

## Article

# The Causes of the Occurrence and Spheres of Restoration of Chateau Brownfields: A Search for Causality on the Example of Properties in the Moravian-Silesian Region, Czech Republic

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**Abstract:** Scientific research in the area of chateau brownfields is quite new and thus offers room for interesting findings and insights. This text presents the results of a pilot study in search of causality between the causes of the occurrence and spheres of restoration of chateau brownfields in the Moravian-Silesian region in the Czech Republic, where chateau settlements are considered an urban phenomenon of the cultural landscape. Out of a total of 88 chateaux, 40 have received brownfield status over the years, of which 28 are currently regenerated. The main reason why the chateaux were abandoned can be found in the inappropriate economic activities that took place in them, which originated mainly in the directive decision on their functionality at the end of the Second World War. Most of the chateau brownfield sites are still abandoned or currently for sale, and many others have been regenerated for tourism and public sector services. The causality analysed between the causes of their occurrence and their restored function reflects the logical and economic context characteristic of a time of restoration and the general desire of the public sector to reduce the number of brownfield sites in its cadastral area.

**Keywords:** brownfield; chateau; regeneration; Czech Republic; Moravian-Silesian Region



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## 1. Introduction

Manor houses in the European area represent an important phenomenon of the cultural landscape and refer to the rich history associated with the administration of the territory by the feudal and later rich social class. The use of chateaux, like other real estate, is subject to natural processes of renewal, development, stagnation, or decay and may thus have a brownfield status for a certain period of time [1]. It is a sad historical fact that the emergence and enormous number of chateau brownfields in the former Eastern Bloc countries is due to the political events of the last century, the consequences of which are reflected in the visual and functional form of these buildings today. From this perspective, it is important to identify the causes of the occurrence of chateau brownfields and to put them in the context of their regeneration and new meaningful use, especially as restored chateaux have a significant impact on regional development, influence the attractiveness of the area, and co-create open community space in towns and cities.

When defining the chateau brownfield, it is necessary to reflect the concept of the chateau building, which represents a modern residence of feudal origin with a suppressed defensive function [2], for which we can accentuate its residential, representative, and/or economic nature. In other words, it is, in general terms, an exhibition and artistically decorated dwelling of the modern nobility, in which changes in the various artistic styles are reflected, and, with them, the lifestyle [3,4]. Ultimately, we can say that the residential and economic function was decisive. Characteristic of chateau buildings is their art-historical and architectural value. Let us add that the chateau building itself is normally more extensive in space, with a significantly larger number of comfortable rooms and better spatial layout than that of a classical residential house, and it is usually part of a complex

which, apart from the main building of the chateau, also comprises outbuildings, stables, warehouses, a brewery, a park, utility and ornamental gardens, physical infrastructure, greenhouses, etc. [5] Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Chateau brownfield in Doubrava, Moravian-Silesian Region, Czech Republic (2022).

In the European area, chateaux began to be built from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, when they began to replace castles, which were primarily intended to ensure the security of the owned territory. As a result of changes in social development and lifestyle, this security and military function started to be abandoned, which also influenced the new form of noble residences [6]. The gradual decline in the importance of chateaux as aristocratic residences was due to the modernising changes of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which also included the onset of industrialisation. In addition to economic influences, a shift in attitudes towards chateau residences was also influenced by political factors, reflecting the state-forming changes after the First World War, when, in many cases, the estates of (not only) aristocratic owners were to be seized and redistributed. The crackdown on noble property continued during the Nazi occupation in the form of confiscation [7]. The owners of the chateaux are thus prominent industrialists, manufacturers, lawyers, doctors, politicians, and other private individuals, often even the municipalities themselves. In the former Eastern Bloc countries, the situation regarding the ownership of chateau buildings and their functional use underwent further significant changes after the Second World War, with the onset of communism in the form of nationalisation, and finally with the collapse of the Eastern Socialist Bloc after 1989 and the subsequent restitution process. In these historical milestones, it is possible to identify the original reasons for the creation of many chateau brownfields, which were then reflected in the actual reasons why many chateaux, mainly in Central and Eastern Europe, remained abandoned for some time or permanently (in general also see [8]).

Considering the fact that the definition of brownfields is widely known in professional circles (for example [9–12]), we summarise that a property is a brownfield for a certain period of time if it is without any use, is empty, and is structurally and technically derelict, dilapidated, and falling apart [13,14]. Therefore, we define a chateau brownfield as a specific type of brownfield, which represents a completely or partially abandoned dilapidated property originally used as a chateau residence, for which no meaningful functional use has been found in the specified period. A chateau brownfield can be perceived in both narrower and broader terms, with the narrower term referring only to the main building of the chateau itself, which forms the very core of the entire chateau complex, while the broader definition reflects the chateau building and its hinterland [5].

The aim of this article is to link the causes of occurrence of the brownfields with their restored function against the background of the analysis of identified chateau brownfields in the Moravian-Silesian region of the Czech Republic. It should be added here that chateau brownfields represent specific properties that have so far been avoided by scientific research,

and the pilot research carried out is unique from this point of view. All the input data for the implemented analysis were in most cases quite difficult to retrieve from secondary data, and their synthesis into the database is thus entirely the author's own. These facts also explain the absence of a wider literature search and references to other studies and scientific texts. The reason for carrying out this research is to determine whether it is possible to reveal the specific prevailing current trend in the regeneration process of chateau brownfields, as well as the success rate of the regeneration of these properties in general and whether there is an apparent causality between the cause of the occurrence of a chateau brownfield and its subsequent use.

## 2. Materials and Methods

In order to achieve the set objective, the first step was to locate all chateau buildings in the Moravian-Silesian Region and to trace whether they had been abandoned and were without use for some time. For these chateau brownfields, it was then necessary, based on the available information, to determine why they had lost their functional use, how long they had been left "fallow", and what economic purpose they had acquired after the regeneration process was completed.

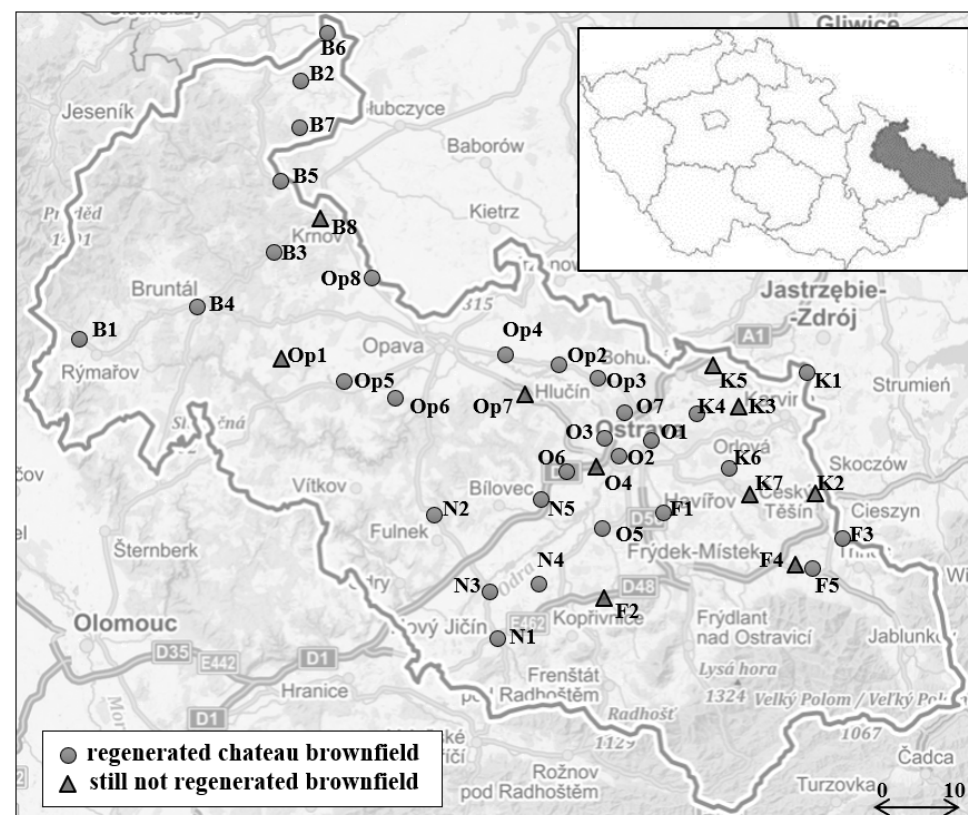
Relevant information was traced, verified, and combined from several possible publicly available sources, particularly from the official websites of individual chateau buildings, the municipalities concerned, or the National Heritage Institute [15]; moreover, a lot of information was also found on portals dealing with the history of chateaux or historical places of interest, etc. However, it cannot be ruled out that new information may emerge in the future in relation to the use of chateaux that is not currently known. We would like to add that our chateau brownfields are defined in a narrower sense, i.e., the research presented here focuses only on the main building of the chateau, and all data on the properties was collected during June–October 2022.

The Moravian-Silesian Region (NUTS 3) is located in the northeast of the Czech Republic at the border of Poland and Slovakia and is divided into 6 districts (LAU 2 regions): Karviná, Frýdek Místek, Ostrava City, Nový Jičín, Opava and Bruntál (see Table 1). A total of 88 chateau buildings have been traced in the region, which currently physically exist. Due to the fact that there are 300 municipalities in the Moravian-Silesian Region [16], there is one chateau for every 3.4 municipalities. The highest numbers of chateau buildings in relation to the number of municipalities are in the regions of Karviná (1.55) and Ostrava City (1.86), and the least is in the region of Frýdek Místek (6) [17]. During both the last and current century, 40 of them (i.e., 45%) had the status of a chateau brownfield; moreover, of these 40 properties, 10 are still abandoned and significantly dilapidated and 2 other empty buildings are for sale (14% of all chateaus; 30% of chateau brownfields). The remaining 28 properties can be described as regenerated brownfield sites. The largest representation of chateau brownfields to the total number of chateau buildings is in the regions of Karviná (64%) (see also [18]) and Bruntál (53%). Chateaux that can still be considered abandoned and decaying are always located outside of major cities and are located in villages. Regenerated chateau brownfields have been empty for an average of 23 years, while these properties that are still unused or for sale have been decaying for more than 44 years.

Figure 2 shows the location of regenerated settlements and those that have not yet found their functional use in the region (40 objects in total). From this point of view, no continuity can be found in their distribution. It can only be added that the location of the chateaux in the landscape logically reflects the location of human settlements and the historical claims of the original owners to land and family property.

**Table 1.** Chateau and chateaux brownfield, Moravian-Silesian Region (2022).

Region	Municipalities	Chateau (in Total)	Of which Chateau Brownfields	Name of Chateau Brownfields
Karviná	17	11	7	Petrovice u Karviné (K1), Chotěbuz (K2), Doubrava (K3), Rychvald (K4), Dolní Lutyně (K5), Šumbark (K6), Životice (K7)
Frýdek Místek	72	12	5	Paskov (F1), Hukvaldy (F2), Ropice (F3), Hnojník (F4), Stráž (F5)
Ostrava City	13	7	7	Rothschild Chateau (O1), Zábřeh (O2), Poruba (O3), Polanka nad Odrou (O4), Stará Ves nad Ondřejnicí (O5), Klimkovice (O6), Hošťálkovice (O7)
Nový Jičín	54	15	5	Nový Jičín (N1), Fulnek (N2), Kunín (N3), Sedlnice (N4), Bravantice (N5)
Opava	77	28	8	Deštné (Op1), Dolní Benešov (Op2), Hlučín (Op3), Kravaře (Op4), Litultovice (Op5), Štáblovice (Op6), Hrabyně (Op7), Neplachovice (Op8)
Bruntál	67	15	8	Janovice (B1), Dívčí hrad (B2), Brantice (B3), Bruntál (B4), Linhartovy (B5), Slezské Pavlovice (B6), Slezské Rudoltice (B7), Staré Heřmanovy (B8)
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>40</b>	—

**Figure 2.** Chateau brownfields and regenerated brownfields in Moravian-Silesian Region (2022).

The next methodological approach towards the fulfilment of the objective of the paper was to factually link the identified and categorised causes of the chateau brownfield and the current functional use (see next chapter). Due to the small number of objects analysed

and the nature of the research, which is so far only of a pilot nature, it was not necessary to use sophisticated mathematical and statistical apparatus, as the results are evident from the data presented in Section 3.

### 3. Categorization of the Causes of the Occurrence of Chateau Brownfields and Definition of Their Utility Functions after the Regeneration Process

The categorisation of the causes of chateau brownfields' occurrence has been published recently [5] and therefore only the most important observations will be presented here, which are crucial to gaining an understanding of the issue and determining the reasons why the chateau buildings can be assigned the status of a brownfield. A categorisation of the causal factors is given in Table 2. It should be added here that functional transformational changes in the economy, which are the result of the implication of the economic cycle, are considered to be a general factor in the emergence of brownfields [19,20]. These natural market manifestations will become more and more prevalent in the future in the case of chateau residences, at the same time, the mitigation measures established by the policy of sustainable development will be projected here [21].

**Table 2.** Categorizing the causes of occurrence of chateau brownfields (adjusted [5]).

Original Causative Factors	Specific Categories of Causes	Explanation
Non-market character	exceptional	one-off harmful effects of forces and phenomena caused by human activity, natural influences, as well as accidents that significantly limit the use of the chateau object and its existence (explosion, fire, earthquakes, etc.)
	inappropriate purpose	the useful function implemented in the chateau building is not compatible with its urban design and the location of the chateau in the longer term (the useful function of the chateau does not reflect its nature and is determined “from above, by a directive decision from the table”) or its relevant search (especially when there is a change of owners)
Market character	problem with ownership	from a legal point of view, the concrete owner is not clear, there is a dispute over ownership, or the owner does not show interest in the chateau property
	operational (investment) inefficiency	the functional use of the chateau is not effective in the long term (economic costs exceed the economic benefits), or the return on investment is not attractive for investors and/or the use of the chateau is not profitable

In view of the historical events of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century associated with the aforementioned forced changes in the ownership of chateau residences in Central and Eastern Europe, it is necessary to refer to them when looking for the causes (see also [22,23]). In many cases, the later emergence of chateau brownfields was due to unwanted and directive political decisions about their new purpose, which, however, did not reflect the characteristics and nature of these properties at all. In addition to these inherently non-market causes, which are characteristic of the former Eastern Bloc countries in varying degrees and manifestations, it is logical to identify market causes that refer to the natural processes of the creation of chateau brownfields associated with changes in the functional use of properties. Both of these breakdowns of the original causes of the occurrence of brownfields complement the classical breakdown of causes, which is applicable to virtually all brownfields, is based on real facts, and has an analogy in (1) inappropriate purpose or its relevant search; (2) ownership problems; (3) operational (investment) inefficiencies; and (4) contingencies (which are also non-market in nature).

Similarly, it is necessary to determine the groups of activities that are carried out in chateaux today. This can be achieved using information from all the functioning chateaux



that were the subject of the research. These have been divided into four groups and supplemented with the category “miss, for sale”. Here, these were properties that are still abandoned, dilapidated, and without a specific use or are currently for sale. In addition, the groups were (1) public services, (2) museum, (3) tourism, and (4) other.

The group of public services includes chateaux that house the municipal office of the given municipality, a school, a post office, an information centre, a library, or clubhouses and community centres, where public cultural events and wedding ceremonies take place, where the municipality displays its exposition, or, exceptionally, where a part of the building is available for tours or for running a private small business or are intended for permanent occupation [24]).

The category of museum is indicated for chateaux that have been functionally converted into permanent museums and house thematic exhibitions. Such buildings are in most cases owned by public sector institutions, and their operation has a number of synergies beneficial to regional development [25,26].

The group of tourism consists of chateau residences, which are mostly in private hands and have been converted into hotels, accommodation facilities, restaurants and conference facilities, wellness centres, etc. [27].

As the other identified economic activities were minimally represented, these were included in the other category. This included chateau properties that are used for agricultural activities, those converted to residential units and intended for permanent occupancy, or those completely rented out for private events.

Table 3 then summarises for the identified brownfields the reason for their occurrence and their new use, including the years for which the chateau brownfield has been without use. The table shows that the buildings that are still dilapidated and have no economic activity have mostly been abandoned for a very long time—on average, for 46 years. The number of years is 24 years for tourism buildings, 15 years for buildings that are museums, and more than 16 years for those that house public services. For this category, the partial years of abandonment are the most polarized, which is evident from the findings that it was the municipalities that, in most cases, saved the dilapidated chateaux in their cadastral territory (abandoned at the time of the fall of communism), bought them, and subsequently rehabilitated them, or bought them because their operation was not financeable for the private sector. Municipalities not only avoided undesirable externalities associated with the existence of brownfields [28], but at the same time made their public space more attractive and strengthened their social responsibility towards citizens and visitors [29].

**Table 3.** Cause of brownfield, length of abandonment (in years), and new purpose (2022).

GEO	No.	Cause	Period without Use	New Use	GEO	No.	Cause	Period without Use	New Use
Karviná	K1	PO	5	tourism	Ostrava City	O1	IP	64	events
	K2	EX	52	miss		O2	IP	15	tourism
	K3	IP/PO	33	miss		O3	IP	7	tourism
	K4	IP	43	tourism		O4	IP/OI	33	miss
	K5	IP	18	miss		O5	EX	5	public services
	K6	IP	28	tourism		O6	EX	8	public s./museum
	K7	IP	38	miss		O7	IP/OI	32	habitation
Frýdek Místek	F1	OI/IP	9	museum	Nový Jičín	N1	IP/OI	33	museum
	F2	OI	42	miss		N2	OI	58	tourism
	F3	IP/PO	39	given up for sale		N3	IP	9	museum
	F4	IP	62	miss		N4	EX	33	habitation
	F5	OI/IP	45	agriculture		N5	PO	15	tourism

Table 3. Cont.

GEO	No.	Cause	Period without Use	New Use	GEO	No.	Cause	Period without Use	New Use
Bruntál	B1	EX/OI	16	public services	Opava	Op1	OI	77	miss
	B2	EX	8	tourism		Op 2	EX	4	public services
	B3	OI	11	tourism		Op 3	IP	39	public services
	B4	IP/OI	15	public s./museum		Op 4	EX	13	public s./museum
	B5	IP	29	public services		Op 5	IP	2	public services
	B6	OI	29	given up for sale		Op 6	EX/IP	56	tourism
	B7	IP	19	tourism/public s.		Op 7	EX	77	miss
	B8	OI/PO	29	miss		Op 8	OI	31	public services

Note: OI—operational (investment) inefficiency; IP—inappropriate purpose; PO—problem with ownership; EX—exceptional.

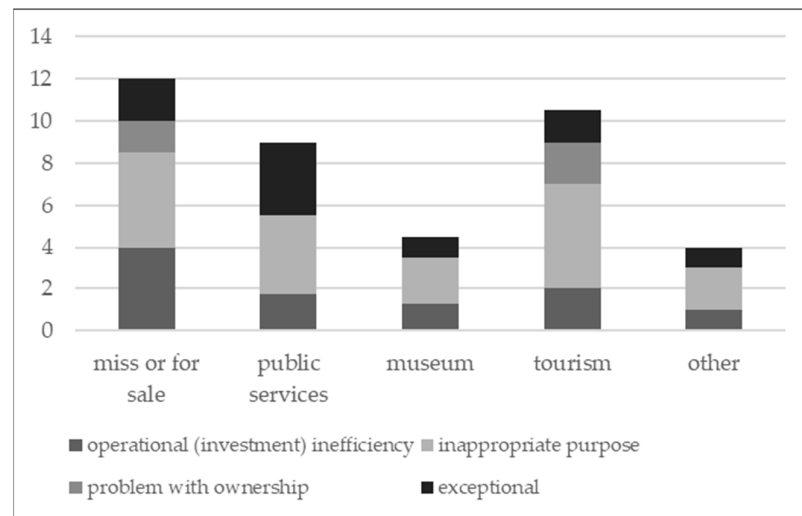
The data presented in this table are a source for calculating the representation of causal factors on the one hand and the form of current use on the other. A frequent phenomenon in identifying the causes of occurrence was their indeterminacy; therefore, for many chateaux, two causes are stated. The same applies to the categories of current use. In terms of the numbers given in Table 4, their established value is then half or a quarter.

Table 4. Cause of brownfield, length of abandonment (in years), and new purpose (2022).

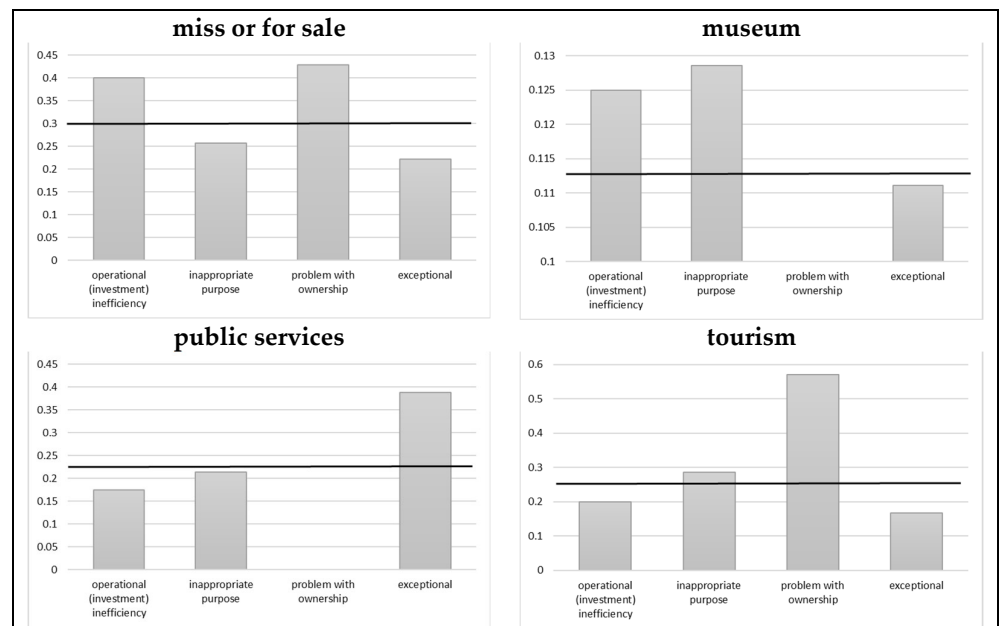
Cause				Current Use			
Category		Number	Miss or for Sale	Public Services	Museum	Tourism	Other
Operational (investment) inefficiency	OI	10	4	1.75	1.25	2	1
Inappropriate purpose	IP	17.5	4.5	3.75	2.25	5	2
Problem with ownership	PO	3.5	1.5	-	-	2	-
Exceptional	EX	9	2	3.5	1	1.5	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>40</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>4</b>

#### 4. Results

The results of the analysis are summarised in Table 4 and presented visually in Figures 3 and 4. The most frequent cause of chateau brownfields' occurrence was the fact that (in 44%) activities were carried out in them that did not fit at all due to the architecture, layout, orientation, and availability of rooms, size of rooms, and basic technical infrastructure (heat, water, electricity, sanitation). The accumulation of problems associated with inappropriately implemented activities (purpose), together with the unwillingness to invest in these buildings, gradually led to their devastation and dilapidation, which resulted in their final abandonment. This very reason for the occurrence of chateau brownfields is related to the property ownership changes of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which were mentioned earlier [5]. The second most common reason was that the funding of activities carried out in the chateau became unfinanceable, inefficient, and loss-making after a certain period of time (25%) and, because the operation of the chateau did not pay off, it remained abandoned. Then, at the end of the Second World War, a number of chateaux were also so significantly damaged that it took some time before they were renovated and began to be used in a meaningful way again. The occurrence of chateau brownfield sites is then to a lesser extent due to problems with determining ownership and property disputes over the title to the chateau building (only 9%).



**Figure 3.** Causal relationship and useful function of chateau brownfields.



**Figure 4.** Selected causal relationship and useful function of chateau brownfields supplemented with an average value.

If we approach the issue from the other perspective, most of the chateau brownfields are still without any meaningful use, i.e., they are still abandoned or for sale. This group comprises 30% of the buildings and still retains the status of a chateau brownfield. The remaining properties are already regenerated brownfields, with the most represented group serving tourism activities (26%) followed by the public services group (23%).

In Figure 3, the findings on the cause of the occurrence of chateau brownfields and their subsequent use, which have been traced for chateau settlements in the Moravian-Silesian Region, have already been effectively linked. Brownfields that have been created against the background of unclear ownership relations are often still without use or have found their use in the tourism sector. For the owners of the chateau, it is better to sell the building to private investors and settle financially with each other than to continue to face court or other property disputes. In contrast, brownfields that have been created by extraordinary causes and are related to unusual events of a one-off but fundamental nature originating outside the chateau building itself are mostly used by the public sector to



provide public services. This may have a parallel in the process of rehabilitation, which, in this case, is very expensive and time-consuming and has not been attractive for the private sector to invest in. The municipality, on the other hand, has been attentive to the needs of the public interest and has sought to meaningfully eliminate the number of abandoned buildings [23,30].

Chateau residences that now serve as museums were abandoned due to unsuitable purpose or operational inefficiency. Again, the intervention of the public sector, which is a common institution in the redevelopment of this type of brownfield site, is evident here. At the same time, the location of museum exhibitions in the building of interest is economically and functionally desirable in the context that these chateaux have just been abandoned for their original inappropriate purpose. The last group consists of properties that are brownfields to date. This is mainly because their original use was economically inefficient, which was objectively proven a very long time ago and the devastation of this building is now quite extensive, or because there is still a problem with ownership that does not allow the chateau to be used in any way.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

The presented pilot research undertaken to identify the links between the causes and the reuse of chateau brownfields on the example of chateau settlements located in the Moravian-Silesian Region of the Czech Republic on the one hand confirmed the general knowledge about the trends and focuses within their regeneration and on the other hand offered appropriate directions in which the regeneration of chateau brownfields should be directed given the reason for their creation. Significant is the involvement of the public sector, which is motivated to their restoration by the public interest of its citizens and potential tourists [31], the desire to reduce the undesirable and negative effects associated with the existence of brownfields on its territory, and the vision to strengthen the development of its municipality and make it attractive for all subjects [32]. From the perspective of regional development in general, it is most advantageous to transform chateau brownfields into museums or objects supporting tourism or leisure activities [33]. The analysis thus determined the areas in which castle brownfields are successfully regenerated.

If a chateau brownfield was created by unclear ownership relations, then either it is still abandoned or has been sold to the private sector, which operates accommodation, and catering and offers services for private and corporate events on its premises. If the cause was due to non-market emergencies, then the public sector has most often been involved in the restoration, using the building to offer public services. Most of the chateau brownfield sites are associated with the inappropriate purpose for which the chateau properties were used. This cause has relatively no influence on the specific direction of potential use (see Table 4 and Figure 3) and is evenly represented in all groups of activities that are now taking place in chateaux. The last cause of occurrence has a parallel in the economic efficiency of operating chateaux or investing in their restoration. The fact that the chateaux have been abandoned for this reason has fed into the likelihood of their regeneration, with 40% of them being still abandoned because no suitable investor has been found, either from the private or the public sphere. The restoration of chateaux brownfields is also related to the length of time they have been abandoned, when buildings that have been unused for a shorter period of time are primarily restored. From this point of view, it is necessary to try to start the regeneration process as soon as possible. However, this applies to all brownfields.

The presented research is not large in its scope; however, it dealt with facts that have not been investigated before. Therefore, even an expert discussion of chateau brownfields of the research is not possible. At the same time, it offered a number of questions and areas on which further research should focus. The idea is to expand the research sample to include chateau buildings in other regions or states and to confirm or refute the situation found in the Moravian-Silesian Region. An interregional comparison could also offer unexpected findings in terms of relevant similarities or differences. There is certainly room to elaborate and accentuate the importance of regenerated chateau settlements for

regional development and to identify the economic benefits for society. It would certainly be interesting to define a suitable and verified approach to the regeneration of these specific chateau residences against the background of examples of good practice in combination with the determination of the characteristics of hitherto abandoned buildings. However, it is indisputable that manor houses, chateaux, aristocratic estates, or manorial residences have been an integral part of the European rural and later urban landscape since the early modern period [5,34] and should be a functional place that connects contemporary society and refers to its cultural responsibility in relation to previous generations and its own history.

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