



KRAFTING THE FUTURE IN KŐSZEG

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN THE CITY CENTRE OF KŐSZEG WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE NATIONAL KRAFT PROGRAMME

The Kraft programme was founded in 2012 by the Institute for Social and European Studies Foundation (ISES Foundation), based on the ideas of Ferenc Miszlivetz. In 2014, the Government of Hungary decided to support the detailed elaboration of the Kraft programme as a national program - the new regional development strategy based on the example of the city of Kőszeg. The ISES Foundation was then asked to prepare a feasibility study that included a plan for an "advanced studies" institute. The Institute of Advanced Studies Kőszeg (iASK) was established in 2015 with the Kraft concept at the core of its values, principles and activities.

The "Creative City – Sustainable Region" (Kraft) programme is an integrated urban and rural development concept seeking new ways of releasing and innovatively connecting creative social energies. The Kraft concept draws on, uses, and utilises already existing values for the future. The first specific development and a model example of this concept is the town of Kőszeg, which has a unique built heritage, school town identity, and long-standing cultural, professional, and religious communities.

The seven beautifully refurbished buildings in the historical centre of Kőszeg are: Benedictine Monastery, Europe House, Festetics-Chernel Palace, Sgraffito House, Szemző House, Zwinger-Old Tower and the 19th-century Synagogue.

Thanks to Kraft's achievements, Kőszeg has become an important scientific research hub and a centre of experience tourism based on the new management of cultural heritage.



KRAFTING THE FUTURE IN KŐSZEK



BENEDICTINE MONASTERY

In terms of scale, the largest historic building covered in the Kőszeg Kraft programme is the former Benedictine Headquarter and Secondary School. It was constructed in early Baroque style on the plans of the Italian architect Pietro Orsolini in 1860. Until the 1950's, it was the residence of Benedictine monks. After the expulsion of the monastic order, the building's premises were turned into apartments. The building was returned to property of the Benedictines in 1990.

The historic building reconstruction of the two-storey building started in 2017. In the first phase the entire roof surface and attic part, as well as the parts on the second floor were renovated.





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BENEDICTINE MONASTERY

In the second phase, the remaining parts, the façade, and the courtyard of the building were renovated, the full interior design was completed, the corridors and the community areas were fitted out, and the hotel rooms were furnished. The construction was completed with the restoration of the parts to be protected, the comprehensive upgrading of energy efficiency in line with current principles and requirements, and the complete renewal of the engineering, electrical and light-current systems.

Since its handover in 2021, the building owned by the Hungarian Benedictine Congregation has been operating as a hotel.



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EUROPE HOUSE

Although its last renovation took place in 2014-2015, as the seat of the Institute of Advanced Studies and the “centre” of the Kraft programme, the building is a key member of the group of inner-city buildings renovated within the framework of Kraft. The former Szvetics House, later called Sigray House, is a building dating to medieval times, later decorated with Renaissance and Baroque elements.

During the 2015 renovation, the Sigray Palace with its diverse historical architectural layers was redeveloped in the way that respected its properties and advantages to make it a suitable venue for quiet academic work and contemplation.





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EUROPE HOUSE

The reconstruction also resulted and expansion: the building houses research rooms, lecture spaces and offices. The development of the loft and the renovation of the basement also functioning as a community space has broadened the range of the building's potential uses - the original two-storey building was magically transformed into a four-storey house. The expansion of the city's functional built heritage, and the creative thinking needed to implement the vision had begun.





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FESTETICS-CHERNEL PALACE

The building, which also includes the former city wall, dates back to the 16th century. Imre Festetics – one of the first to discover the fundamental laws of genetics – bought the building in 1802, which later became the property of the Chernel family through marriage. After the nationalisation, council flats were developed in the building.



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FESTETICS-CERNEL PALACE

In the first phase of the historical reconstruction in 2017-2018, a comprehensive external and internal renewal was completed. As part of the historical restoration work, the particularly valuable Baroque-Rococo paintworks discovered in the salons during the wall inspection – dating back to 1766-1767, when the building was turned into a Baroque palace – were restored.

New technology required by the new functions the building serves were installed in a natural way that did not disrupt the historical spaces and spatial relations that even the original owner would approve. The quality of materials is also noteworthy. Interventions were not overdone, and Kőszeg regained one of its most beautiful historic buildings, with its future secured by iASK. In the course of the renovation, research rooms, offices, service areas were developed, and the ground-floor premises previously functioning as a stable now hosts lectures and exhibitions.



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SGRAFFITO HOUSE

Sgraffito House, a building of Renaissance origin built in the 16th century, was named after the sgraffito decoration on the façade, which was considered a special feature in Hungary. The word of Italian origin refers to a multi-layer plaster decor, which essentially means applying two layers of plaster on the façade, then removing one of them according to a predetermined pattern.

In addition to the decorative motifs, there is a Latin quote on the façade: an excerpt from the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans. The quote in Latin reads: "Non est volentis, neque currentis sed miserentis dei" - in English: "So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (1668).





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SGRAFFITO HOUSE

In the 18-19th century, the building was expanded with a courtyard wing, and the façade was transformed into Baroque style. The complete renovation of the building took place in 2017-2018, when in addition to the renovation of the interior, the building's façade was also restored.

The library of the Institute of Advanced Studies operates on the building's second level. As an added value, its attic was redeveloped to provide new internal space with state-of-art research facilities to meet the needs of international researchers in the 21st century. In the loft space a multimedia room and research rooms were developed during the renovation.





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SZEMZŐ HOUSE

The Kraft programme also includes the restoration of two more buildings in Kőszeg's „street of nobles”. Built around 1905, and named after its owner, the Szemző House is a post-Art Nouveau work of art of the Viennese Plachnich school, with some Art Deco features. This villa today is the only Secessionist building in the inner city of Kőszeg.

During the previous decades it occasionally accomodated ad hoc exhibitions of local artists and was known as the „House of Arts”, but stood empty for most of the time and had begun to deteriorate due to lack of maintaenance. It waas renovated in 2017: its internal space was not changed, but retained the characteristics of villas built for upper-class burghers in the early 20th century.





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SZEMZŐ HOUSE

In the first phase of the historic building reconstruction, a full external and internal renovation was completed, which included the restoration of the parts to be protected, the comprehensive upgrading of energy efficiency in line with current principles and requirements, and the complete renewal of the engineering, electrical and light-current systems. In the second phase, the full interior design of the building was completed, the corridors and the community areas were fitted out, and the research rooms upstairs were furnished.

During the renovation of the historical building, the preservation and renovation of the existing building elements was a priority: upgrading of the windows, renovating the cement cladding, and remedying the missing elements based on the sample taken from the existing one.





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SYNAGOGUE

The synagogue was built in a romantic style in 1856 with the support of Fülöp Schey. Following World War II, the abandoned building gradually decayed. By 2016, the building has become the property of the Hungarian State. The architectural planning of the renovation started at the end of 2017 and was finally completed in 2021.

During the restoration of the interior, efforts were made to preserve as much of the surviving building as possible; therefore, the entire surface of the walls were renewed by restorers, in addition to modernisation in line with current principles and requirements and the installation of engineering, electrical and light-current systems.

Despite its relatively small size, this jewel of a building is of outstanding historical, architectural and religious significance due to its design, location and accessibility. The comprehensive renovation that is planned to include the rabbi house, the school and garden, as well as the related rehabilitation of its surrounding environs, will provide the city with enhanced attraction and appeal.





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SYNAGOGUE

The building complex has multiple purposes: its development into a place of worship and remembrance, a cultural, exhibition, training, and conference centre resulted in an institution with special added value which attracts the city's residents, academic and educational institutions, as well as visitors. The iASK supports a Working Group that carries out historical research on the cultural life and activities of the Jewish communities in the region of Western Pannonian. This includes studying their impact on society and the modernisation of the region's cities. The results of this research will be regularly presented in temporary and permanent exhibitions.

Organised by the Institute and its partners, the synagogue offers cultural and scientific programs throughout this season, and also hosts musical events thanks to its excellent acoustics. The synagogue's rebirth has reconnected the town of Kőszeg to the national and international bloodstream in an unprecedented way. This will make Kőszeg one of the Central European centres of heritage-based experiential tourism in the spirit of the Kraft programme's objectives.





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ZWINGER-OLD TOWER

Believed to originate from the 13th century, the nine-sided bastion is considered as the oldest part of the town's defence system. In times of war, it served as the south-western corner bastion of the former city wall. Its current form was built before the Turkish invasion in 1532.

It has performed several functions over the centuries: in addition to its role played in defence, it has been used by the locals as a pantry, a warehouse and according to some sources, even as a prison. After losing its defence function, the tower was used for different purposes; in 1820, there was an idea to turn it into a theatre. Until the recent past, it served tourism and museum purposes. In the cellar, there is a beam wine press made in 1778.





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ZWINGER-OLD TOWER

The tower was completely renovated in 2015 to accommodate the needs of iASK. It hosts summer and winter schools, conferences and cultural events on its two floors of well-equipped lecture halls. The primary aim of its restoration was to preserve the historic, monumental character of the building and resulted in a fine example of historic restoration according to an integrated approach.

