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Neratov – the role of the local community in the revalorisation of the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the revitalisation of the village

Abstract

The article examines the role of the local community in the revalorisation of a monument and the revitalisation of a locality, using Neratov as a case study.

The discussed settlement is a small village on the Polish-Czech border, in an area originally inhabited primarily by German inhabitants. After post-war expulsions, the region and the village remained degraded for several subsequent decades. Following the political transformation, grass-roots initiatives led to the revitalisation of the village, associated with the revalorisation of the historic church.

The aim of the article was to present the history of the town's revitalisation and the restoration of the church, with a special focus on the role of the local community in these processes. The research included scientific literature, source literature, archival project documentation, as well as official correspondence related to the project.

The conclusions confirm that the activity of the local community constitutes a significant potential for the protection of local monuments, while ongoing cooperation with heritage conservation specialists is also necessary. Similarly, grassroots-initiated revitalisation appears to be a beneficial way of acting.

Key words: Neratov, Czech Republic, revalorisation, revitalisation, community

Introduction

The article discusses the role of the local community in the protection of historic monuments, using the example of the Czech village of Neratov – a small settlement in the Orlické Mountains, near the border with Poland. The most important historic monument in the village was the Baroque Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. 1945 saw the abrupt depopulation of the region, due to the forced migration of local inhabitants who were mostly German. During the decades that followed, Neratov and its church became increasingly dilapidated. After 1990 and the change of the political system, the reconstruction of the church and the revitalisation of the village began.

Neratov is not the only place where monument restoration or village development has been undertaken as a result

of a local community initiative. In this case, however, the scale and multifaceted nature of the undertaking, together with its long-term duration and ongoing development, make it particularly worthy of analysis.

A study of this case, taking into account the role of the local community in the revalorisation of the monument and the revitalisation of the village, can be helpful in planning this type of activity in other locations. This primarily concerns plans for the restoration of locally significant monuments located in smaller centres. Especially in these cases, the local community can become the main driving force behind the revalorisation of the monument. Its restoration, in turn, can contribute to revitalisation (Kubiszewska 2014).

State of research

The role of local communities in heritage protection has gradually been recognised by international organisations, finding its reflection in various documents (Sroczyńska 2021). The potential of heritage as a catalyst for economic,

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cultural, and social development has been gaining increasing recognition and became the subject of diverse studies (Murzyn-Kupisz, Hołuj and Działek 2022) aimed at developing optimal recommendations for Poland. Published works to date discuss the role of conservation services and social guardians of monuments in these processes (Hirsch, Łozowska 2024; Fuglewicz 2016), as well as the roles of individual actors in revitalisation (Ćwik 2020). Researchers described the use of contemporary means of expression in adaptations of ruins (Kuśnierz-Krupa, Krupa 2006), as well as controversies primarily concerning interventions in sacred buildings (Szuta, Szczepański 2020). The church in Neratov is part of the Baroque heritage of the region, whose historical and cultural background was more broadly presented by Bogusław Czechowicz (2011).

The history of the church in Neratov, the context of its creation, and its development up to 1945 are discussed in the “Historie poutního kostela Nanebevzetí Panny Marie v Neratově” [The History of the Pilgrimage Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Neratov] (Oppeltová 1999). The post-war history of the monument and its restoration were subsequently examined in a master’s thesis and, later, in a doctoral dissertation in theology (Šindar 2010). Other theological publications have focused on the sacred landscape (Burda 2015).

The economic activities of the Neratov Association and the role of volunteering were examined in a bachelor’s thesis in the field of economics (Němec 2020).

In the literature on architecture and monument conservation, Neratov has appeared in the context of securing ruins (Molski 2020) and revitalising abandoned areas in the Czech Republic (Kreisslová et al. 2025). An important source of information on the reconstruction process and community involvement is also a long-form interview with Fr. Josef Suchár, the leader of the revitalisation efforts (Suchár, Kutil 2022).

Methods

The author’s intention was to determine, using Neratov as an example, the role played by the local community in the

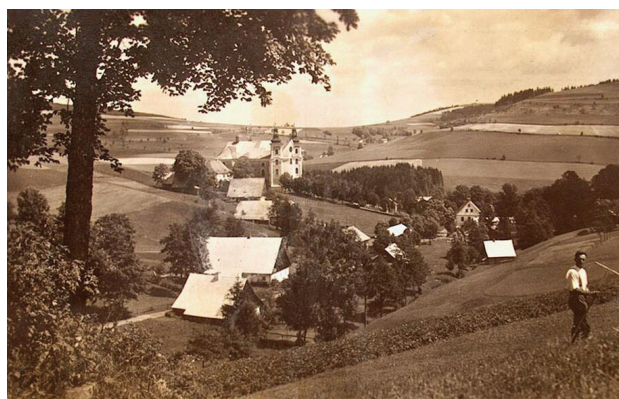


Fig. 1. Neratov before World War II
(author unknown, source: Neratov Association archive)

Il. 1. Neratov przed II wojną światową
(autor nieznany, źródło: archiwum Stowarzyszenia Neratov)

process of monument revalorisation and the revitalisation of the village. To this end, literature research was conducted on the history of the local church, the settlement and the region, primarily focusing on architecture and the cultural landscape, as well as the history of monument preservation in post-war Czechoslovakia. The study of Neratov’s community role in the revalorisation of the church was based on the analysis of archival materials – project documentation from 1992–2021 and correspondence between the parish and public administration offices from 1955–2021, held in the archives of the Národní památkový ústav in Pardubice (field branch in Josefov) and in the parish archive (on site in Neratov).

The research focused on the functional program of initiatives carried out by the Neratov Association and their impact on the cultural landscape. For this purpose, reports from the Association for the years 2008–2025 were analysed, and during field research conducted in March and August 2025, photographic documentation was made and an interview with Father Suchar was conducted. A published interview with Fr. Suchar, along with statements from the initiators of the restoration included in the same publication (Suchár, Kutil 2022), was also used.

A brief history of the village and the church

Neratov, originally called Bärnwald, was never a large settlement. Its peripheral location meant that the small glassmaking settlement seemed destined to remain outside the centre of major events.

However, in the mid-17th century, Bärnwald began to gain importance. Its growing fame was associated with the venerated miraculous statue of the Virgin Mary. Reports of miraculous healings attracted crowds of pilgrims to the village, too numerous for the small local church to accommodate. Therefore, between 1723 and 1733, a large pilgrimage church was built, capable of accommodating up to 1,000 people. It was fully completed by 1749 (Oppeltová 1999). Later, Rococo stairs were added in front of the entrance¹. The silhouette of the church became the most significant element of the local panorama (Fig. 1).

The authorship of the design is uncertain; its similarity to the Church of the Finding of the Holy Cross in Litomyšl, designed by Giovanni Battista Alliprandi, suggests that its creator remained within his sphere of influence (Oppeltová 1999, 28, 29; Krummholz 2015). The design may have been by the mason Carl Antoni Reina, who began the construction. After his death in an accident at the construction site, the church was completed by Jacopo Andrea Carove² (Oppeltová 1999). A turning point in the history of the site was the end of World War II – the church suffered as a result of a fire³, and the village was evacuated.

¹ They were constructed in 1776 by the sculptor Franz Hornich from Rothflosse (Oppeltová 1999).

² Oppeltová provides the Czech spelling of the name: Jakub Ondřej Carowe.

³ On May 10, 1945, a soldier of the Red Army patrolling the area fired a grenade launcher at the roof of the church. The fire damaged the wooden roof, as well as the metal tower helmets and bells.

The damage caused by the fire in 1945 worsened in the following years. The temporary repair was insufficient to prevent rainwater and snow from penetrating the building and accumulating on the exposed vaults. In 1957, the vaults began to gradually collapse. The church's original furnishings were also destroyed or removed from the interior and relocated elsewhere. The miraculous statue of Our Lady of Neratov disappeared during the first expulsion of the German population in 1945.

By the late 1980s, only the outer walls of the church remained, stripped of plaster and posing a danger due to loose stones and bricks. The interior, filled with debris and heaps of earth overgrown with vegetation, was open to the sky, while the vaults had completely collapsed (Fig. 2). The Rococo figures of saints on the entrance stairs, the only element of the church listed in the heritage register⁴, were moved to Skalka Castle near Dobruška, about 30 km from Neratov. The planned demolition of the ruined church was halted due to a lack of funds.

In 1987, Josef Suchár who was organising a local scout camp, came across the ruins of the church. In his professional life, he worked as an electrical technician, while during the summers he organised youth camps; he was also a secretly ordained priest⁵. Moved by the sight of the dilapidated church, he decided to rebuild it when circumstances permitted⁶. Following the Velvet Revolution and the emergence of a new political reality, Father Suchár began the restoration of both the church and the village. His efforts proved successful, and today Neratov is a vibrant village centred on the restored Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary.

Revitalisation of Czech towns after 1990 – an outline of the topic

The renewal of Neratov after 1989 was not an isolated phenomenon. In Czechoslovakia, subsequently Czech Republic, local authorities, conservation services, associations, and private owners sought to restore valuable historic buildings that had been neglected during the post-war period. Abandoned churches in border areas were also part of these efforts (ICOMOS Czech Republic 2001, 77)⁷.

Initiatives related to monuments were diverse in nature – ranging from extra-systemic activities in Prague squats,



Fig. 2. Neratov. Interior of the church in 1972
(photo by M. Kolegar, source: NPÚ ÚOP Pardubice Archive)

Il. 2. Neratov. Wnętrze kościoła w 1972 r.
(fot. M. Kolegar, źródło: Archiwum NPÚ ÚOP Pardubice)

which often occupied historic buildings (the Ladronka or Milada squats), to cooperation between public authorities and private owners in the revitalisation of sites of particular value⁸.

Borderland areas affected by post-war expulsions fostered the establishment of settlements focused on organic farming. In this way, settlement was re-established in the abandoned village of Zastávka in the Rychlebské Mountains in the Olomouc Region (Kreisslová 2025). Only a few people lived there permanently, with their number increasing seasonally during volunteer camps⁹.

In the case of areas inhabited by German populations until 1945, initiatives concerning restoration often focused not only on the degraded monument¹⁰ but also on reconciliation. For this reason, associations bringing together descendants of former residents frequently became involved in the restoration.

Church authorities, having regained the ability to operate legally and openly, were also able to begin rescuing damaged sacred buildings. However, this was associated with various difficulties concerning the method of operation and financing. In the case of renovations of historic buildings, conservation protection also posed a challenge. Often, damaged churches were used only temporarily, during cultural events or as settings for artistic installations (Farnost Manětín 2026)¹¹.

⁴ By virtue of the decision dated August 24, 1973.

⁵ He underwent formation under the guidance of another clandestine priest, František Fráňa, and was ordained a priest in 1986 by the secret bishop Stanislav Krátký. Paweł Boryszewski (2001) provides a more extensive account of the activities of the underground Church in Czechoslovakia.

⁶ The extensive surviving iconographic documentation attests to the artistic value of the church; however, by the time the revitalisation began, the building had been completely destroyed, and its architectural merits would not have been apparent to a person without professional training. The primary motivation was the desire to restore the celebration of the liturgy.

⁷ The 2001 Report of the Czech National Committee of ICOMOS lists several towns where the renovation of historic churches had begun, including towns located in border areas, such as, Boletice, Malonty, Cetviny, Pohorí na Šumavě, Světlá, Polná na Šumavě, Dobrá Voda, Brandov, Březno (ICOMOS Czech Republic 2001, 77).

⁸ For example: the inscription of the South Bohemian village of Hološovice on the UNESCO World Heritage List initiated the restoration of the locality.

⁹ In the spring of 2026, the Brontosaurus Association, involved with Zastávka, announced the completion of the project (Tom 2026).

¹⁰ For example, in the village of Skoky, located in the Karlovy Vary Region, where the community sought to restore the local pilgrimage church (Kreisslová 2025).

¹¹ The placement of “ghost” sculptures in the Church of St. George in Lukova contributed to the revival of tourism and more efficient fund-

Revitalisation of Neratov

The Neratov renewal process did not escape the most common difficulties associated with revitalisation. In many border localities, depopulation was a very significant problem.

In 1990, after beginning his public pastoral ministry, Father Suchár approached the competent bishop¹² to request permission to care for the parish and to rebuild the destroyed church. The response to this request determined the direction of the subsequent revitalisation of the place. The bishop made his approval for reconstruction conditional on the presence of a community of faithful for whom the renovated church would serve as a place of worship. At the dawn of the 1990s, only two people¹³ lived in the village. The presence of a community of believers was a *sine qua non* for consent to the rebuilding of the church. Thus, repopulating the village became the fundamental challenge.



Fig. 3. Neratov. Church festival celebrations in 1991 (author unknown, source: NPÚ ÚOP Pardubice Archive)

Il. 3. Neratov. Uroczystości odpustowe w 1991 r. (autor niezany, źródło: Archiwum NPÚ ÚOP Pardubice)

The first inhabitants of the new Neratov came from circles with which Father Suchár had collaborated during his time in the underground Church; even at that time, they were engaged in supporting people with disabilities. The political transformation of 1989 rekindled their hopes of creating new opportunities for work in this field. Father Suchár inspired them with the idea of establishing a shared home where residents would live and work together, while also participating in the reconstruction of the church.

raising for the church's restoration, although most of the funds came from public sources (Farnost Manětín 2025).

¹² At that time, the bishop of the Hradec Králové diocese was Karel Otčenášek.

¹³ According to information provided by the Association, only two people lived in the village, whereas data from the Czech Statistical Office indicate a population of nine. The discrepancy may result from differences in methodology; in any case, both figures are significantly lower than the population recorded in 1930, which amounted to 378 people (Růžková 2006).

A small group of people decided to move to the countryside and, together with the priest, embark on this undertaking. The repopulation of the village began with two families, who, in addition to raising their own children, also cared for several children in foster care. These included both healthy children and those with disabilities. The way in which these families lived and functioned together established the direction for future revitalisation.

The new residents of Neratov sought to create a place where healthy individuals and those in need of support could live and work together. They were largely inspired by the concept of L'Arche communities, that is, Christian life communities where both healthy people and people with disabilities live and work together. The first of these was established in the French village of Trosly in the mid-1960s. Over time, more communities were founded, and today they can be found all over the world. Neratov did not become part of this movement (L'Arche in the Czech Republic appeared a few years later)¹⁴, but the leaders of the renewal implemented similar forms of operation. Integrated support, including both sheltered housing and a workplace, proved to be a more effective method than that provided by the state at the time (Biskup, Kotrusová 2002). Their greater effectiveness resulted both from the therapeutic benefits of living in a beautiful rural landscape, in small quasi-family groups, and from the opportunities for development through education, paid work, and learning to live in society.

In 1992, the initiators of the renewal established the Neratov Association – a civic and apolitical organisation (Sdružení Neratov 2026, 3), with the aim of creating opportunities for sheltered living and employment in the village¹⁵, as well as restoring Neratov as a place of pilgrimage. The Association purchased the former school building for the first residents. Later, sheltered apartments were established in several buildings, providing living conditions as close as possible to those of a family home¹⁶.

The need to create jobs has resulted in the development of various economic initiatives in Neratov and the surrounding towns. Companies in the catering and hotel industry have been established, and people with disabilities work in a ceramics and wickerwork plant, a gardening enterprise, and in an electronic components assembly facility¹⁷. Hous-

¹⁴ These are Villa Valilla, operating since 1996 in Červený Újezd near Votice (about 70 km south of Prague), and the Benediktus community, founded in 2000 in Chotěboř (about 50 km south of Pardubice). In both communities, sheltered housing is located in historic buildings renovated by the community (Villa Valilla 2025; Benediktus n.d.).

¹⁵ In its early years, the Association sought to assist people with disabilities as well as those who had difficulty finding their place in social life, including people who had been imprisoned, experienced homelessness, or struggled with addiction. In later years, the focus was primarily on people with disabilities.

¹⁶ The number of residents in sheltered housing is approximately 20 people (in 2024, 23 people: Sdružení Neratov 2026), while in 2021 Neratov had 65 permanent residents. Since the beginning of the village's revitalization, its population has steadily increased: 9 people lived in the village in 1991, there were 36 in 2001, and 57 in 2011 (Český statistický úřad 2022).

¹⁷ By the end of 2025, the Association employed 221 people on a permanent basis, of whom 164 were persons with disabilities or in a difficult situation (Sdružení Neratov 2026, 14).

ing and workplaces are located in historical or new buildings, whose form, size, or location refer to the typical forms of the region. This is due to landscape protection requirements¹⁸; the village is situated within the Orlické Hory Protected Landscape Area (CHKO Orlické hory n.d.)¹⁹.

The Association obtains a portion of its funding from various forms of public assistance, while striving for maximum financial self-sufficiency. Since the establishment of the Association, a day care centre and a special school for children have also been created.

The combination of therapeutic and commercial dimensions also characterises cultural activities in Neratov. Since 2011, *Menteatrál*²⁰ has been held in Neratov – a festival featuring theatre groups created by actors with disabilities. Some performances take place in the church, which also hosts concerts. Nevertheless, the primary function of the church remains religious.

Work on restoring the usability of the church began before the Association was formed. The decision of its future founders to move to Neratov, motivated by the pursuit of rebuilding the church, can be considered the beginning of the revitalisation process. For some participants, helping to clear the area in front of the still-inaccessible ruins was a form of voluntary work, while for others it served a therapeutic purpose. The patronal feast mass on August 15, 1990, celebrated in the meadow in front of the church, marked the return of the church to liturgical use. However, access to the interior remained impossible for another year. It was not until 1991 that the clearing of the ruins from rubble and soil could begin. The work lasted several weeks and took the form of a volunteer camp involving various groups of participants: former and new residents of the village and the surrounding area, their friends, descendants of former German inhabitants of the village, and supporters of the initiative. For some, rebuilding the church symbolised the revival of the village and the restoration of a sense of agency over their own lives; for others, it represented the opportunity to profess their faith publicly once again.

The church returned to use as a parish church, but for several subsequent years it remained without a roof. Masses celebrated under the open sky, with only a makeshift covering over the altar, became a distinctive feature of this place.

It quickly became clear, however, that this solution was unsuitable for regular church use. Rainfall and the need to remove snow from the interior proved to be significant challenges for pastoral activities. Nevertheless, Neratov's renewal continued to attract new supporters, drawn both by the community and the liturgy celebrated in the ruined church. The roofless church once again became a place of worship, providing a concise metaphor for the broader idea of Neratov's renewal. Covering the ruins while preserving their openness to the sky would therefore combine practical requirements with a symbolic dimension.

The design process lasted 13 years. The first concepts for the new roof were developed in 1992, while the final

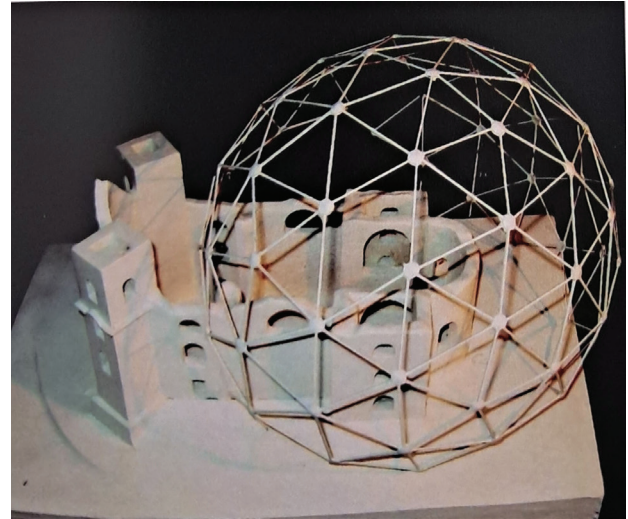


Fig. 4. Neratov. Model of the church covered with a glass dome (photo by J. Kratochvíl, source: NPÚ ÚOP Pardubice Archive)

Il. 4. Neratov. Model kościoła przekrytego szklaną kulą (fot. J. Kratochvíl, źródło: Archiwum NPÚ ÚOP Pardubice)

design, on which the roof in its present form was based, was completed in 2005. The discussion about the new roof began when the parish announced a competition for proposals on how to cover the church. One of the requirements was the incorporation of glazing. The competition entries were meant to serve as inspiration and provide a starting point for developing the detailed design.

All the projects met the requirement to incorporate glazing. Some of the proposed solutions went beyond purely spatial interventions, developing the church's programmatic concept. Architect Jan Kratochvíl's project proposed expanding the church space with a new underground section²¹ and covering the wall crown with a roof in the form of a huge glass sphere (Fig. 4). According to this concept, the church was to become an ecumenical centre, with the underground section housing a synagogue, the above-ground part (the historic body of the church) serving Catholics, and the glass sphere serving as a place of worship for Protestants (Šindar 2010). Another concept presented in the competition was submitted by the SIAL company from Liberec, which involved covering the building with a glass roof supported by a steel structure. It was well-received in the professional community. The visualisation of the roof with an elliptical outline floating above the crown of the walls appeared on the cover of the October 1994 issue of the *Casabella* magazine (Fig. 5). This concept was further developed and refined over the following years. During the design process, it became apparent that the need to account for snow and wind loads under local conditions, as well as the pressure exerted on the walls, combined with cost considerations, significantly limited the possibilities for implementation. However, the main obstacle was that the concept did not receive the full approval from the heritage

¹⁸ Guidelines for the protection of the cultural landscape within the protected area in: (Třešňák 2021).

¹⁹ It was established in 1970 (CHKO Orlické hory n.d.).

²⁰ <https://www.menteatral.cz/>. Accessed: November 7, 2025.

²¹ The concept envisaged the construction of an underground section, which did not originally exist and does not exist at present either.



Fig. 5. Cover of *Casabella* No. 616 showing a visualisation of the roof project of the church's nave by SIAL company (source: <https://casabellaweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/616-cp.jpg>; accessed: August 10, 2026)

Il. 5. Okładka nr. 616 czasopisma *Casabella* przedstawiająca wizualizację projektu zadaszania korpusu kościoła autorstwa firmy SIAL (źródło: <https://casabellaweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/616-cp.jpg>; data dostępu: 10 sierpnia 2026)

authorities (Statní památkový ústav v Pardubicích 2002). Since 1992, the church had been listed in the register of monuments (Památkový katalog 2025)²². Conservation authorities advocated, at a minimum, for preserving the historical shape of the roof. Objections to excessive intervention in the church's structure, together with the need to abandon solutions that were too costly in terms of materials or execution (the Association aimed to carry out as much of the work as possible through self-managed construction), eliminated certain design solutions. Similarly, the wooden truss design developed in 2005 using traditional carpentry techniques²³ could not be implemented due to financial constraints.

During consultations with conservation services²⁴, a project was developed that combined the demands of the Association and the conservation authorities. Its authors were Eng. Jiří Starý and Eng. Petr Dostál (Národní památkový ústav 2005). In 2006, the church regained a roof identical in shape to the historic one (Figs. 6, 7), with glazing in the form of a cross at the ridge area (Fig. 8). Initially,

the glazing of part of the roof was designed as a temporary solution, with the possibility of replacing the glass panels with a permanent covering at a later stage. However, the temporary concept ultimately became the final solution. In 2019, leaks appeared, prompting repairs to the roof covering, together with adjustments to some of the ventilation and condensation drainage systems²⁵. However, these interventions were minor. The Baroque church crowned with a glass roof represented the first realisation of its kind in the Czech Republic, inspiring several subsequent projects of a similar nature²⁶. The decision regarding the method of re-roofing the church largely determined the character of the interior, in which it was also decided not to introduce reconstructed elements. Due to financial constraints, the nave walls were left unfinished rather than being plastered. The reconstruction of the furnishings or the introduction of elements preserved from the period of the church's construction were also not undertaken²⁷.

These solutions also had symbolic significance. The rough, irregular wall made of brick and stone, according to Father Suchár, was meant to represent the community that restored it. The church building here represents the Church – a community composed of individuals who are disabled and vulnerable, yet capable of contributing to a greater whole. The light entering through the roof glazing, in turn, signifies Christ coming into human imperfection. The theological narrative of the “disabled church (Church)” resonates with the story of the history and historical upheavals of the village, as well as with its current program of supporting people with disabilities²⁸.

The original title of the church, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, remains unchanged; however, the narrative associated with it employs contemporary means of expression. Almost all of the church's furnishings are modern. The tabernacle, altar, processional cross, and seating for the celebrant and liturgical ministers were designed by the Brno-based artist Dr. Karel Rechlík. He is also the creator of the spatial composition above the presbytery, in the place of the former altar wall. Dedicated to the patroness of the church, the composition, entitled “On the Wings of Angels”, depicts the Blessed Virgin Mary and refers to the original lost devotional image. It is a metal-cut representation of Mary, modelled on a historical engraving depicting the miraculous statue. The Most Holy Virgin is surrounded by glass forms – “angels” floating around her. The changing daylight entering through the glazed ridge causes the

²⁵ The roof repair and the design of alternative solutions were carried out by the company Sipral.

²⁶ The new roofs of the Church of St. Nicholas in Petrovic (located in the Ústí region, near the German border) and the Chapel of St. Anna in Horní Údolí (which is part of the town of Zlaté Hory) were inspired by the solution from Neratov.

²⁷ An exception is the front elevation with its towers. It was intended to be the only element of the church that was reconstructed to match the appearance of the original. The plasterwork and its colours were restored, the towers regained their copper spires, the clock was restored, and new bells were installed. The parish attempted to recover the sculptures that decorated the entrance stairs, but without success. By court ruling, the sculptures are to remain in their current location.

²⁸ Fr. Suchár spoke about the symbolism of the church, among other things, in: (Suchár, Kutil 2022, 72, 73).

²² Decision of June 5, 1992, registering the church on the list of cultural monuments under no. 10470/6-5561.

²³ Authored by carpenter Petr Růžička (Šindar 2010).

²⁴ The legal system of monument protection in the Czech Republic assumes a significant advisory/consultative participation in the design process (for more details: Dąbkowska 2016).

Fig. 6. Neratov.
View of the church from the east
(photo by P. Leonowicz, 2025)

Il. 6. Neratov. Widok kościoła
od strony wschodniej
(fot. P. Leonowicz, 2025)



Fig. 7. Neratov.
View of the church from
the northwest
(photo by J. Leonowicz, 2024)

Il. 7. Neratov. Widok kościoła
od strony północno-zachodniej
(fot. J. Leonowicz, 2024)



appearance of the composition to vary depending on the time of day, season, or weather conditions (Fig. 9).

Summary

The renewal of Neratov is progressing steadily. The church is gradually acquiring additional furnishings (an organ was installed in 2025), while new support facilities are being established in the village. Despite these developments, Neratov retains the intimate character of a small mountain settlement.

The initiators of the renewal developed their own methods of operation and implemented them in their place of residence. This provided the opportunity to adapt the methods and scope of initiatives to the current situation, as well as to introduce adjustments over time. Revitalisation, carried out in a highly flexible manner and divided into numerous smaller projects, has proven to be the optimal approach in this case.

The pursuit of self-sufficiency to the greatest extent possible appears to be a significant factor in long-term success. The management strategy was based on the diversification of activities. On the one hand, this provided greater flexibility in employing people with disabilities, which was important for therapeutic reasons; on the other, it increased financial resilience in the face of economic crises. The stability of the undertaking is further enhanced by the fact that, despite the region and locality being popular tourist destinations, it is not solely dependent on this sector of the economy. At the same time, access to public support has enabled a broader range of activities.

The process of restoring the church was characterised by similar features: it was initiated by the community, implemented in stages, and involved the community participating as fully as possible in the work.

Conservation protection and the resulting requirement to restore the church's historical silhouette in the landscape positively influenced the final form of the project. The cur-



Fig. 8. Neratov. Church roof (photo by J. Leonowicz, 2024)

Il. 8. Neratov. Dach kościoła (fot. J. Leonowicz, 2024)



Fig. 9. Neratov. Angelus prayer in the church (photo by J. Leonowicz, 2025)

Il. 9. Neratov. Modlitwa Anioł Pański w kościele (fot. J. Leonowicz, 2025)

rent appearance of the roof, while respecting conservation requirements, remains a contemporary and striking solution, while also preserving the symbolism associated with the most recent history of the church. The restored church attracts numerous visitors, which contributes to the long term sustainability of the building.

An essential element of success appears to be the renewal program and the manner of its implementation. Locating sheltered housing and workplaces suitable for their residents in small buildings of traditional form has proven to be an appropriate solution, both for therapeutic reasons and due to landscape protection requirements. The idea of reviving the pilgrimage centre while simultaneously supporting people with disabilities attracts numerous supporters, who provide various forms of assistance, ranging from sponsorship activities to volunteer work²⁹. It also inspires subsequent creators who, through their activities, contribute to the cause. This concentration of successive initiatives confirms the importance of the heritage community in protecting the site.

Over the course of 30 years of its existence, the Neratov Association has developed an effective method for operating as a social enterprise. At present, its activities are managed by 24 people³⁰, among whom the initiator of the renewal, pastor and priest, Fr. Josef Suchár³¹, plays a particularly significant role. His vision of the “reconstruction of two temples”³² in which the renewal of the church and the village proceeds simultaneously and symbiotically, has contributed to the current flourishing of the site. The organisation of cultural events in the church contributes to its maintenance; however, its primary purpose remains its original sacred function (Fig. 9). The continued fulfilment of this function is closely linked to the presence of the pastor. The long-standing shortage of priests in the Czech Republic³³ means that Fr. Suchár is the only priest serving the parish. Consequently, when considering the future of the revitalisation process and the identity of the place, the question of his successor may prove to be one of the most important issues.

²⁹ In August 2025, the church received new liturgical vessels designed specifically for this place. Their creator is the artist Leona Marie Špačková. The glass liturgical vessels refer to the region’s oldest tradition.

³⁰ The supervisory board consists of 7 members, the audit committee – 3, and the remaining persons are engaged in managing various initiatives (Sdružení Neratov 2026).

³¹ For his activities, Fr. Suchár was awarded the Silver Commemorative Medal of the Senate (2015) and the Order of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, 4th Class (2024).

³² The words of the Song of Neratov written by him: *Pomoz nám prosím, naše milá Paní. postavit z trosek zas krásný chrám. Ten první z kamene, ten druhý v srdcích. tak jak si přeje Tvůj Syn – Král* [Please help us, our dear Lady, to rebuild a beautiful church from the ruins. The first from stone, the second in hearts. Just as Your Son – the King – wishes] can be considered a summary of the revitalisation program.

³³ Due to a shortage of priests, the Archbishop of the Olomouc Diocese, His Excellency Josef Nuzík, issued a decree exempting the faithful from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass in the absence of priests. The decree has been temporarily enacted for the period from July 1 to December 31, 2025 (Olomoucká Arcidiecéze 2025).

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Streszczenie

Neratov – rola społeczności lokalnej w rewaloryzacji kościoła pw. Wniebowzięcia NMP i rewitalizacji miejscowości

Tematem artykułu jest rola społeczności lokalnej w rewaloryzacji zabytku oraz rewitalizacji miejscowości na przykładzie studium przypadku Neratova. Omawiana miejscowość jest niewielką wsią na pograniczu polsko-czeskim, na obszarze pierwotnie zamieszkanym przede wszystkim przez ludność niemiecką. Po powojennych wysiedleniach region i wieś pozostały zdegradowane przez kilka kolejnych dekad. Po przewrocie ustrojowym w wyniku inicjatyw oddolnych doszło do rewitalizacji wsi powiązanej z rewaloryzacją zabytkowego kościoła.

Celem autorki artykułu było przedstawienie historii rewitalizacji miejscowości oraz rewaloryzacji świątyni, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem roli społeczności lokalnej w tych procesach.

Badania obejmowały literaturę przedmiotu, archiwalną dokumentację projektową, a także korespondencję urzędową dotyczącą projektu oraz badania terenowe.

Na podstawie przeprowadzonych analiz można potwierdzić, że aktywność społeczności lokalnej stanowi znaczny potencjał dla ochrony lokalnych zabytków, jednocześnie konieczna jest stała współpraca ze specjalistami w zakresie ochrony dziedzictwa. Również rewitalizacja inicjowana oddolnie wydaje się korzystnym sposobem działania.

Słowa kluczowe: Neratov, Czechy, rewaloryzacja, rewitalizacja, społeczność