

Galéria Mlyny Nitra - a project in the right place at the right time



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One of Nitra's largest developers and investors, the holder of the ASB Developer of the Year award, awarded at ABS GALA evening 2010, executed the construction of the shopping and leisure centre Galéria Mlyny ("Gallery Mills") between 2007 and 2009. The ancient town under Zobor mountain therefore gained a shopping megacomplex of supra-regional importance - not only for Nitra's inhabitants and its adjacent extended region.

An interesting connection of architect-developer-constructor

This is a typical - yet in many respects specific - retail project which replaced the dilapidating industrial complex at Nitra's former Mlyny (Mills) location near the town centre, within a touching distance of a pedestrian zone, offices, universities, the historic part of Nitra and the intersection of Štúrova and Štefánikova streets - the busiest in the Nitra self-governing region. Although the location is complicated, it is without question exclusive. This was the primary factor for the decision to site it here.

"Another was the number of inhabitants of between 80 to 90 thousand and the size of the entire catchment area with up to one million people. This is exactly where we saw the opportunity to bring to Nitra brand names which had not been there yet," said Tóthová. She added that when they made an analysis of the existing competitors and planned projects, with the exception of small shops, no large shopping centre was planned in Nitra. So the investment plan called Galéria Mlyny was born - a project which "will create the right mix of large and small tenants and a modern entry into the town". As she emphasised, the decision was made at the right time. Let's add that in the right place, too.

While there were 23 nonfunctional industrial buildings in the original complex, the execution time was significantly extended by the Regional Monuments Board, during which even the architect had to be replaced. In any case, a very interesting alliance of the architect - developer - constructor professions was created. The whole construction of the shopping-leisure centre which opened on the 9 September 2009, took two years. "We started leasing in 2006 and by 2007 all space had been rented out," said Tóthová and she also stressed the fact that the project brought many related investments - for example the reconstruction of surrounding roads and intersections.

Town gained quality contemporary architecture

We informed about the project just before its opening in a separate article (see [New shopping centre: Nitra Mills "mill" again](#) - SF 8.9.2009). What is therefore the primary reason that we are returning to it again, after almost 10 months of its operation? The opportunity to evaluate it following a time period. Let

us summarise briefly what Galéria Mlyny, awarded the title Best Shopping Center Development, brought to the people of Nitra and its surroundings:

- a change of usage of the area from manufacturing to commercial-social,
- quality contemporary + modern architecture (load bearing steel construction with glass-concrete-metal casing),
- 126 retail units - including 103 shops and 23 service provision units on three above-ground commercial floors with a total rentable area of 28 500 m²,
- shops and services of significant Slovak and international brands (H&M, Benetton, Mango, Marks&Spencer, Samsonite),
- a socio-relaxation zone with designer coffee houses, bistros, a classic fast food court, a gym and a casino,
- 1100 new parking spaces in a four-floor house (a significant help in solving of static traffic),
- strengthening of shopping tourism (car registration plates from other districts can be seen in the car park),
- a place for personal as well as group meetings,
- space for cultural and social functions,
- last but not least - 500 new jobs.

Even though controversial, Nitra residents accepted it as their own

Neither the Nitra region nor Nitra itself ever had enough quality office space. There was an interest to invest in this segment two years ago but the crisis significantly blunted it today. This is why the start of construction of the planned 10-floor administrative Veže Mlyny (Mills Towers) totalling an office space rentable area of 6 000 m² is a subject of more discussion. The announced symbiosis Retail & Office is not happening yet in terms of this project, this is why there is a bigger need to fill up the area of retail and services which attract demand in every phase of the economic cycle.

As we have written, Galéria Mlyny is characterised by choosing visually interesting materials (lacobel - coloured lacquered glass plates on the front and side facade, white alucobond on the rear facade). The atrium - the internal space of the building - is effectively lit by a large skylight, glass railings as well as glass elevators.

Despite this the project Galéria Mlyny was “very controversial in several aspects“, believes Stanislav Babčan, the principal architect of Nitra. According to him the original design would have been of more benefit to Nitra. “It is not that much of town-defining building in this location. Usage of modern materials with the reflective effect gives rise to an assumption that people will accept it as their own. I expect that it will open itself up to the town more and will connect with it,“ Babčan does not deny the positive attributes of Mlyny either.

But today, at least based on the statistically monitored daily utilisation of the largest shopping centre in Nitra and surroundings, in fact much suggests that the Nitra inhabitants accepted Galéria Mlyny as their own long time ago.

Illustrations - Mlyny, a.s.

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