

So Close to Water

A Prague research note on the last metre between public infrastructure and public use.

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Public infrastructure does not become public at the point of ownership.

It becomes public when a person can use it — or can find a clear, honest answer when they cannot.

That is what I mean by public luxury.

Not excess.

Not a premium version of an ordinary need.

It is the decision to make an ordinary need visible, reachable and trustworthy without making people negotiate for it.

Bread, Water, and the City used Paris to ask what that can look like. It did not say Paris has solved water. It said that visible public water changes the civic meaning of a city: water becomes part of the place where ordinary life happens, rather than something hidden in a pipe or sold back to people one bottle at a time.

Prague gave me the harder question.

At Malé náměstí stands the historic well known as *Studna s renesanční mříží*. The ornamental grille is part of the protected monument. It is not evidence that the city recently put a cage around public water.[1]

A specialist history says the original pumping equipment worked into the 1990s and that the installation was later connected to the municipal water main.[2] Prague 1's 2025 maintenance contract includes Malé náměstí among six historic pumps and requires regular service documentation.[3] In an official update dated 18 May 2026, Prague 1 said the water meter at Malé náměstí had been replaced and that repair of the pump still had to be commissioned.[4]

Those are not small details.

They describe a public object with history, a modern water connection, a maintenance system and a stated repair step.

But they do not yet describe a confirmed public outcome.

The dated official update cited here does not say that the public can use the water point now. I do not have a later repair order, completion record, technical diagnosis or current official status. This article therefore cannot say whether the pump works today, why it did not work in May 2026, or whether any official, contractor or administration failed to do their job.

That uncertainty is not a weakness to write around.

It is the subject.

The missing owner of the result

A system can have an owner, an asset manager, an operator, a local authority and a maintenance contractor.

Each role can be real.

Each role can be necessary.

And still nobody may own the answer a person needs at the pump.

Prague's wider water network has a city owner, an asset manager and an operator.[5] The historic object at Malé náměstí also sits in Prague 1's local maintenance system. That does not tell us who owns the specific repair decision or whether the handoff has failed. It shows why the answer can be difficult to find.

A chain of roles is not automatically an owner of the public outcome.

That is the structural risk.

The object can be known.

The contract can be active.

A repair can be under discussion.

And the actual public result can remain unresolved.

No one needs to be corrupt, careless or indifferent for that to happen. The system only needs to divide the object, the pipe, the contract, the repair and the public explanation into separate jobs without giving a person or team a duty to join them back together.

Then responsibility becomes both everywhere and nowhere.

Not because nobody has legal duties.

Because nobody is clearly responsible for the last metre.

A modest public role

This does not require a new ministry.

It requires a role inside an existing institution that can answer four simple questions about a public water point:

1. Does it work for the public today?
2. If not, what is the recorded problem?
3. What is the next action, and by when?

4. Who updates that answer when the date passes?

That role would not replace heritage specialists, water-quality rules, procurement or maintenance workers.

It would own the handoff between them.

There may be a completely ordinary explanation for Malé náměstí. The repair may be difficult, underway, subject to heritage or safety constraints, or simply poorly reflected in the public record. None of those possibilities is an accusation.

Each is a reason the status should be easy to state.

The standard is not that every historic pump must run every day forever. Public water can be seasonal. It can be unavailable during repair. It can be restricted by water quality, safety, drought or heritage care.

The standard is simpler.

When a city presents a water point as public infrastructure, people should be able to find out whether it works, what kind of water it provides, what has happened when it does not work and where the next decision sits.

Without that, a city may still have infrastructure.

It may not yet have public access.

That is the distance between a beautiful object and a civic relationship.

It is often only a few metres.

It is sometimes the whole system.

— *Dennis Hedegreen, still checking*

Sources and reading

[1] Czech National Heritage Institute, *Studna s renesanční mříží* catalogue record. Official monument source: <https://pamatkovykatalog.cz/renesancni-studna-15392164> (<https://pamatkovykatalog.cz/renesancni-studna-15392164>).

[2] Pražské kašny a fontány, *Studna s renesanční mříží*. Specialist secondary history, used here for the 1990s and mains-connection history: <https://www.prazskekasny.cz/studna-s-renesancni-mrizi/> (<https://www.prazskekasny.cz/studna-s-renesancni-mrizi/>).

[3] Czech Contract Register and attached Prague 1 contract document, contract no. 2025/0451, concluded 13 May 2025 and published 26 May 2025: <https://smlouvy.gov.cz/smlouva/33405524> (<https://smlouvy.gov.cz/smlouva/33405524>).

[4] Prague 1, “Praha 1 opravuje pumpy, studny i Wimmerovu kašnu,” 18 May 2026:

<https://www.praha1.cz/praha-1-opravuje-pumpy-studny-i-wimmerovu-kasnu/> (<https://www.praha1.cz/praha-1-opravuje-pumpy-studny-i-wimmerovu-kasnu/>)

[5] Pražské vodovody a kanalizace, basic information on ownership, asset management and operation of Prague’s water networks: <https://www.pvk.cz/o-spolecnosti/zakladni-informace/> (<https://www.pvk.cz/o-spolecnosti/zakladni-informace/>)

Related reading: *Bread, Water, and the City*: <https://hedegreenresearch.com/articles/bread-water-and-the-city/> (<https://hedegreenresearch.com/articles/bread-water-and-the-city/>)

Source Boundary

This is an OPEN research note, not a finding of neglect, corruption, mismanagement or individual failure. Sources [1]–[5] establish only the dated or attributed facts stated above. They do not establish the pump’s present operating status, the cause or cost of any non-function, water potability, a delay by any named person or institution, or responsibility failure by Prague 1, PVS, PVK, the City of Prague or a contractor. Those questions remain open pending site-specific records or an updated official status.

RELATION MEMORY

CONTINUES [Bread, Water, and the City](#) · Moves from the visible public-water promise in Paris to a bounded Prague question about the last metre between infrastructure and public use.

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