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**The European Village Renewal Prize 2024 has been decided**

***Czech municipality of Kostelní Lhota has been named the winner of the European Village Renewal Award 2024 by an international, interdisciplinary jury under the motto "thirst for future"; exceptional high level of the 21 submissions; award ceremony in September 2024 in Stadtschlaining, Burgenland, Austria, the winning community of the last competition.***

The competition for the European Village Renewal Prize 2024 has been decided: An interdisciplinary international jury has recently selected the municipality of Kostelní Lhota as the winner following a comprehensive on-site assessment and final evaluation session in Prague. "The theme of this year's competition is 'thirst for future' and is simultaneously exemplified by the events in the approximately 920 inhabitants strong community of Kostelní Lhota. The village community is the core and lives according to impressively contemporary ideas about ecology, resource conservation, value creation, architectural culture, education, culture, and sports. The floods of 2013 and the droughts from 2015 to 2020 sensitized the residents to sustainable village development. The required spaces are primarily developed in existing buildings and open spaces to radical ecological standards with renewable energies and rainwater retention basins", among other reasons stated by the jury.

In addition to Kostelní Lhota, nine other participants have made it to the "Gold" category, which is awarded to participants who address the current challenges of their living space with sustainable, innovative, and contemporary projects and have initiated holistic development processes of outstanding quality, thus counting them as final contenders for victory. Eight participants will receive a European Village Renewal Award in silver, and three will be awarded in bronze. Therefore, all participants proved to be "prize-worthy."

**Only Top Projects Remain in the Competition**

The 20-member jury, including experts from several European countries, expressed enthusiasm in view of the extremely high level of submissions; practically, only absolutely outstanding top projects for the European Village Renewal Award were submitted from the various countries and regions, all of which are in exceptionally forward-looking developmental processes – a gratifying fact that, however, makes it increasingly difficult to find a single winner. Even minor "deficiencies" typically lead to awarding "only" silver or bronze. "Just a few years ago, almost all this year's participants would have been classified in the highest category, which is why it is also difficult to compare with the evaluation of villages or municipalities evaluated in previous competitions," explained Theres Friewald-Hofbauer, managing director of the European Association for Rural Development and Village Renewal, which has been organizing the European Village Renewal Prize every two years since 1990.

The jury placed special emphasis on the process itself during the evaluation, extensively examined the starting conditions of a community and the development that occurred under these conditions, placed even greater value on strategies, methodology, the quality of citizen participation, and the interaction of various stakeholders in the participating villages and municipalities.

**Mikl-Leitner: only winners!**

As Johanna Mikl-Leitner, chairwoman of the European Association for Rural Development and Village Renewal and Governor of Lower Austria, stated prior to the jury session, there are no losers in the competition for the European Village Renewal Prize 2024, quite the opposite: "Because getting to know village development projects at the highest level and exchanging experiences across Europe makes all participants winners."

This will be particularly evident at the award ceremony from 12th until 14th September 2024 in the winning municipality of the previous competition, Stadtschlaining, Burgenland, Austria. It will be the highlight of a multi-day event featuring excursions, exhibitions, workshops, and cultural encounters, and will prove to be a major European celebration with lot of "thirst for future", but initiating as well many municipal partnerships and knowledge transfers.