FANZUN



„The old hay barns are not our biggest problem“

Medienmitteilung

- fanzun.swiss/die-alten-heustaelle-stellen-nicht-unser-groesstes-problem-dar/

This week, a news item spread through the media reporting that the small Ticino municipality of Gambarogno is offering idyllic rustici with views of Lago Maggiore for sale for just one franc, with the note that they must also be renovated. In autumn, the building commission will decide whether this idea is even permissible. René Meier, Head of Architecture and Planning, took a closer look at the alleged bargain.

How much will it roughly cost to renovate one of these houses?

All the buildings are located in the agricultural zone, meaning outside the building zone. The site can only be reached on foot. The area is not fully connected to utilities. There is a drinking water source in the hamlet, but sewage and electricity probably are not available. Some of the individual buildings apparently consist only of their foundation walls, and some are missing their roofs. As far as I can judge, the conditions for the renovation have not been conclusively defined. The focus is mainly on upgrading and reviving the cultural and architectural heritage of the hamlet and restoring its traditional overall appearance. On this basis, the costs of a renovation cannot be quantified.

If the building commission now rejects the proposal, do you see other ways to save the little village from falling into disrepair?

At its core, probably only a suitable tourism project can help. Apparently, corresponding plans have existed since the 1970s. There are said to be plans for a small group of buildings near the well at the crossing of the hiking trails to be turned into a mountain hut, funded by the municipality, where hikers and mountain bikers on their way to Monte Tamaro and Monte Lema could stop for refreshments. Such a project would naturally make private use of the rustici in the hamlet more attractive. The cable car from Indemini currently under discussion would of course also improve access to the hamlet – but its financing and compatibility with the cultural heritage are more than questionable.

Could the idea of affordable acquisition also be a way to save the hay barns in canton Graubünden that are at risk of falling into disrepair?

No, there is no shortage of interested parties. The issue is the conflict of interest between the desire for a change of use and the preservation of cultural heritage. Under the Secondary Homes Act, converting agricultural buildings into holiday apartments in a small area that is not connected to utilities and lies far from the nearest settlement contradicts important goals and principles of spatial planning law, namely the principle of separating building zones from non-building zones, the principle of concentrating settlement activity within building zones, and the limitation on the construction of secondary homes. We probably have to accept the decay of building structures and the resulting loss of cultural heritage if no suitable users or funds are available for their preservation – this applies to decaying barns just as much as to entire hamlets, villages or even whole valleys. In the best case, a suitable use is found that is in line with current legislation. The most important cultural assets should be preserved with support from public authorities, enabling a use that might otherwise be uneconomical. Buildings without users and without an overriding interest in preserving their cultural heritage are, in the long run, left to decay. If you look at our villages, you will see that the old hay barns and «fodder sheds» are not our biggest problems. The proportion of unused and decaying houses in village centre zones, for example, is steadily growing.

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