

Competition brief

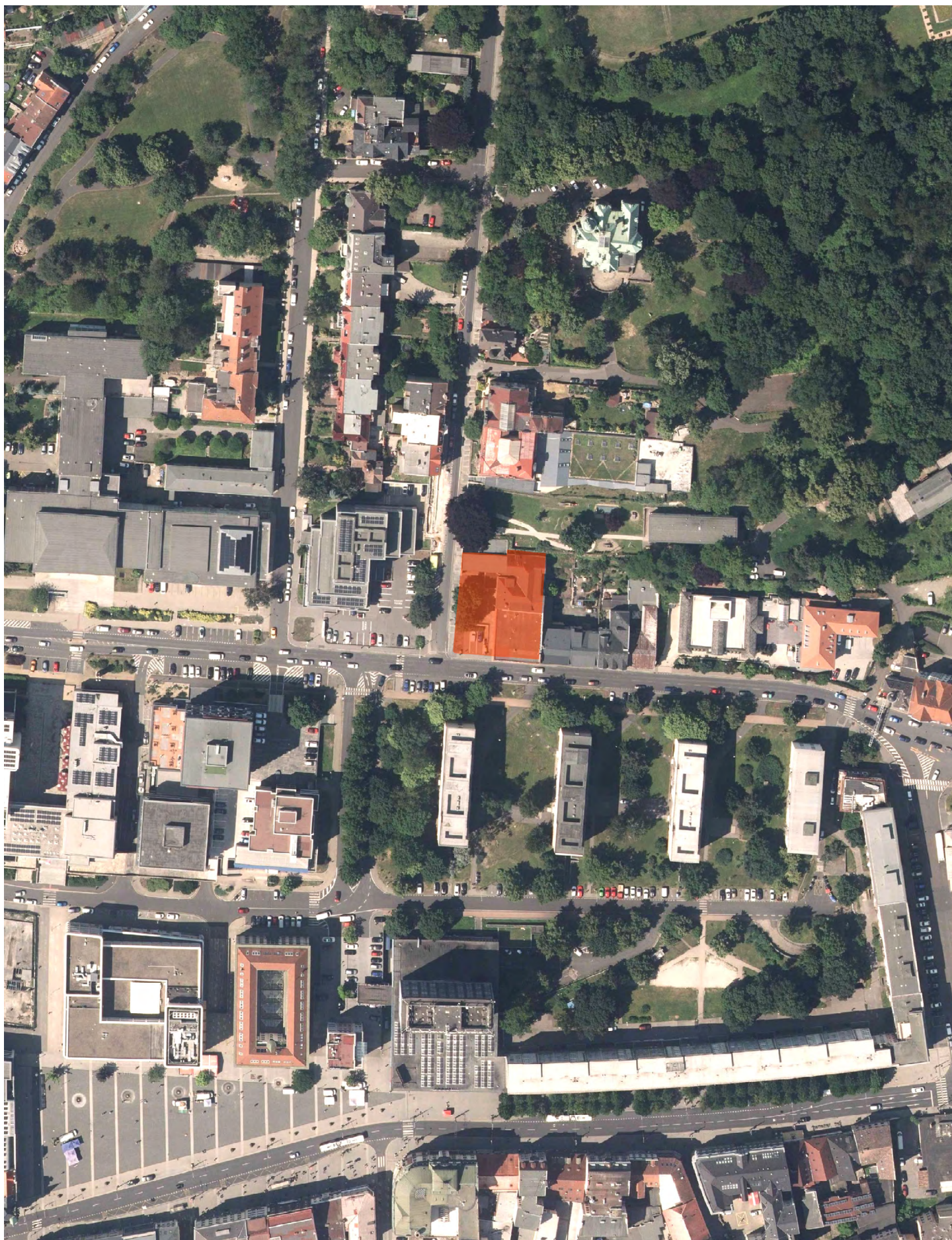
The National House in Ústí nad Labem is entering a new chapter in its history and is seeking a contemporary, adaptable interior that builds on its cultural legacy while opening the building to today's social life and new forms of use.

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Deadline for submitting
requests to participate
|25|09|2026|



Opening remarks

For decades, the National House has been an integral part of the cultural life of our city. Generations of visitors, artists and organisers have come together here, and thousands of events have taken place within its walls. Since the 1990s, however, despite its important role in Ústí nad Labem's concert scene, its programme has gradually stagnated and lost touch with younger audiences. At the same time, the condition of the building continued to deteriorate.

As the managing body of the National House, we feel a responsibility to build on its rich history, give it new energy, and open it to a broader range of cultural activities and visitors. We believe that a thoughtful transformation can create a vibrant and inspiring place – a natural setting for meeting, creating and sharing. A place that will also appeal to younger generations.

We are launching this competition with the ambition to explore new ideas and with confidence in the creativity of its participants. We have spent countless hours considering the spatial layout, adaptability, interior and exterior design – including the outdoor terrace – as well as acoustics and the operation of the bars. We explored many possibilities, but ultimately concluded that an open competition is the best way to find the right solution. We are not afraid of bold changes, we are not attached to preserving the name National House, and we are open to new approaches. Naturally, the project will be shaped by budgetary constraints and long-term operational sustainability, but these limitations are part of the challenge. We look forward to proposals that will help write the next chapter in the story of the National House and strengthen its role within Ústí nad Labem and the wider region.

Jan Kvasnička
director of Kulturní středisko města Ústí nad Labem
(Cultural Center Organization of Ústí nad Labem)

The development of the city of Ústí nad Labem

Ústí nad Labem was founded as a medieval royal town on an important trade route along the River Elbe. Its historic core developed around the market square and remained enclosed by the town walls for centuries.

A major transformation came in the 19th century with the Industrial Revolution. Following the demolition of the town walls, the city expanded rapidly, its population grew severalfold, and, thanks to the railway, river transport and industry, Ústí nad Labem became one of the principal urban centres of North Bohemia.

A further layer of urban development emerged at the turn of the 20th century with the construction of perimeter-block housing, villa neighbourhoods and new public institutions. The Second World War, however, brought extensive destruction to the historic centre, followed by post-war reconstruction.

A defining moment in the formation of today's city centre was the urban planning and architectural competition held in 1963, which proposed a comprehensive re-development of the central area. The scheme embraced a modernist vision of the city centre, preserving primarily the landmark historic churches while many other historic buildings were replaced by new development. The result is a distinctive urban fabric where fragments of the historic town coexist with extensive post-war and modernist interventions. Today's city centre thus represents an open urban layer whose future development remains the subject of ongoing discussion.





History of the National House in Ústí nad Labem

The National House is located on Velká Hradební Street, which was established in the mid-19th century on the site of the former city walls. The foundation of today's building is a burgher house with an inn, built in 1853. From the beginning, the complex included a garden restaurant, a bowling alley and a garden pavilion for social gatherings and musical performances. During the last quarter of the 19th century, these facilities were gradually expanded. The original garden salon was converted into a ballroom, complemented by a dining room, guest rooms and additional facilities. The alterations carried out between 1895 and 1899 gave the building the form that has largely been preserved to this day.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the building was further extended with a new two-storey wing facing Na Schodech Street. In addition to restaurant functions, it served as a venue for social gatherings, cultural events, educational activities and civic associations. During the First Czechoslovak Republic, it became one of the main centres of the Czech minority in Ústí nad Labem, housing association rooms, a hall with a stage, a restaurant, guest rooms, as well as a bookshop and publishing house.

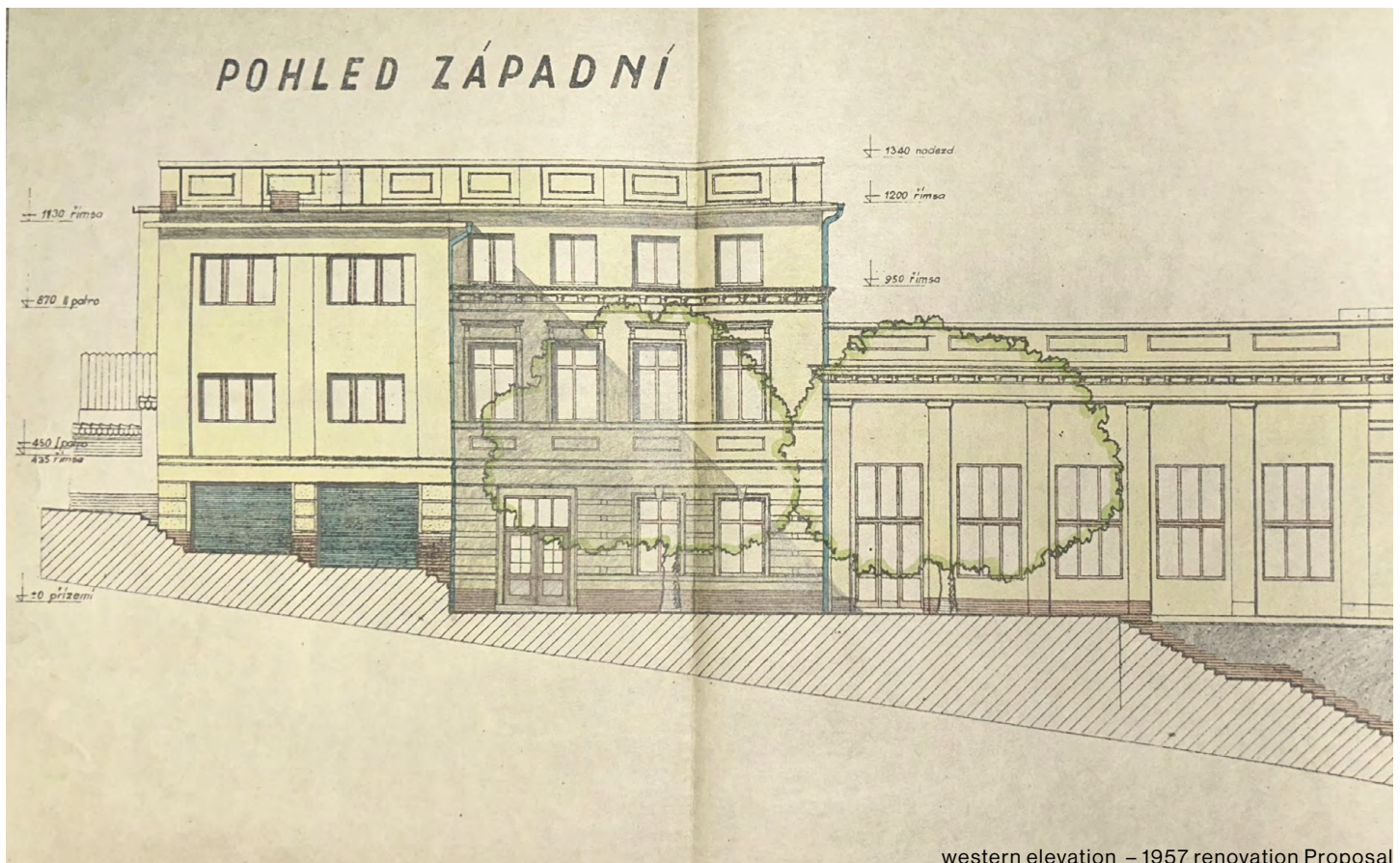
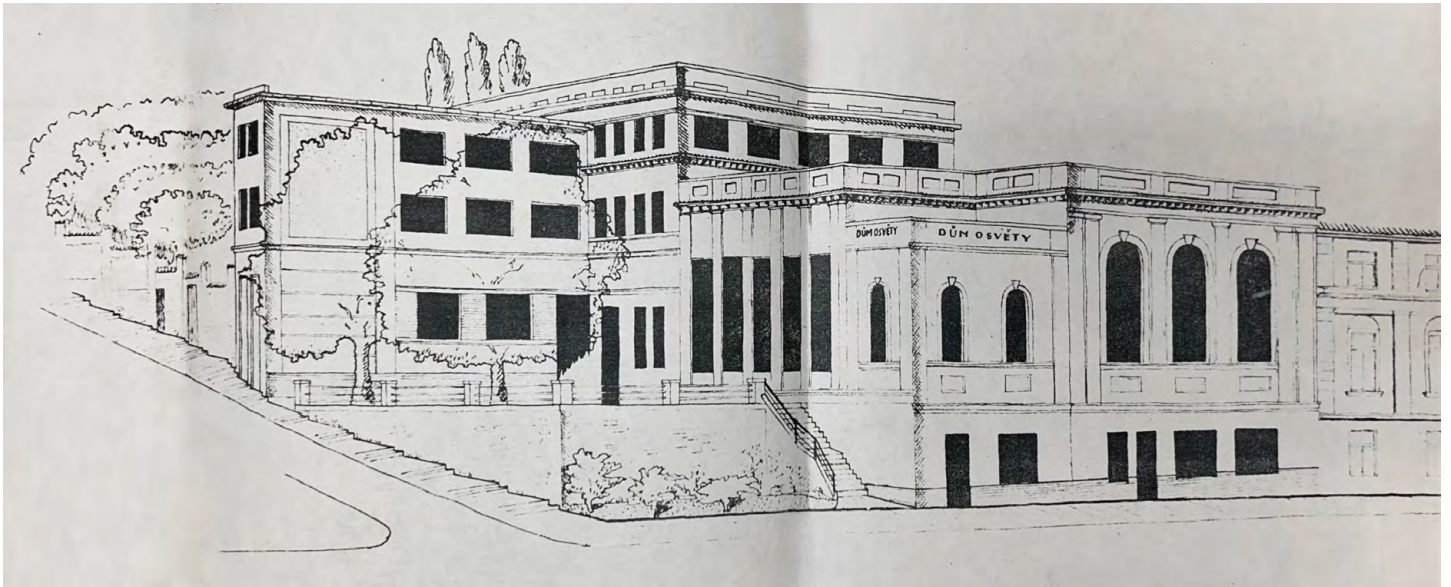
After the Second World War, the building continued its cultural function under the name House of Education. In the 1950s, it underwent its last major structural modification, during which parts of the basement were converted into offices and the original Neo-Renaissance façade was replaced by a new architectural design reflecting the ideas of the period. In the following decades, the building was used by the city's cultural and administrative institutions; it housed cultural facilities management, cultural centres, a publishing house and the editorial office of the regional



The National House around 1920

press. Theatre activities also formed an important part of the building's history – in the 1960s and 1970s, it was home to the small-scale theatre Kladivadlo, the predecessor of today's Činoherní studio. In 1989, the Ústí nad Labem branch of Civic Forum was also established here.

Throughout its history, the National House has retained its character as a place dedicated to public, cultural and social life. Its present form is the result of several construction phases from the mid-19th century to the second half of the 20th century, reflecting changing social needs and the transformation of the urban environment.



western elevation – 1957 renovation Proposal

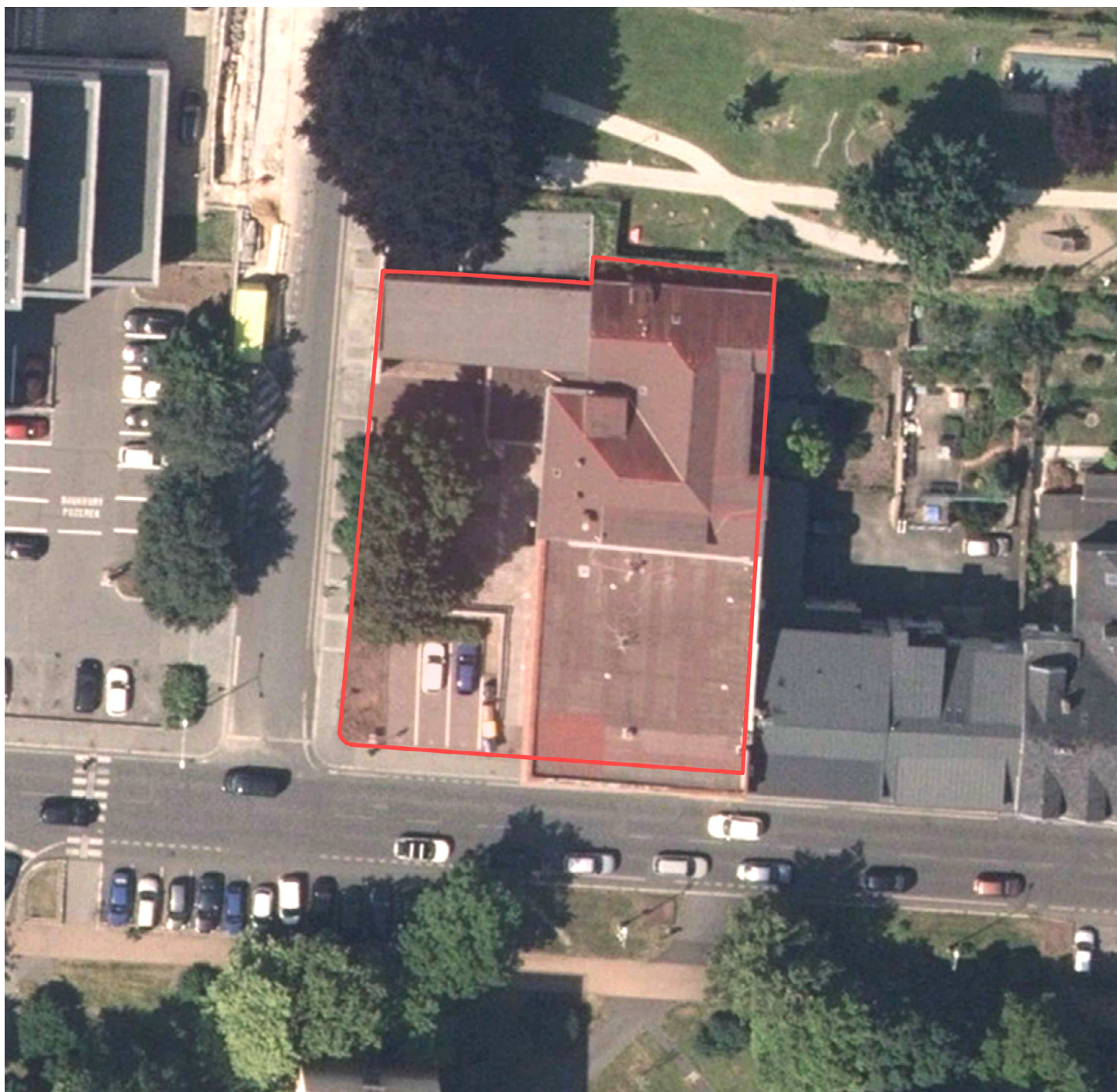
The surroundings of the National House

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|---|-----------------------------|----|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Addressed area | 10 | Cultural Center |
| 2 | Library | 11 | Regional Office |
| 3 | Kindergarten | 12 | City Hall |
| 4 | Elementary school | 13 | Zdar Palace |
| 5 | Elementary Arts school | 14 | Mírové Square |
| 6 | Open air cinema | 15 | Tax Office |
| 7 | Elementary Arts school | 16 | Church Assumption of Virgin Mary |
| 8 | Library | 17 | Forum Shopping Center |
| 9 | Children's and Youth Center | 18 | Main Train Station |



Addressed area

The total area of the project site is 1 408 m² and includes the building located on plot no. 2393, as well as plot no. 2394, which forms part of the complex. The site is owned by the Statutory City of Ústí nad Labem and is entrusted for management to the contributory organisation "Kulturní středisko města Ústí nad Labem".

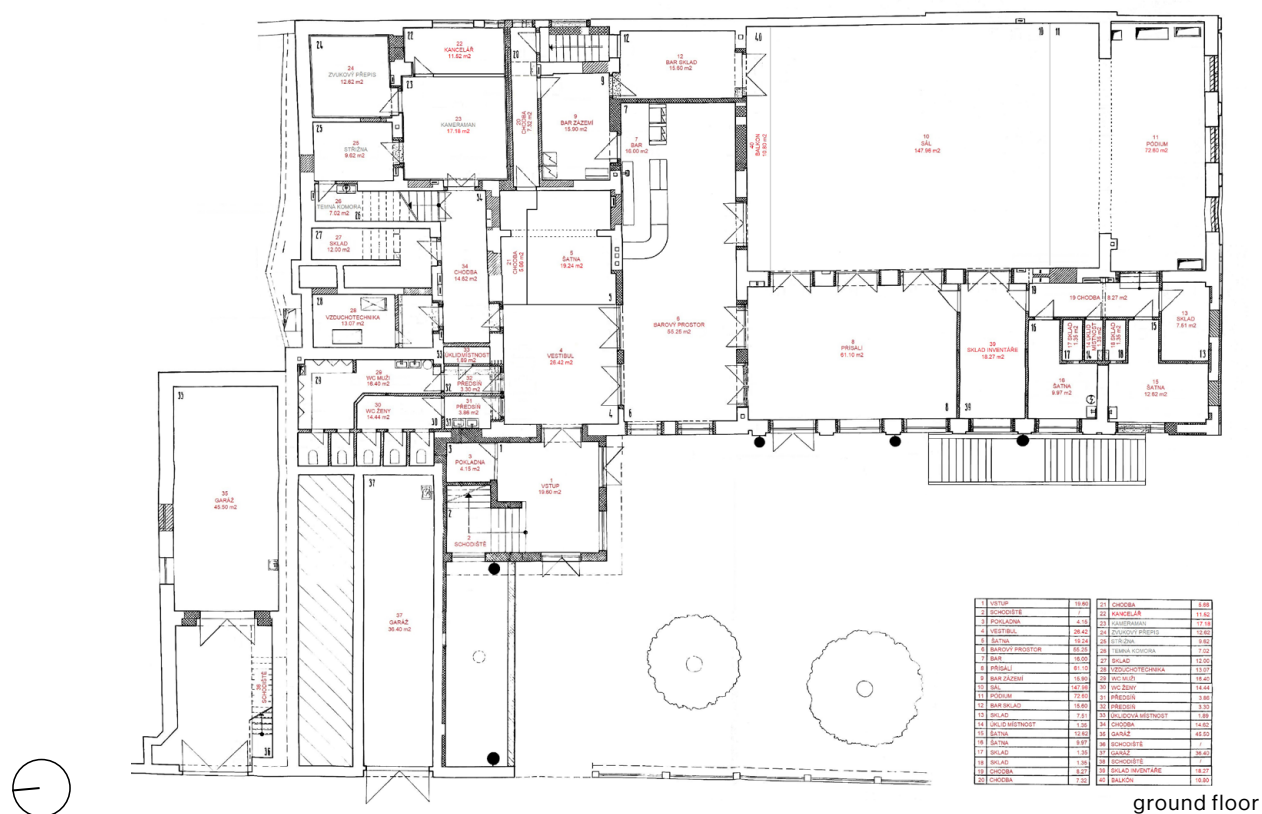


Current State of the National House

The National House currently operates as a cultural and social venue consisting of several functionally distinct parts. The main space is the concert hall on the first above-ground floor, with a capacity of up to 350 visitors, complemented by facilities for performers and the public. The building also includes a club venue with its own street entrance, comprising a smaller hall for approximately 80 people and an intimate underground space with a capacity of around 40 visitors. The building further contains office, educational and operational spaces, including garages.

The building has retained its cultural function over many years; however, its spatial organisation no longer meets the requirements of a contemporary cultural centre. In addition to the necessary renewal of the building's technical systems – particularly ventilation, electrical installations and heating – the aim of the transformation is also to reconsider the internal layout and operational relationships between the individual parts of the building. The main hall currently represents a compromise between different types of events. Its capacity is limiting for larger concerts, while for more intimate programmes the space is often oversized. The current arrangement also offers only limited flexibility and does not provide adequate conditions for different forms of stage use. Deficiencies can also be found in the technical facilities, acoustics and operational comfort. The building lacks appropriately integrated facilities for lighting and sound control, rehearsal spaces and suitable sanitary facilities for performers. Noise transmission between the individual functions of the building and to neighbouring properties is another issue.

The transformation of the building represents an opportunity to turn the National House into a contemporary, flexible and technically appropriate cultural centre, capable of responding to a wide range of cultural, social and community activities.



ground floor

Brief

The aim of the transformation is to turn the National House into an open, contemporary and highly multifunctional cultural centre – an attractive place for meeting, creating and presenting culture. The ambition is not only to restore the historic building, but to create a vibrant urban centre capable of responding to the changing needs of cultural life and engaging new generations of visitors.

The proposal should work with a high degree of flexibility and enable the building to accommodate a wide range of activities – from concerts, theatre performances and conferences to community events, club programmes, lectures, screenings and dance events. The competition seeks solutions that allow the capacity and character of the main hall to be adapted according to the type of event, offering different modes of use ranging from intimate performances to larger concerts and social events. Proposals that explore a flexible stage, adaptable audience arrangements or the possibility of transforming the hall into an open standing and dancing space are encouraged. At the same time, the integration of technical facilities, high-quality acoustic solutions and appropriate conditions for contemporary cultural production are essential.

The National House should function not only during evening events but also as an active urban space throughout the day. Consideration may be given to introducing a café or bar connected to the public realm, activating outdoor areas, or creating shared facilities for cultural and creative organisations. A key theme is also the relationship between the individual functions within the building and the possibility of their independent as well as shared operation. The competition does not seek a conservative restoration of the existing condition. The proposal may work with the building freely and explore new spatial, operational and architectural qualities corresponding to the needs of a contemporary cultural centre.

Advertisement for the
National House Restaurant,
1934

