

Establishment of URBAN HERITAGE RESERVES

Historic urban structures are among the most valuable parts of the cultural heritage. The protection of historic towns and villages in Czech lands, supported by profound theoretical background, is a great feat of the Czech preservation policy in the European context.

The most valuable historic town centers have been protected in Czechia since the 1950s, when the country decided to resolve the unpleasant situation resulting from the big changes in society, especially concerning ownership and demography. 30 historic town centers formed the first set of urban heritage reserves, including 22 on the current territory of the Czech Republic

(Prague, Český Krumlov, České Budějovice, Jindřichův Hradec, Tábor, Třeboň, Prachatice, Domažlice, Cheb, Loket, Litoměřice, Nové Město nad Metují, Pardubice, Litomyšl, Jihlava, Telč, Slavonice, Znojmo, Mikulov, Olomouc, Kroměříž and Štamberk). At the same time, the communist government also released funds for the maintenance and reconstruction of selected buildings. The expert support of the survey and project work, including the modification of master plans, was provided by the new specialized organization – State Institute for Reconstruction of Heritage Towns and Buildings (SÚRPMO). From the start, many towns benefited from well-organized restoration.

The Act on Cultural Heritage adopted the concept of the comprehensive protection in 1958, and coined the term “heritage reserve”. Thus in 1964, the Venice Charter just confirmed the suitability of the Czechoslovak approach to preservation. However, the Charter extended the basic definition of heritage sites with buildings and facilities of lesser importance (“modest”), and also established the status of “other valuable towns”. This was the background of further Czechoslovak proposals to extend the protection to other towns with their “heritage zones”. A large group of towns was selected for preservation during the town categorization in 1973; however, the full legal background for the protection wasn't established until the “second” act passed in 1987, No. 20/1987 Coll., on national heritage preservation, effective as of January 1, 1988. More dozens of town centers were prepared for preservation after the 1989 revolution.



The process hasn't been finished yet. Though it was never easy to enforce the reconstruction of the preserved buildings and facilities during the socialist era, the preserved towns were saved by the specific form of cooperation of experts from newly established institutions. In "common towns" without the protection, historic centers were often demolished and replaced by uniform modern buildings.

Also the protection of the rural heritage was prepared rather intensely and comprehensively since the 1980s. However, given the large number of villages, the first legal provisions weren't passed until 1995, and the process continued well past 2000.

The comprehensive protection of historic towns and villages in Czech lands was a very positive feat, as traditional building skills started declining soon after the building industry had begun to

focus on mass production of blocks of flats. After decades of cooperation with heritage institutions, local government and building owners, this practice is a proven form of protection of the architectural cultural heritage, and no doubt also a big success of the preservationists. The restorations of buildings and public open-air areas can be realized due to the functional grant program system.

A very popular event is the Historic Town of the Year competition, featuring the annual ceremony at the Prague Castle on the International Day of Heritage Sites. It's a good meeting opportunity for both preservationists and local government representatives.

Together with the protection of towns and villages, the Czech preservation institutions have developed the concept

of the natural heritage areas – areas with specific predominant cultural and historical aspects. Another type of protection is provided by the concept of protection zones that may be established at a single site or within a heritage area. As for the protection of cultural landscape, the preservationists maintain and develop expert cooperation with environmental protection institutions, and struggle for the harmonization of these types of protection of public interests.

Currently (2018), there are 39 urban heritage reserves in the Czech Republic, alongside 61 rural heritage reserves, 3 spa heritage reserves, 8 archaeological reserves, 255 urban heritage zones, 211 rural heritage zones, 25 natural heritage areas, and 446 protection zones.

