

## The completion of historical gap sites in historical town centers on the example of Litomyšl (Czech Republic)

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### **Abstract**

*The historical centers of towns are the reflection of the whole town, which records cultural, historical events, constructional development, etc. Occurrence of city center gap sites is frequent mainly due to historical context. Demonstration of the principles of correct completion of historical development, as a support of the expression of the city on the example of the city of Litomyšl, is established mainly because of the cultural and tourist importance in the Czech Republic. The proposed addition is a town gallery, which supports the cultural image of the historic city center, complements the civic amenities and creates a new tourist center.*

**Keywords:** architecture, urbanism, vacant lot, historical center, completion, Litomyšl

### **Introduction**

The historical structures of the town core belong to the most valuable parts not only of the Czech Republic's heritage fund, but also significantly contribute to the overall European cultural heritage. The expression of the town as an urban-cultural center is determined by social conditions, its location in the existing territory in the country, historical events and their successive development. In the urban composition of the city, the structure is dependent on a number of factors and indicators, mainly of a historical nature. Historical towns in the Czech Republic have undergone several developmental phases that coincide with the periodization of historical styles. Construction and sometimes urban changes in the urban structure have resulted from historical events such as fires and war events. Each subsequent development phase brought new architectural and urban elements to the urban structure, did not deny the previous phase, but enriched it with other valuable buildings, supplemented or transformed the structure of the city. Sudden interventions in development, such as mentioned historical events, have resulted in unintended relations - anomalies, especially in the structure of the historical city center. The most common phenomenon we encounter in this issue are *gap sites*.

The term gap site refers to an open space between two elements of a building or an empty space between two or more separate objects without interconnection. It means an undeveloped place in the already standing continuous development, which is intended to be filled. From an architectural point of view, it is a deliberate or accidental interruption of a continuous sequence of objects and their facades in the street development. Property with this nature is intended for further infilling, complementing the existing structure of the city.

The issue of completion of historical gap sites in city centers became particularly relevant at the end of the 20th century, both from the point of view of architects, urban planners and monument care workers. The need to densify the city, but especially to restore the compositional urban context, leads to the completion of historic gap sites with new buildings.

### **Location and delimitation**

Litomyšl is located in the northeast of the central part of the Czech Republic, about 90 km north from the second largest city of Brno. Litomyšl is situated in a slightly undulating landscape bounded in the east by the wooded zone of the Českotřebovská vrchovina and in the southeast and south by the watershed of the rivers Loučná and Svitava.

The historical settlement is spread on the right eastern bank of the river below the castle hill.<sup>1</sup> The first mention of Litomyšl refers to 981, mentioned in the Czech Cosmic Chronicle.<sup>2</sup> The settlement in the territory of today's Litomyšl grew along with the growing importance of the local trading route linking Bohemia and Moravia, with European importance - Trstěnická cesta. The city underwent a number of reconstructions, which were the result of multiple fires, military events and rebellions, but also changes in religious orientations. An important milestone in the development of the town was the arrival of the Premonstratensians in the 12th century, who founded a monastery in the place of today's castle. After their departure, the monastery was transformed into a mansion and in the 16th century it was rebuilt into a preserved castle, in the renaissance style. The historic town underwent a

remarkable transformation during the reign of Kostkovi of Postupice, who built their own fortifications around the castle, dividing the whole structure of the town into two units - upper and lower town. The compositional center of gravity of the lower town became the spindle-shaped square with its characteristic arcade. In the middle of the 18th century, the complex of the castle hill was completed with the baroque Nalezení sv. Kříže church and other important buildings built by Piarists. After the last fire of 1814, the city was rebuilt by demolition of walls and city gates. At the beginning of the 20th century, the historic core was complemented by new buildings only on its outskirts, for example Bedřich Smetana House. After the First World War, the city developed urbanly outside the original walls and suburbs.

Litomyšl is a city with a diverse and rich history, which has gained an important position in the past as a business center and today it only confirms it. In its unique preserved integrity, it is a perfect example of not only the historic city but also the cultural and artistic center. The space of the city has been shaped by important personalities of the architectural scene since ancient times.

In the structure of the city, the solved gap site is located in the historic center, close to Smetana Square, on the parallel street B. Němcová. The plot of the building is situated on the viewing axis, which is perpendicular to the axis of Smetana Square. The view axis, starting at Smetana Square, runs through Toulovec Square and ends with the Nalezení sv. Kříže church, whose raised landing is adjacent to the property. The compositional connections between the main square and the castle hill, which pass through the parcel, caused a gap site, such as highlighting the importance of the urban connection and highlighting the importance of the Nalezení sv. Kříže church.

The character of the development in the surrounding area remains of a bourgeois character, as it is in the square.



**Fig.1** Plans of Litomyšl from 1800 (left), 1911 (centre), 1931 (right)  
(Source: Archive in Litomyšl)

## Material and methods

The aim of the study is to propose a new development of the historical gap site in the protected monuments of towns, so that it appropriately complements the existing structure of the city. The subject of the proposal is a new building of the gallery as a new cultural center. Litomyšl is interwoven with cultural institutions of all kinds, the location of the Gallery in the historical center of the town seems all the more important.

Before starting to think about the architectural expression of the building on the gap site, it is important to set out conditions, or ways of solving the site. It is necessary to reflect on the question of how to approach the arising urban situation in the structure of the historical center, how to respond to the legacy of the extinct building.

### New building as a copy of extinct building

Buildings of copies of extinct buildings will always be exceptional. In the list of forms of regeneration and rehabilitation of heritage sites it is not possible to reject methodologically in advance or to mark them as unacceptable, but this approach is highly controversial. On the one hand, making an exact copy is almost impossible due to the absence of part or most of the construction documentation, but above all there is a clear contradiction in the ideological aspect of the matter. The completion of the gap site, built on the principle of this methodology will not achieve the expression of the defunct building at the architectural level. From the urban point of view, the justification of the copy is more remarkable. The resulting gap site, as an empty space in the urban structure, cannot be replaced by a neoplasm. Therefore, a copy on this scale, for example the mass solution of the building, does not lose the desired expression.

### New building as a paraphrase of the extinct building

This approach to the construction of the gap site eliminates theoretical reservations in copying. The construction conceived in this way does not conceal that it is a new work, but at the same time it preserves some characteristics of the extinct building. In this case too, it is obvious that the basic features - mass, roof shape, structure, flooring - should be respected.<sup>3</sup> The application of this approach is justified in gap sites where the new object is to remind the building of architectural value.

The paraphrase of the extinct building does not consist in the precise application of morphology and architectural elements, but in the capture and subsequent expression of the expression of the building. It is significant that the basis for the application of this method is the existing construction documentation.

### New building as a new creative work

Unlike a copy or paraphrase, a new building as a new creative work does not necessarily have to be based on the specific features of the building that stood at the place. There are several options for access in this case, and they differ from one another according to the degree of historical or nonhistorical approach, and depending on the environment.<sup>4</sup> At present, this methodology is the most widely used, mainly because of the freedom of design.

In the study of the new building of the gallery in the conservation area of the town of Litomyšl, this method of approaching the completion of the historic center is applied.

## Analysis

Architectural-urban analyzes of the historical center of Litomyšl and its surroundings.

In the historical core there are many cultural monuments inscribed on the state list. The historical part of the town was declared an urban conservation area in 1965. Since 1962 the castle complex has been protected as a National Cultural Monument.

Thanks to the many institutions located here, the castle hill has become a center of cultural events and tourism. In addition to the castle hill, which is sought after by tourists, a number of cultural events and festivals take place in Litomyšl every year. One of the most important is the Smetana's Litomyšl music festival.



*Fig.2 Litomyšl conservation area and listed cultural monuments (left); Litomyšl conservation area and listed UNESCO monument (centre); Analysis of festivals and cultural events, for example festival Smetana's Litomyšl, Archimyšl, etc. (right) (B. Hrončeková)*

Directly above the designed object rises the Nalezení sv. Kříže church, a former Pianist monastery with adjoining gardens, a Renaissance castle, The museum houses, dolls and toys, a regional museum, and others.

The plot of the building is situated on the viewing axis, which is perpendicular to the axis of Smetana Square. The view axis, starting at Smetana Square, runs through Toulovec Square and ends with the Nalezení sv. Kříže church, whose raised landing is adjacent to the property. After ascending on the platform of the church - the parkan - you will have a view of the whole town of Litomyšl. There is another axis running along the street B. Němcová, which is parallel to the street line.

In the vicinity of the building there are the most important gathering places - Smetana Square, which is the busiest part of the city. Due to the retail character of the parterre, many tourists and ordinary people meet here. Toulovec Square, of a quieter character, and in the structure of the town, situated a higher area of a Renaissance castle. B. Němcová Street, where the designed building is located, lies in their midst.



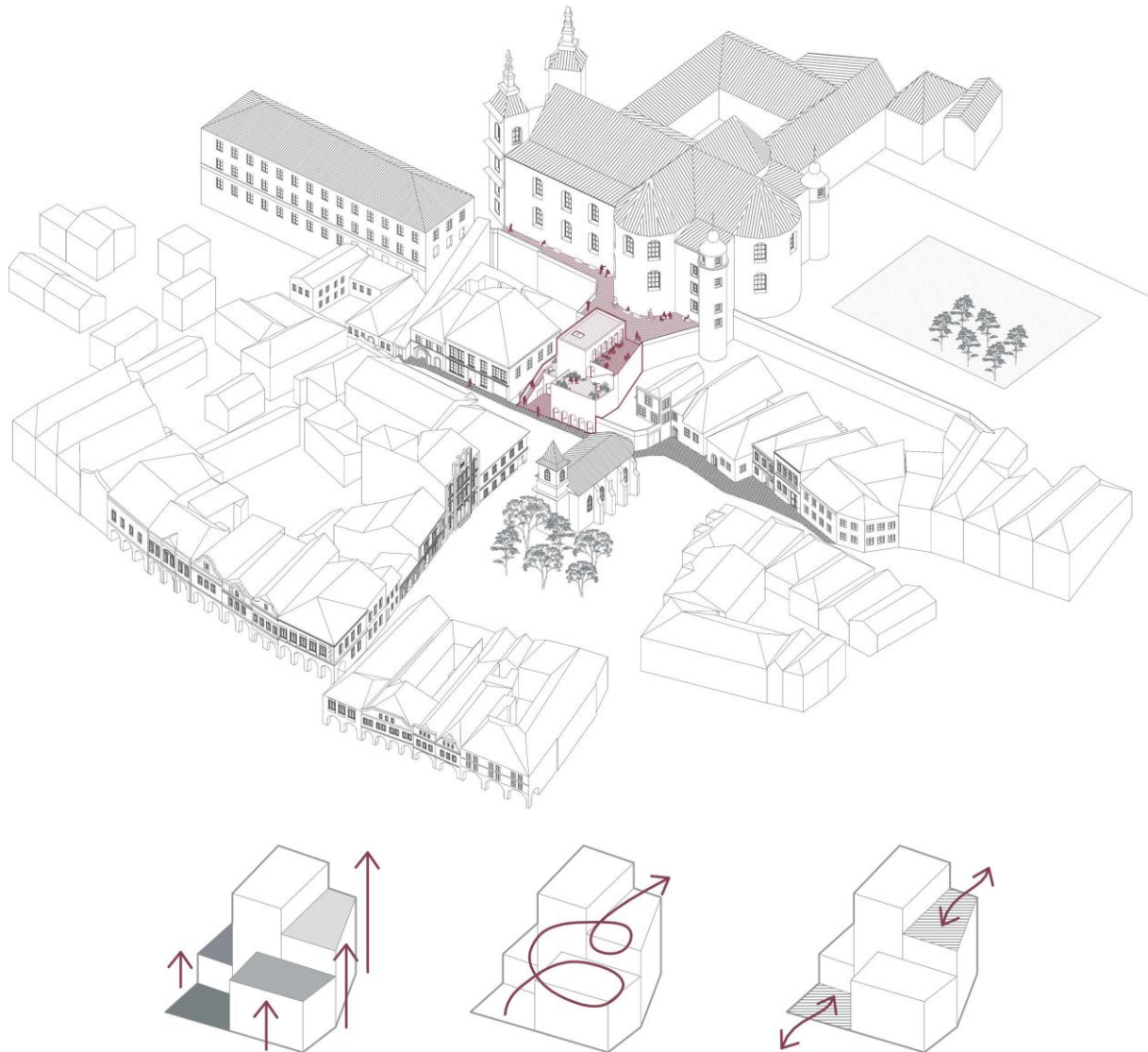
**Fig.3** Analysis of important institutions (left): 1 - Nalezení sv. Kříže church, 2 - Monastery with gardens, 3 - Litomyšl castle, 4 - Regional Museum; Analysis of visual context (centre); Motion analysis (right)  
(B. Hrončková)

## Results

The design of the new building of the Municipal Gallery consciously follows the traditional architectural procedures in terms of the creation of matter, form and materials used and responds responsibly to the context of the place by which it is inspired. It seeks to be sensitive to the existing context, limits any existing negative environmental features and responds to historically established urban relations. It uses modified citations of historical morphological details and schemes.

The design of the new building of the Town Gallery Litomyšl is located in the gap site of the urban development in the historical center, near Smetana Square. The main principle of the building is the spatial interconnection of different height levels of B. Němcová Street and the landing of the Nalezení sv. Kříže church, and thus walking the urban connection of the square with the castle hill - the upper and lower town.

The design reacts with matter to the visual axis of the urban structure and its historically given composition. The direct visual connection of the square, as the center of the lower town, with the mass of the church is determined historically. The built-up area is interrupted at this point, thus creating a gap site. The proposal responds to this compositional principle of structure. The different height division of the city, which is caused by the landscape character and historical division of the center, the proposal reflects in its interconnection.



*Fig.4 Axonometry of the historical center (up); design functioning diagrams (down)  
(B. Hrončeková)*

The mass of the building is divided into five units with different height levels. The task is to interconnect urban spaces, whether in the form of terraces that are accessible to the public and connected by exterior staircases, or in the form of masses. The matter tactically changes its height based on the operation and the load of the matter, the phase of transition from one height level to another or the desired expression. They retreat and create semi-public spaces of patios and courtyards, ascend or step forward and create dominants. At the point of direct viewing from the square, the mass of the top floor recedes, thus not disturbing the desired expression of the church.

The building has four floors and one underground. The main entrance to the gallery is situated from B. Němcová Street, on the viewing axis from the square. Entrance to the gallery is also possible from the courtyard, which is created by stepping away from the street. The courtyard is delimited by a massive exterior staircase, which leads the visitor even without buying the ticket to the system of raised terraces and further to the church. On the underground floor there are premises for the functioning of the gallery. The building is served by a freight elevator and staircase, located in the highest mass. The exhibition halls are situated in the mass that is connected to the landing of the church. The exhibition rooms have the character of universal halls, which allow to adapt the space to the exhibition, to divide it with a system of sliding partitions. The exhibition hall situated on the 2nd floor is on a part of the floor plan elevated to the 3rd floor. The highest situated terrace serves the café, which is situated on the top floor.

The changing nature of the gallery space, together with the inclusion of accompanying functions for the public in the design, creates a new cultural center in the direct historical center. The characteristic arcade of the urban development in Litomyšl reflects the building expressively in the form of rounded window openings and passages.

The materiality of the gallery is based on the characteristic surface finishes of town houses. The whole material is used lime-cement plaster with a rough scraped structure. The window openings are in brass. The

courtyard area is paved with stone cat heads in a regular grid. Extensive greenery is proposed on the terraces, marble pavement in the walking part.



**Fig.5** Visualization of the city gallery proposal - view from B. Němcová street (left), view from Nalezení sv. Kříže church (right)  
(B. Hrončková)

## Conclusions

The design of the new town gallery fits into the historical core of the city and demonstrates the infilling of gaps in the historic center of towns. Especially thanks to respect for urban and compositional context, selection of a construction program that functionally complements civic amenities and architectural solution of total materials, facades and materials.

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