

Transformation of the Velehrad pilgrims premises: restoration and innovation press release 15th June 2012

In the past two years and a half, the Velehrad place of pilgrimage has gone through a fundamental transformation, in its extent comparable only to the construction works which the extensive fire called for in the Velehrad monastery in 1781. At that time, the medieval monastery was completely changed in the spirit of the upcoming Baroque style. **In fact, the present reconstruction has finally finished the transformation of the closed Cistercian monastery (1784) into a place of pilgrimage. However, at the same time, the value of the whole structural unit of the former monastery has increased as well and in 2008 it was declared a national cultural monument.** The most distinct expression of both is the construction of the “**fence wall with niches**” along the road running through the village of Velehrad. On one hand, this wall once again defines the premises of the monastery and distinguishes it from the neighborhood, especially from the noisy road. However, at the same time, it is also a feature typical for a number of places of pilgrimage – a space designed for meditation and dwelling. The structure has become a place for presentation of eight statues which have stood on the wall oriented from the road towards the basilica since 1990.

While the surface of the courtyard in front of the basilica was paved so that meetings of a large number of pilgrims could take place there, the space along the basilica provides, in connection with the planting of vegetation, an opportunity for resting in the shade. **Thanks to the bricking of castle walls that were discovered**, the medieval fortification of the monastery is remembered here. Also, there is a long bench created here which invites for resting. From the archaeological point of view, it is possible to emphasize the finding of the north-western prismatic corner tower and the north-eastern circular tower. In the north-eastern direction from the basilica there is a **new sanitary facility** with a sufficient capacity. On the other hand, in the north-western side, visitors to the place of pilgrimage will find a **multifunctional Velehrad house of Saints Cyril and Methodius** with an information center, exhibition premises, a candy store and a store for pilgrims. The park along the monastery building is unexpectedly beautiful. Also the **parish building**, which is part of the monastery, is renovated.

The project ‘Velehrad – Center of Cultural Dialogue of Western and Eastern Europe’ is now in its third, final realization phase. At present, **reconstruction of the little church called Cyrilka is going on.** It is a neo-gothic structure with its history dating back to the 13th century. Another aim of the current restoration works is also **renewal of the interior of the main nave in the basilica, the organ loft, the space under the loft and the organ itself.** **Reconstruction of the coating of the basilica will begin and renewal of the remnants of the medieval monastery – better known**

as “lapidarium” - will go on. Here also a **permanent exhibition called “Velehrad on the Crossroads of European History”** will be placed, which will have its continuation in the **Velehrad house of Saints Cyril and Methodius**.

Thus, the restored Velehrad premises will offer to a common visitor – a person open to values; a tourist – a person looking for inspiration; a pilgrim – a Christian of Western or Eastern tradition; a child visitor – the generation of the first half of the 21st century, a view of the beauty of the pilgrims’ basilica, a reflection of the testimony of history, a living spiritual and cultural legacy in the art treasures, a sacred uniqueness of Velehrad’s genius loci (“why we return to some place”) and traces of holiness of our ancestors. Also, it will be possible to celebrate here, in a dignified way, the anniversary - 1150 years since the arrival of Saints Cyril and Methodius to Great Moravia, which we will commemorate next year. The project called ‘Velehrad – Center of Cultural Dialogue of Western and Eastern Europe’ contributes to it in a significant way. Its budget is CZK 345,837,000 and it is financed by the European Union – the European Fund for Regional Development and the Czech Republic state budget, through the Integrated Operational Program IOP.

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