

Revealing restoration

CASTLE PROJECT USES WEB-BASED FUND-RAISING

While driving through the Aggtelek National Park, look closely and you can spot blanched walls from a 13th-century castle on a hilltop, resembling a set of teeth. Just a few years ago, this historic site was shrouded by foliage, but thanks to the work of committed volunteers and pioneering web-based fund-raising, the Szádvár Castle is being revealed through restoration. BY **MARISA BEAHM**

EACH FALL AND SPRING since 2006, volunteers from Friends of Szádvár (Szádvár Baráti Kör) gather to work on the castle, which is north of Miskolc in Szögliget, near the Slovakian border. The long-term goal of their efforts is to make the castle a tourist draw, which could be the ticket to economic renewal of the poor county that it neighbors. The friends' aim isn't to rebuild the castle to its towering original state, but rather to maintain what remains after the castle exploded in 1686 (see box).

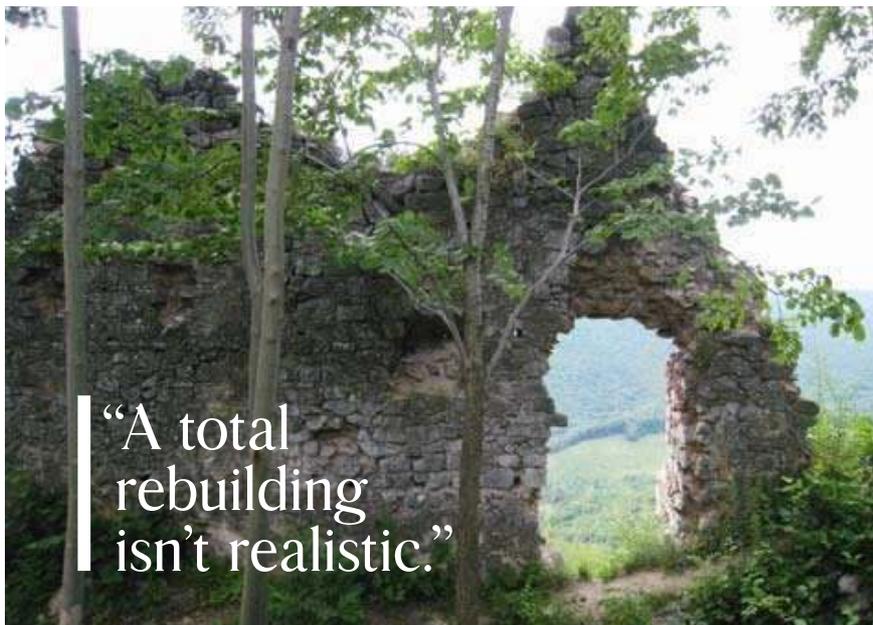
"A total rebuilding isn't realistic. It would cost \$10–20 million for a full restoration. At this point, the realistic goal is to conserve the existing walls," says Tamás Kárpáti, a Friends of Szádvár member who lives in California. The project's aims are to clean the castle grounds, including removing all the overgrown foliage, restore a tower as a viewpoint, and place signs, information boards,

and trash bins along the road that leads to the castle. The volunteer efforts are overseen by employees at the Miskolc museum and archeologists. Everyone involved knows it is a long process, but they stay committed. "If it takes a lifetime, it takes a lifetime," says Sebestyén Nyáry, Friends of Szádvár volunteer.

ONLINE FUND-RAISING

WHILE THERE ARE multiple castle restoration projects occurring in Hungary, this project is set apart because its fund-raising efforts are being streamlined through the Internet. "We've raised about \$2,000. It's the first time that any Hungarian organization used online fund-raising, especially in the US," Kárpáti says. Kárpáti is a product manager for eBay Giving Works, which facilitates donations to nonprofits through buying and selling on eBay.

To join this program, organizations must have nonprofit status in the US and charity status in the UK. So to be eligible, Friends of Szádvár teamed up with GlobalGiving, an online marketplace where individuals can donate to myriad locally run campaigns around the world. Donors can sell items on eBay to benefit the castle restoration project or give a cash donation on the Global Giving website. For donations, their target market is Hungarians living in the US or any castle aficionados worldwide. To donate, it's as simple as going to GlobalGiving or eBay, choosing a donation amount and providing credit card information. The donation sites also break down how a gift would be spent. For instance, \$25 provides food and lodging for one volunteer a day or \$120 would hire a carpenter to work on the restoration, according to the GlobalGiving website.



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assets in villages can be castles,” he says. Since Szádvár is set in the beautiful national park and can draw both Slovaks and Hungarians, it should easily attract people, and the friends are hoping for 30,000 annual visitors. In one day, tourists could visit the national park, spend the night in the city, and see the castle. “Tourism is one way to help locals break out of economic depression,”

While the project does receive governmental grants, using the Internet provides a wider fundraising base for the organization, which has even received donations from Australia and Vietnam. “The reach is definitely broader. We can target anyone with a PayPal account,” Kárpáti says. Ideally, they’d like to find 100 people worldwide to donate \$25 per year to keep the restoration sustainable. They have also received grant money from the Hungarian government and fund actions through the organization’s dues. “People like to help all kinds of causes that they believe in,” Kárpáti adds.

While web-based fund-raising, especially for political fund-raising, is very common in the US or UK, Kárpáti thinks one of the reasons Hungary is behind is because of a low Internet penetration, although it’s growing. “Ten years ago, even having e-mail was a big deal.” Also, Kárpáti sees a cultural difference, in that charitable action in Hungary is not on the same scale with that of the UK or US. “In Hungary, people expect help from the government in general, rather than from themselves.” American donors are also at an advantage, because they receive tax breaks for donations, which is why they’re targeting people in those countries, Kárpáti adds.

VOLUNTEERS

THE FRIENDS of Szádvár joined together in much the same way that they are being sustained: through the Internet. Initially, a group of castle enthusiasts logged on to web portal Index.hu to discuss their mutual passion. In 2006, rather than just letting the discussion continue, Kárpáti proposed a call to action. “Let’s not just talk about castles, but start doing something about it,” he recounts. Just a month or two later, 40 people showed up for the first castle-saving weekend. Now the volunteer group has grown and is made up from people of many walks of life. “Everyone is just giving; there’s no corruption,” Kárpáti says.

Members of Szádvár’s local communities have been very supportive of the castle efforts by hosting volunteers and giving their own time, including former miners who have shared methods for stone removal and other tasks, Nyáry says. The experience has been great for historically inclined volunteers, Kárpáti adds, because they can find items from the Middle Ages like bones and ceramics.

Like the other volunteers, Kárpáti hopes their efforts make the castle a tourist destination to help Szögliget. “The biggest

Kárpáti says. Szögliget is one of the poorest areas in Hungary, and has been suffering since its state-sponsored factories and mines closed. ★



SZÁDVÁR

While exact details of the castle are slight, the first written documentation of Szádvár dates back to 1268. The most famous residents of the castle were the Bebeks, who made many significant constructions in the 1500s, like the main structure of the castle and the ropeway elevator. In 1567, the castle suffered its roughest siege, when it was attacked by Chief Captain Lázár Schwendi. Zsófia Patócsy, wife of György Bebek, defended the castle for four days, but eventually surrendered. Afterwards, the castle’s owners fluctuated throughout the 17th century. In 1686, the Hapsburgs decided to blow up the castle in order to protect the area from anti-Hapsburg rebels in Hungary.

Today, only some of the castle walls still remain on its undisturbed one-hectare site. Unlike some other ancient castles which have been disturbed, this one may have been protected since it was regularly patrolled because of its proximity to the Slovakian border and location in the Aggtelek National Park, according to Friends of Szádvár volunteer Sebestyén Nyáry. He feels lucky that the castle has remained. “The last 50 years were not about respecting nationalism. It was about demolishing old castles, but this survived well at the border,” Nyáry says.