

## AUSTRIA

### The Difficult Protection of Vienna's Historic Centre

The quarrels about the “Wien-Mitte” project – the construction of a new railway station, office building and shopping centre in close vicinity to the core zone of the World Heritage site “Historic Centre of Vienna” – had shown that the World Heritage title is also an obligation that requires the observation of protection provisions. Initially, high-rises of up to 120 m had been planned. Thanks to the intervention of UNESCO these plans were then reduced to an acceptable size (compare “The Wien-Mitte Project as Threat to the World Heritage Site ‘Historic Centre of Vienna’”, in: *Heritage at Risk 2002/2003*, p. 42 f.). If the City of Vienna intends to consider the World Heritage status in future planning activities, extra care should be taken that a development explicitly welcomed in the past by the town planning authorities – namely to surround the historic centre by a ring of high-rises – is given up. This means that the recommendation of 2002 by the World Heritage Committee “to limit any future large redevelopment activities in the buffer zone” is followed. The then-report by the City of Vienna (Report on the Requests and Recommendations made by the World Heritage Committee regarding the World Heritage Site “Historic Centre of Vienna”, September 2002) combined its reply to UNESCO with general remarks on the objectives of urban development. According to this report the city, faced with the problems of the Wien-Mitte project, developed new guidelines for planning and assessing high-rise buildings for Vienna as early as in April 2002. The city's new concept for building heights designates zones where high-rises are forbidden, for instance protection areas, landscape protection areas, important view axes and also the World Heritage area – however, with the exception of two zones: The area of the former Wien-Mitte project situated in the buffer zone of the World Heritage “Historic Centre of Vienna”, and the zone north of the embankment of the Danube Canal, i. e. at the fringe of the very narrow buffer zone on the southern side of the Danube Canal. High-rises in this area could therefore become a problem, and in future they must be evaluated in their possible impact on the integrity of Historic Vienna. The latest project, apart from the already completed Generali Tower by Hans Hollein and the Uniqua Tower, is the Sofitel by Jean Nouvel.

It is to be hoped that the City of Vienna has learned from the negative experiences with the Wien-Mitte project. However, complaints about the disfigurement and gutting of historic buildings in the World Heritage area continue: In spite of exemplary restorations of individual listed monuments, a view from the steeple of St. Stephen's Cathedral shows that the city's roofscape, so important for the integrity of a historic city, has already been disturbed by more roof superstructures than in the World Heritage cities of Prague and Budapest. From the perspective of building regulations this handling of the roofscape, which often is accompanied by destructions of historic fabric and by large-scale gutting (see also *Heritage at Risk 2004/05*, pp. 41–45 on “Vienna's Roofscape and Roofspace”), is chaotic. It is the result of an amendment to the Vienna Building Code of 1996, which allows several storeys of superstructures and has led to drastic changes in the city's roofspace. So far, the City of Vienna has not done anything against this trend. Within the building code and in accordance with European conservation standards it should limit roof conversions and protect historic roof structures.

In summary, what is missing in the sense of an effective protection of the historic fabric is a revised management plan for the World Heritage site that would follow the recommendations of the World Heritage Commission, if necessary limit future large-scale projects in the core and buffer zones and guarantee a serious assessment of building and enlargement projects, as in the roof structures. If, however, such a management plan is meant to improve the present situation, some deficits in Vienna's monument conservation system need to be corrected first. A fundamental mistake is that the majority of privately owned buildings are not listed. Only buildings owned by the public or the church – this amounts to c. 25% of the buildings in the core zone of the World Heritage area – are protected according to the still valid “ex lege” regulation. In contrast, the listing of privately owned buildings can only be done bit by bit and with long delays. In addition, the Austrian monument protection law, § 1 (3, 4, 5), allows the listing of ensembles. Why does one not make use of this opportunity? Speedily listing the not-yet listed individual monuments by designating entire ensembles would enable the Austrian state to show that it takes its responsibility for the World Heritage seriously. Instead, the plan of the historic centre in the nomination file for inscription on the World Heritage List only showed public and church buildings as monuments. A proper plan of the entire ensemble, however, would have to show all historic buildings.

Although in principle the Protection Zone together with the Old Town Conservation Fund, both newly created in 1972 by the Vienna

Vienna's historic centre (photo: E. J. Schimek, first printed in *Denkma[j]l* no. 6, 10–11/2010, <http://idms.at>)





World Heritage zone Historic Centre (Stadt Wien)

World Heritage Schönbrunn Palace and Gardens with the high-rise project on the so-called Kometgründe, planned since 2004 (Stadt Wien)



Old Town Conservation Act and part of the Vienna building code, may be welcomed as useful additional vehicles for protecting the cultural heritage, this should not be used as an opportunity for state conservation services to withdraw from the Protection Zones and thus also from the World Heritage zone. After all, the municipal MA 19 (Magistratsabteilung 19) only looks after – though in a very committed way – the “townscape”, i. e. the conservation of street facades, not the entire historic fabric.

Michael Petzet

## High-rise Projects behind Belvedere Palace and near Schönbrunn Palace Threatening the Visual Integrity

The City of Vienna has tried again and again to implement building projects that would include high-rises which would question the visual integrity of its most important palaces and parks. Especially such baroque palaces are highly sensitive to such disturbances: The ruthless attacks of banal new buildings on the palaces' visual integrity, on the balanced symmetry of palace and gardens the wide view axes and perspectives designed as a manifestation of ruling the land should at least be thoroughly investigated through reputable and independent expertises. In fact, this would be a matter of course, since it concerns famous highlights of the Austrian cultural heritage.

In combination with the planned “Bahnhof-City” in Arsenalstrasse the project for a new main station on the edge of the core zone of the World Heritage site Historic Centre of Vienna was threatening the visual integrity of palace and park. The devastating project (see visualisation in *Heritage at Risk 2006/07*, p. 33 f.) was modified by a revised master plan of February 2006; however, the changes were not sufficient to ensure a real compatibility with the World Heritage. Of course, the new visual impact study, presented to the World Heritage Committee in Brasilia in 2010, also tried to play down the problems.

In the surroundings of Schönbrunn Palace and Gardens there have also been problematic projects, for instance the high-rise project on the so-called Kometgründe planned since 2004. It is a tower that would stand in one of the view axes of the *Gloriette* and would also be visible from other parts of the park – an intolerably disturbing element. After UNESCO and the World Heritage Committee had taken care of this matter in the context of reactive monitoring, the height of the planned building was reduced to 60m. However, in the zoning map of 2008 the height was increased once again. In the meantime, plans have been developed to erect a combination of 78 metre-high office tower, hotel and shopping centre on the Kometgründe near the underground station of Meidling. Among the results of the new visual impact study for Belvedere and Schönbrunn presented to the World Heritage Committee at its 34th session in Brasilia were the following decisions: The World Heritage Committee “further notes that the Kometgründe project will create an alien element in its urban context, and that the project is located at a point in the cityscape less suited to the construction of high-rise buildings and that this will impact ad-



New planning for the central station with reduced heights (master plan 2010) (Stadt Wien)



Different plans for the high-rise project on the Kometgründe, left: 80 m, right: 40 m (photo: Stadt Wien)



The new buildings at the Fiatgründe are already visible in the historic view axis of the park facade of Schönbrunn Palace (photo: M. Landerer)

versely on the diagonal axis of the Palace and Gardens of Schönbrunn World Heritage property” and “also urges the State Party, in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*, to inform the World Heritage Centre of details of the various other recently approved and proposed new high-rise developments that could impact adversely on the Outstanding Universal Value of both properties (...)”

A series of reports and updates on the state of conservation of the UNESCO World Heritage in Austria can be found in *Denkma[il]* No. 6, October/November 2010, “Unser Welterbe ausreichend geschützt?” ([www.initiative-denkmalschutz.at](http://www.initiative-denkmalschutz.at)).

## Threats to the World Heritage Site Neusiedler Lake – Plans to Construct Wind Parks

Projects to build two wind farms north-east and east of the UNESCO World Heritage site Neusiedler Lake – Seewinkel (Austria) severely affect the largely unspoiled scenery typical for the lowland plains of the Seewinkel. The beauty of the landscape will be significantly deteriorated due to the construction of about 100 wind power plants, each about 190 m high and at a minimum distance of 5 km (as the crow flies) from the northeast border and 10 km from the northernmost core area of the heritage site. An environmental impact analysis (EIA) was performed without integrating ICOMOS. However, the EIA did not take into account state-of-the-art visibility studies of virtual views from tourist lookout points inside the central areas of the heritage site, looking north-east and east after the erection of the wind parks. ICOMOS has objected to the projects and is going to provide an in-depth study of the effects of the wind farms on the cultural landscape of the region and thus on the heritage site itself.

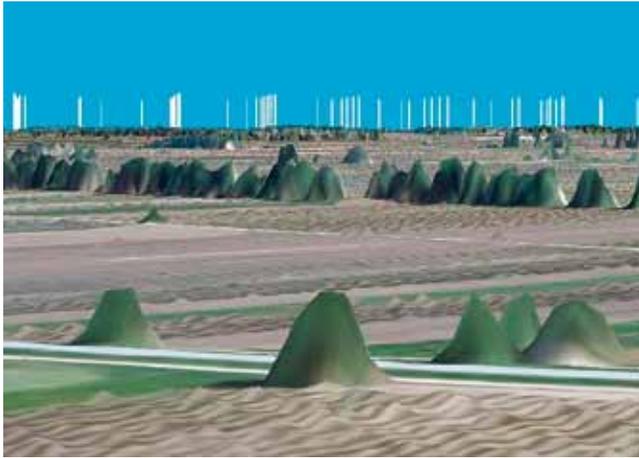
Conflicts of interest peak in the fact that the government of the federal state of Burgenland is pushing forward the ambitious political agenda of achieving the state’s energy self-sufficiency in the forthcoming years. As the operating company is a subsidiary of the Burgenland power supplier BEWAG the interdependencies between politics and economic interests are striking. It is worthwhile to take into consideration that wind energy has to be inducted into the distribution network continuously and that the storage of energy reserves is not possible so far. Additionally, due to regional climate change strong winds blowing constantly over a longer period of time have become rarer and are replaced by frequent heavy storms of short duration and significant periods of calm. The future cost-effectiveness of wind parks in this region is thus disputable.

Needless to say that the initiative of ICOMOS is not intended to oppose activities of sustainable energy production. Nevertheless, we hope to raise awareness to the risk of spoiling the irreplaceable values of natural heritage: In this special case we cannot ignore the fact that the construction of wind parks for sustainable energy production means a disturbance of the sensitive and thus extremely vulnerable scenery of the lowlands of the UNESCO World Heritage site Neusiedler Lake.

Prof. Elmar Csaplovics  
on behalf of ICOMOS Austria

## Wachau Cultural Landscape

The World Heritage cultural landscape of the Wachau is an important Austrian wine-growing area situated along the Danube between Krems and Melk, and west of Vienna. It spans 33 kilometres, encompasses a territory of nearly 190 km<sup>2</sup> and consists of 13 communities. Its inscription on the World Heritage List took place in 2000. Due to special cultural and scenic characteristics the area represents one of the highlights of Austrian tourism. Consequently, the area is exposed to several kinds of pressure (economic pressure, pressure of development and change). In particular, there are changes in the



Virtual view from the National Park Information Centre look-out towards north-east (height of towers equal height of rotor hub of appr. 150 m)



The Wachau railway



Luberegg Castle

Hotel project next to Luberegg Castle

fields of wine-growing, tourism, major intervention in infrastructure, etc., as the following current cases exemplify.

**Wachau Railway, termination of regular service**

Due to changes of property relations and for economic reasons, the Wachau railway was recently abandoned (December 2010). This railway was put into service in 1909 under Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne and member of the Royal Central Commission for Research and Preservation of Monuments of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The routing was and still is an outstanding example of integrating a transport structure into a cultural landscape. The discontinuation of service will have serious effects on the further conservation of the train path and the region’s infrastructure.

**Luberegg Castle hotel project**

As the World Heritage site is very attractive for tourists, there is a particular incentive to erect hotels and other kinds of accommodation. Currently, there is a plan to build a hotel in the immediate vicinity of Luberegg Castle, across the river from the Melk Monastery. Luberegg Castle, built in the second half of the 18th century, is a particularly fine example of baroque architecture and one of the most important architectural components of the World Heritage site. The realisation of the hotel project would mean that this part of the cultural landscape would be severely disturbed.

**Vineyards, new architecture**

Apart from tourism, viticulture is the economic basis of the Wachau region. Following the international trend, wineries of the area are starting to merchandise their products by building architectural ‘eye-catchers’ in the midst of the vineyards. One example is the recently erected production hall of a leading winery, taking up about 1300 m<sup>2</sup>. Such cases need to be evaluated critically and with reservation, especially in respect of potential following examples.

**Mobile flood protection storage halls**

Due to the fact that the World Heritage site is situated along the Danube, mobile flood protection is a particular challenge. Currently, the concept of mobile flood protection is being implemented in several communities, which includes the construction of storage halls for the mobile flood protection equipment. These depots are, due to their technoid architecture, their size and volume, in conflict with the compartmentalised structures of this cultural landscape. An example is the planned storage hall in the Spitz community, meas-





Wachau, modern architecture in the vineyards

uring 63 x 24 x 6 m and to be built on an orchard situated directly by the Danube riverbank.

These four examples are meant to show the development pressures such large-scale cultural landscapes as the Wachau region are af-



Storage halls for mobile flood protection

ected by. Singular cases may be found within the frame of tolerance; in general, however, these changes go too far.