

CZECH REPUBLIC

Prague, High-rise Buildings on Pankrac Plain

Since 2005 the Czech National Committee of ICOMOS and the Society for Old Prague have been fighting against the project of further high-rise buildings on Pankrac Plain – an elevated area within the buffer zone of the World Heritage site. After a colloquium of experts in Prague ICOMOS sent the following letter on 3 May 2007 to Mr Pavel Bem, Lord Mayor of the City of Prague, and to the responsible authorities:

Dear Lord Mayor,

The members of ICOMOS, Architect Michal Firestone and Professor Wilfried Lipp, shared with me their experiences from the joint ICOMOS-UNESCO mission and colloquium that took place in Prague one month ago. The topic/purpose of their mission was the current architectural changes and notably the projects for high-rise buildings to be erected on Pankrac Plain within the formally designated Prague World Heritage site buffer zone.

I am most concerned by what I have learned. Prague deservedly has the fame of being one of the most beautiful historic cities in the world, comparable to World Heritage sites as Florence or Rome. The UNESCO World Heritage Committee identified its invaluable urban landscape as a deciding factor when inscribing Prague on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

As a frequent and enthusiastic visitor to your city, I fully share the opinion of ICOMOS experts that the existing high-rise buildings on the Pankrac Plain represent a serious town planning mistake of the past. I must strongly advise against this mistake being repeated today. What concerns me especially is the fact that projects with such deep impact on the historic urban ensemble of Prague may be approved by the city authorities on a case-to-case basis.

The case of Pankrac Plain high-rise buildings shows the urgent need for an appropriate Management Plan for the formally designated World Heritage site and buffer zone.

In the case of Prague, I also miss a vision of such form of poly-

centric development of the city that would prevent the construction of further high-rise buildings in direct visual contact with the historic core. Instead of such action being taken, I am informed that another project for high-rise buildings is being proposed and presented for review. This project is located in Holesovice quarter within the World Heritage buffer zone.

Being concerned that the Pankrac development may constitute an irreversible process of compromising the unique urban qualities of your city, I urgently ask you, distinguished Lord Mayor, to stop the Pankrac project in time, and see to it that the height of proposed buildings be reduced to soften instead of increase further negative impacts.

Because of the importance of this case, I am sending a copy of this letter also to Mr. Vaclav Jehlicka, Minister of Culture to the Czech Republic, and to Mr. Francesco Bandarin, Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in Paris.

Yours sincerely,

*Michael Petzet
President of ICOMOS*

In spite of all concerns, at the beginning of September 2007 the Czech Ministry of Culture consented to the decision of the Prague Magistrate to erect two high-rise buildings on Pankrac Plain. The consequences of this decision for the historic centre are regrettable, for the bad example of Pankrac Plain will be an incentive to develop more projects of this kind. First of all there is the Holesovice project, promoted as “The Prague Twins” with the argument that from the windows of the apartments and office studios the future customers will have the most impressive view over historic Prague. We can only hope that the authorities in charge will finally realise that one of the most beautiful city ensembles in the world must not be sacrificed for the economic interests of a few developers.

View of Prague with simulation of the so-called “Prague Twins” project

