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Lubovňa Museum — Stará Lubovňa Castle

Castle Versus Ethnography. Creation of Museum Expositions in Ľubovňa Museum — the Castle

Museum: The museum is located in a renovated building of the second courtyard. Various historical artefacts are showcased in display vitrines while historical paintings can be admired on the walls of the large hall on the second floor. Interesting ethnographic collections from Stará Ľubovňa and its surroundings are displayed in four additional chambers. Ground floor consists of an office and four chambers dedicated to the exhibition of tools typical of the crafts that once flourished in Stará Ľubovňa: fabric blue-printing, tanning, candle making, gingerbread making, confectionery, furriery etc [Ľubovnianske múzeum 1967].

Andrej Čepiššák, Director of the Town Museum in Stará Ľubovňa, 1966

A passage from the first printed guide from 1966 provides information about the condition of the exhibitions, the goals of the then modest museum team and the actual premises of the Ľubovňa Castle. The year 1966 was a milestone in the history of the young Ľubovňa Museum — the Castle (then the Town Museum in Stará Ľubovňa), which was established in 1956 and located in the so-called Provincial House at the St. Nicholas Square. The first castle exhibition was opened to the public in the summer of 1966. It opened in the best-preserved part of the Ľubovňa Castle — the Ľubomírsky Baroque Palace. Today, 54 years later, museologists from Stará Ľubovňa are working on the libretto and the script for a new permanent exposition



Photo 1. Castle Lubovňa and Open air museum, extra ordinary area in Europe (Lubovňa Museum — castle archive)

in the palace. From 2013 to 2017, the palace was subjected to extensive historical research (archaeological, historical, architectural, restoration and structural). The research carried out in the Ľubomírsky Palace and its surroundings became a valuable source of information for the preparation of the project documentation needed to acquire the building permit. The project of the construction was created by one of the most prominent castle architects, Magdaléna Janovská. Subsequently, funds amounting to EUR 1.8 million were granted by the institutor (Prešov self-Governing Region). In December 2017, the construction of the palace was turned over to the contractor. In February 2020, the renovated, reconstructed and restored building is to be handed over to the property manager.

We are taking up a challenge

Since 2017 Stará Ľubovňa museologists have been exploring forms of presentation of the Ľubomírsky Baroque Palace after its extensive reconstruction. Primary focus of the entire project documentation and all other processed documents has been to preserve and reveal the original historical architecture, original plasters and facades. From the beginning we have known and also wanted to return back to the palace the forgotten and previously



Photo 2. Lubovňa castle, exhibition of medieval armour in the main castle tower (Lubovňa Museum — castle archive)

eliminated “genius loci” of the place. Lubovňa Museum is a specialized castle and ethnographic museum since it manages both — a medieval castle and its annexed Museum of Folk Architecture. At the beginning of the 21st century ethnographic collections and related expositions were moved out from the castle and used to create exhibitions in the ethnographic exposition. We have been unhappy and sometimes even annoyed by exhibitions of natural sciences and ethnography in the castle area. Why? We believed and still believe that unfitting collection installations would not only confuse both lay and expert audience, but also take away the original spirit and diminish the value of the castle. We do not reproach the generations of former museum staff for installing the permanent natural sciences and ethnography exhibitions into the Baroque Palace of the Lubovňa Castle. In 1966, the now annexed Museum of Folk Architecture did not exist and the number of museum collections was limited. Over time we realized that exhibitions with a non-castle theme were not fitted for the premises of the Lubovňa Castle. There are other exhibition locations that are better suited for this purpose, situated in the town centre and in the open-air museum. Our goal has been to present exhibitions in compliance with the museum premises (42 buildings including castle, sacral and wooden folk architecture) and to give them back their original character in the form of either perma-



Photo 3. Princess de Bourbon's room (Lubovňa Museum — castle archive)



Photo 4. Ethnographic exposition at Lubovňa Castle, Lubomirski palace, 1976-1991 (Lubovňa Museum — castle archive)

ment or temporary exhibitions. It may be unusual that we possess premises with a structure that calls for this philosophy. We have seen the reactions of the experts as well as lay audience who, during their visit to the castle, “encountered” the exhibition of modern photography, which interrupted and “spoiled” the experience. We are not trying to avoid the installations of a diverse collection fund, but they require professional communication with the artist, graphic designer, curator and the audience. We are aware that the 21st century museum is a museum that has a duty to provide an aesthetic experience in addition to being a source of information. We believe that it is our duty to properly determine and influence the aesthetic feelings of all generations of visitors. Therefore, our gift shop souvenirs and shop publications were selected to be suitable in terms of content as well as aesthetics. As for the creation of the permanent exposition of the Ľubomírsky Palace in the Ľubovňa Castle, we created two alternative versions of the libretto and the script. The first alternative would be just temporary and last for one year. The palace would be shown as “bare”, without any collections, descriptions and other installation items. We want to show what’s most valuable — historical architecture with its artistic plasters and facades. The goal is to highlight the development of the castle palace from 1642 to 1930. All the valuable objects that were discovered during our research were uncovered and restored. Historical and architectural delicacies that were discovered during the research include black kitchen and a dry toilet from the 18th century. We never carry out our activities entirely on our own. That is why we conducted a survey among the expert and lay audience while planning this stage. When asked about showing the palace for one year without any exhibits, almost 90% of those asked appreciated this idea and considered it a suitable solution. They, as well as we, think that once the furniture, paintings, text panels etc. are moved back in, another such opportunity will not present itself for another 15 years. In 2021, after showing the „bare” palace, we would move on to its furnishing during which the individual chambers would be given the character of a hunting lounge, a workroom of count Juraj Félix Raisz, a dining room and a museum of Ján Zamoyski. The palace libretto and script are thus prepared in two alternative versions, both of which are feasible. The first one as a temporary and the second one as a permanent exposition. The processing of the libretto and the script of the palace was supported by the public funds for the promotion of arts.



Photo 5. Hunting salon in the upcoming stationary exposition of the Lubomirski palace, visualization (Lubovňa Museum — castle archive)



Photo 6. Crystal Room, Lubomirski palace, visualization of a new exhibition (Lubovňa Museum — castle archive)

How the permanent castle expositions were changing from 2003 to 2020

Restoration of the main castle tower (2003–2006) and the Renaissance Palace (opened in 2012) became the turning point in the creation of the castle expositions. The experience and subsequent reactions of the expert and lay audience in regards to the creation of these permanent expositions have shown that perhaps the exposition replacements at Ľubovňa Castle were the right decision. It was reflected not only in the number of paying visitors (214 000 paying visitors in 2019), but also their response to our-their exhibitions. We believe that everything we do we do to preserve cultural heritage for future generations and for our visitors. As an administrator of the Ľubovňa Castle (2003-2011), but also as the director of the museum (2011 — ongoing), I often “infiltrate” our daily visitors. Their diversity amazes me sometimes. From university professors, Slovak “celebrities”, fellow museologists, students, senior citizens to visitors from countries far away. I talk to them and I am curious about their opinions. My personal research is focused mainly on museum expositions. Most of the visitors are extremely receptive, longing for knowledge and experience. We never underestimate and label them as „just” tourists and us as „experts” in the field. Such an approach would ultimately result in our failure.

How we have created and how we want to create the castle permanent expositions

The Main Castle Tower (originally from the Gothic period) was under renovation from 1998 to 2003. Its reconstruction visibly changed the panorama of the Ľubovňa Castle and it was the first building of the upper part of the castle that was made available to the public. Originally the tower had no exhibits. The museum decided to show the originality of the building and the impressive view from the trumpeter’s room at the height of 711 maml. With such “competition” any other exhibit in the tower would probably become a hindrance instead of an enrichment. After difficult negotiations, we managed to put a roof over the tower and thus create space for future exhibitions. While working the museum staff took advice from the public who requested the exposition of the prominent castle prisoner Móric Beňovský (opened in 2016). The questionnaire research found a major interest in the exposition of arms or the armaments. We realized that this public request was absolutely reasonable, because Ľubovňa Castle served as a border-gu-

arding castle for centuries. In the 17th century, during the period when the Polish coronation treasure was hidden in the castle, as many as 200 soldiers were stationed here. We responded to this reasonable requirement with the exposition of the armaments on the ground floor of the main castle tower, where the equipment of the Polish hussar and associated information have been presented. Despite the fact that the exposition has been there for quite some time (it opened in May, 2006), it has been and still is successful even today. A unique sound recording of a military anthem and signals of the elite hussar army enrich the exposition. There was a temporary photographic exhibition in the castle tower in 2004, which showed the condition before, during and after the reconstruction of the building. 90 year-old photographs of the castle were also presented at the exhibition and the visitors were offered a unique insight into the extent of the reconstruction and restoration works carried out in the castle, as well as those that were still needed to be done. The exhibition might have looked disruptive in the Gothic tower, but it was very educational. It was temporary and later on it had been replaced by the exposition of armaments.

The Renaissance Palace of the Ľubovňa Castle was built after a large fire in 1553 and renovated from 2008 to 2012. The palace, compared to its image from 1750, was in a state of partial ruins. Without any historical research, it was not only in an emergency condition, but also “condemned” to a total collapse. But there is a saying: What the eyes fear, the hands can fix. In 2009 we began historical research followed by negotiations with the Regional Monument Office in Prešov, castleologists, structural engineers and designers of both younger and older generations. We travelled all over Slovakia, as well as abroad, to find the best solutions for the Renaissance Palace. We received generous support from an architect Andrej Fiala, who backed the museum’s efforts to reconstruct and roof the building. He stated that during the research at Ľubovňa Castle in 1975 he designed the castle expositions for the palace himself. Together we identified the great opportunity to create new exhibition areas, a place for small-scale stage performances as well as multi-purpose premises in the entire area. Preservation and protection of the original architecture was our priority. The palace was ceremoniously opened in May 2012 with the following permanent exhibits: Castle Brewery (documented in the palace in 1564), Castle Distillery, a temporary photographic exhibition of restoration works and the collection presentations in the form of a hologram. After the opening and

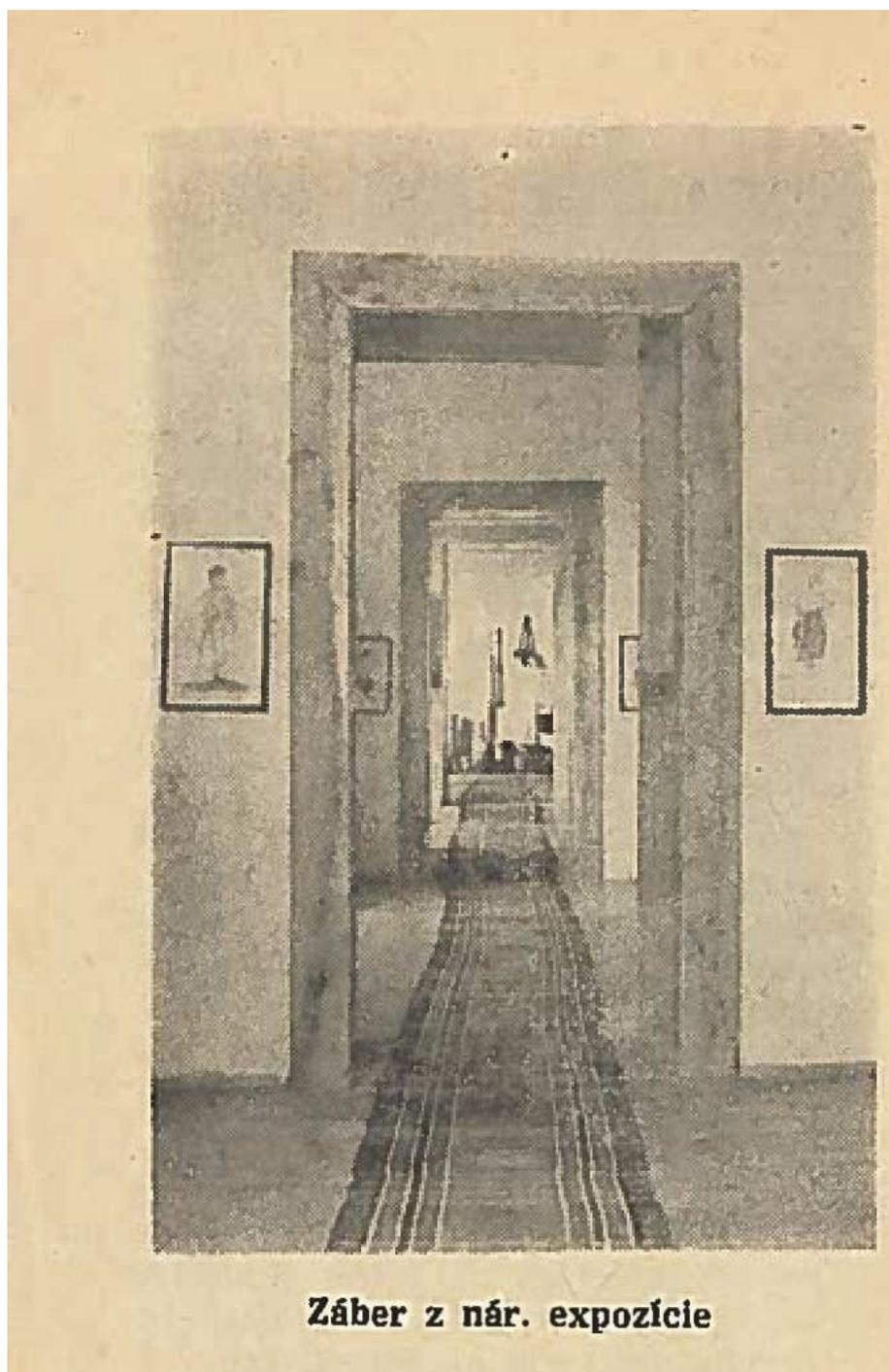


Photo 7. Ethnographic exposition in the early Baroque palace (Lubovňa Museum — castle archive)

during the following seasons we observed the reactions of the professional and lay visitors who were extremely interested in this new form of digital presentation. Sometimes to such extent that the glass pyramid in which the interactive graphics of discovered coins and pottery were placed was marked with nose prints of the visitors. We were very happy, because we created it on the basis of the archaeological research in the palace itself. After a while, a new exposition titled “How Lubovňa Castle was Built“ was added to the palace with another hologram presenting the Gothic Lubovňa Castle. Gothic Lubovňa Castle hologram uses visual 3D technology and shows the visitors the unseen, i.e. the image of the Lubovňa Castle from the 14th and 15th. century. At the ICOM Velvet x Digital Conference, the creator of the pan-European project The TIME MACHINE stopped by our stand to talk to me and said that the hologram “How Lubovňa Castle was Built — Gothic” was an implementation and demonstration of future exhibitions. However, for us, museologists, the dominant focus remained on the architecture of the palace, where the elements of Gothic and Renaissance style were preserved. But we also understand the visitors and that it is difficult for them to imagine the Gothic Lubovňa Castle, therefore we helped them, as well as ourselves, with the hologram. For me, the most unique exhibit in the palace is the rock cliff. Originally, it was supposed to be covered, but after consulting the preservationist and the building designer, we decided to show it in its full glory. It is the top exhibit that started it all. After all, without it, Lubovňa Castle would probably not be built on that elevated, strategic place. After the demanding renovation, innovative opening of the palace and the creation of permanent exhibitions, Lubovňa Museum and its collaborators on this demanding project received the title “Cultural Monument of Slovakia — Fénix 2012”.

When creating the new permanent exhibits in the Renaissance Palace and the castle tower, we opened the sacristy of the castle chapel. We restored its original character and since 2012 we have been holding temporary exhibitions of sacred and liturgical artefacts there. For instance the exhibition “Treasures and Reliquaries of St. Kunigunda the Hungarian, Krakow and Sandeck princess” was held there last year. For the first time since 1292, the exceptionally valuable historical collections left the walls of the Poor Clares’ Monastery in Stary Sacz and travelled across the Polish-Slovak border. This year I plan to present the Piarist College in Podolíneč with a temporary exhibition in the sacristy of the castle chapel. Other premises of the castle

underwent a reinstallation and new permanent expositions were created in them. The creation of the new castle expositions was dependent on the museum's new acquisitions. In the years 2006–2019 the museum managed to obtain exclusive collections from the former owners of Lubovňa Castle as a gift. I have to mention the acquisition of portraits of the castle owner, Juraj Félix Raisz and his wife, that were transported from Luxembourg. The Raisz — Lublováry family donated more than 300 artefacts to the museum and they were used in the implementation of an exhibition. After traveling to Spain and France, we received items from Princesses Carolina and Isabella de Bourbon as a gift. We created a new temporary exhibition “Princesses de Bourbon at Lubovňa Castle”. The employees of the museum continue to maintain friendly relationship with the descendants of aristocratic families who once owned Lubovňa Castle, in the period from 1593 (Lubomírsky) to 1944 (Raisz a Zámowsky). I believe that this is a unique example of cooperation in comparison with other Slovak castles.

In the article we present the expositions that have undergone the most significant changes related to the extensive reconstruction and restoration of the castle, as well as the creation of new expositions.

The original collections presented in the castle museums since their opening included various aristocratic armories and picture galleries, which were later broadened by the so-called cabinets of curiosities [Güntherová 1942: 40]. Through the rich collections that surrounded them and the museums founded by them, the nobility sought to revise the acquired knowledge through direct and constant contact with objects. The primary endeavour was to acquire, to own, to fulfil the desire; the secondary was the educate. Of course, we are talking about private collections characterised by a high degree of individualism. Such an approach was implemented also by the owners and administrators of the Lubovňa Castle estate. Castle, manor or similar museums have gone through almost two centuries of development, transformation, modernization. Their contents were changing during particular historical periods. Our goal is to return the original character of the expositions and exhibitions. This year the professional activities of the museum staff will include preparing the final draft of a document on the future character of the expositions in the castle and ethnographic expositions in the annexed Museum of Folk Architecture.

Global versus Regional

Here, at first glance, we find a big difference in the approach to basic museum activities, especially presentation ones. Ultimately, there is always something global in regional and something regional in global. How to understand it? Fashion in the field of architecture, art, clothing, etc. came from the „big world” to the specific region. But it is its regional manifestation that is the result of the great global influence. Otherwise, it would not be applied, nor would it be considered in the „small” regional area, albeit with some peculiarities of particular region.

In conclusion, I believe that we are lucky to oversee the castle and the open-air museum, even the grounds around the castle. After a time of inappropriate, sometimes necessary mix, we „cleaned up”. However, we are far from being done and we are working on the localization plan for all 42 objects which are in the administration of the museum. We want to give them back their *genius loci*. Although it is no longer possible to execute it fully, certainly an exhibition with all its attributes can be helpful. The finished document will be a starting point for the next generations of museologists who will plan and implement the exhibition activities. Even if we did not have such an object in our hands, we would be looking around for other monuments in the region that would be suitable for exhibitions of our collections.

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The Ľubovňa Castle and its annexed Museum of Folk Architecture present a unique site in Central Europe. In the past permanent exhibitions in the castle contained collections of mostly ethnographic character. A significant change in the contents of the expositions occurred after the reconstruction and opening of the main castle tower, followed by the reconstruction of the Renaissance and Baroque palaces. Museum employees are currently

taking up a challenge of creating a temporary or permanent exposition in the Lubomírsky Baroque Palace. The article presents the development of the castle exhibitions from 1966 up till now. It is a testimony based on the history of the place and experiences of generations of Stará Lubovňa museologists.

Keywords: castle, open air museum, authenticity, genius loci

