsorships, donations (the most interesting donors are local business and citizens) or international funds for restoration, which are in Slovenia at present very rare as the study has shown. The integration of Slovene castles in international projects is even more seldom (only three estates of this sample got some financial means as members of international projects or will have this possibility in the future). On average the castles are not even orientated towards gaining such financial means, even 55% of them have not assured constant financing yet.

Besides, the national strategy in the field of culture has not been adopted yet. This means that the main document that contains the directions for budgetary financing is still not in force. Although the public funds for restoration, reconstruction and re-establishment of the castles are more than legitimate, they will have to get financial aid from the private sector on a voluntary basis. In fact in a society with a high level of cultural awareness and responsibility should not be voluntary but – in a certain sense – ethically obligatory. In Slovenia such levels of cultural consciousness have not yet developed.

When the formal procedures concerning the ownership of the castles will be concluded it is necessary to anticipate that some monuments won't be accepted by owners. To take the ownership of a castle means to take over responsibility of at least its preservation, providing research and, if possible, also its restoration or reconstruction. These duties are such a tremendous burden for many potential owners that a lot of them are not willing to accept, considering in particular that even less of the public financial sources will be at disposal for the castle's restoration under individual ownership. But in spite of fulfilling all obligations, paradoxically the state will re-purchase the monuments from private owners who could make the best governors of the castles.

The crucial problem is how the estate can be re-established and revitalised. What functions should a castle have to be kept alive and to gather enough financial means to cover at least the maintaining expenses. In Slovenia the castles are nowadays used as museums, hotels, hospitals, schools, residential homes for elderly people or as prisons. But mostly there is a combination of several functions such as restaurant, wedding room, offices, sales rooms, cultural scene, protocol rooms, museums and generally spaces for social gatherings. The study points out that none of the castles could cover its operating costs by its activities alone. More than 50% of them have not ensured a continuous financing of their activities and about half of the castle's managers were convinced that the present functions of »their« estate are not appropriate.

When the function is changed there is a trade off: Do the new functions contribute to the maintenance of the cultural monument or do they ruin it? Does a non-traditional activity betray the tradition and heritage or is it a possibility to preserve the beauty of the monument for the following generations? Which activities can include as many different interests as are interests of the owners and the public, tradition and economy? Already at the beginning of the restoration the function should be clearly defined and it should be obvious that besides the compromises that have to be made on the questions, which period and which parts of the architecture to preserve up to the present – also the compromises between the historical valuables and the economic claims have to be made.

Castles in Slovenia that have governance are in most cases non-profit organisations. In this sample only one castle was a company. The managers of the estates are mainly experts in the field of cultural heritage, not in economics. Too many times the castle managers have to invent the possibilities how to get the necessary financial means. Managers with a better economic knowledge could solve such problems more professionally. Thus, the recent way of understanding cultural heritage also requires a new understanding of cultural management. This means, that the cultural manager also has to be responsible for business efficiency of the castle. 40% of the castles did not elaborate their program of activities for the next year. Only a third of them organised promotion activities, none of them with the aid of external enterprise.

Another third was able to present a clear organisational structure and descriptions of the labour position. Only 15% of the castles could claim that the monuments were not physically endangered.

The basic task is to change the public attitude towards the castles. In fact from the economic point of view it does not pay at all to buy a castle. None of the activities that seem to be appropriate would reimburse the invested capital or at least assure the profitability that can be expected under ordinary circumstances. The times are gone when the castles with belonging landed property provided sustenance to their owners. Today the owners have to maintain the castles.

Hence the reasons for their preservation should be searched somewhere else. Unfortunately a multiplier effect (direct and indirect) of castles and similar profane buildings on the productions of the regions and the country is not calculated yet. The possible economic effect would for sure be astonishing. Such monuments are of crucial importance for the tourism, especially in Slovenia, where tourism still remains to be hardly developed. There is an opportunity for the castles to become a driving force of the region and to create precious new jobs. In particular it is important in regions that suffer from the industrial crisis. The castles could also become the centres of social gathering of the region and strengthen the social cohesion as well as build up the local and regional identity. The cultural atmosphere could help to keep the local and regional intelligence and simultaneously ameliorate the capacities of integration and the reputation of the region. Consequently, the castles could become an important economic factor to contribute to the economic growth of the country and region and should be treated as such.

We can conclude, that the attitude towards the castles in Slovenia is improving. However, there is still a transitional period, Slovenia is slowly but surely entering the post-transition period and this spirit is entering also the field of castles. The training of castle managers is established, the awareness of the importance of gathering sponsorships and financial means by donations is slowly strengthening, the number of cultural and other events in the castles increases, some of the castles have formed the *Slovene Association of Castles* and some have joined the *International Castles Network*. The public interest in such monuments increases as well as the awareness of the importance of their preservation. After all a progress can be perceived.

Castles, so mighty in their monumental beauty and yet so vulnerable in their fight against time, are the features of social, technical, cultural and other achievements in Europe during the last millenium. They represent the events of the past and co-create our present and future, our tradition and mutual identity.

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