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Attack on the World Heritage Site “Historic Centre of Vienna”

There is not much hope that the City of Vienna will learn from the negative experiences with the Wien-Mitte project (see H@R 2002/2003, p. 42 f.) and the high-rise projects behind Belvedere Palace and near Schönbrunn (see H@R 2008–2010). Compared with the famous Canaletto view of Vienna the visual integrity of the historic centre with the tower of the Stephansdom seen from the Upper Belvedere could now be ruined by another high-rise project. The development project “Vienna Ice-Skating Club – Hotel InterContinental – Konzerthaus” lies in the World Heritage zone in the area of the Vienna Ice-Skating Club between Hotel InterContinental (opened in 1964) and the Konzerthaus (opened in 1913, a building by architects Fellner and Helmer). With regard to this project the World Heritage Committee at its 37th session in Phnom Penh in 2013 urged the State Party “to halt any redevelopment higher than existing structures until an evaluation has been made by the Advisory Bodies”. However, although in the international competition there were proposals that would have respected the visual integrity of the World Heritage, the first prize-winning design by the Brazilian architect Isay Weinfeld presented on February 27, 2014, a 73 metre-tall building, is another provocation by the high-rise lobby. This design would seriously harm the nearer surroundings and the entire silhouette



Winning design for the “new” Hotel InterContinental
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of the historic centre and therefore also the outstanding universal value of the Vienna World Heritage site.

Wilfried Lipp
President of ICOMOS Austria

Present view
of the historic
centre from the
Upper Belvedere
(top) and
photo montage
showing the
high-rise project
for the Hotel
InterContinental
(below) (©
Wertinvest)



The Historic Centre of the City of Salzburg

The historic centre of the City of Salzburg, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1996, has again and again been on the agenda of the World Heritage Committee concerning the management plan and various state of conservation reports, which were evaluated by a UNESCO/ICOMOS reactive monitoring mission of January 27–29, 2009, and most recently by an ICOMOS advisory mission, April 2–3, 2013. The World Heritage Committee in its 37th session at Phnom Penh in 2013 (37 COM 7B.72) expressed its concern “about the apparent lack of adequate, legislative and planning mechanisms to protect the property from the various proposed, often aggressive, urban and infrastructure developments as well as lack of an officially approved management system” and requested the state party “to initiate the modification of the project designs and proportions of the Residential Buildings City Life Rehrplatz, the project at Schwarzstrasse 45/Ernest-Thunstr. 2 and the Nelböck Viaduct Rainerstrasse/Bahnhofsvorplatz”, and “to strengthen the legal mechanisms for the protection of monuments in their setting, especially through an expansion of the Austrian Monument Protection Law.”

Indeed, a fundamental problem seems to be the Austrian Monument Protection Law, which in general only refers to individual objects and hinders the inscription of all the monuments and ensembles (groups of buildings), incl. parks, etc by rather complicated procedures. Under these circumstances the inscription of monuments and sites is incomplete (only very few inscribed ensembles). Besides, the Federal State Office for the Protection of Historic Monuments (Bundesdenkmalamt), taking care only of the conservation of the inscribed monuments of art and architecture, is not responsible for the surrounding and setting of the inscribed monuments and sites, and therefore not for matters of disturbing building projects nearby. In any case, it would be high time to strengthen the Federal Law for the Protection of Historic Monuments (Bundesdenkmalschutzgesetz) in accordance with article 5 of the World Heritage Convention, to avert danger not only from the Austrian World Heritage sites, but from the entire national cultural heritage. A certain improvement is the Environment Impact Assessment Act (Umweltverträglichkeitsprüfungsgesetz) of 2009.

In the special case of Salzburg a Law for the Preservation of the Old Town Centre of Salzburg (Altstadterhaltungsgesetz) of 1967 (latest version 1980) applies, in combination with a Fund for the Preservation of the Old Town Centre (Altstadterhaltungsfonds) and an Expert Commission for the Preservation of the Old Town (SVK, Sachverständigenkommission). Under these comparatively good conditions the Federal State Office for the Protection of Historical Monuments (Bundesdenkmalamt with Landeskonservatorium Salzburg) looks after the monuments of art and architecture in Salzburg in an exemplary way, which fortunately are inscribed in great numbers and also documented in a series of inventories (Österreichische Kunsttopographie). Although the monument protection system in Salzburg with its different responsibilities may seem complicated, very good results can be achieved by means of the Law on the Preservation of the Old Town Centre (Altstadterhaltungsgesetz) – not just for the outstanding monumental buildings, but also for many “small-scale projects” (including roofscape, facades of townhouses, etc) thanks to the commitment of the Building and Planning Department of the City, the Federal State Office for the Protection of Historical Monuments, and the Expert Commission for the Pres-

ervation of the Old Town. Consequently, large areas of the old town making up the core zone of the World Heritage Salzburg are still in excellent condition, compared to the devastating interferences in the urban landscape of the historic centre of Vienna.

Among the cases given in the above-quoted decisions of the World Heritage Committee the **project “Residential Buildings City Life”, Rehrplatz** is the most controversial case; a project against which the citizens of Salzburg have protested with 25,000 signatures. The project (architects Storch Ehlers Partners GbR), result of an international competition, is located within the World Heritage property and the Historic City-Centre Zone I opposite the modern wings of the emergency hospital, near an ensemble of villas from the later 19th century on the banks of the river Salzach, in the background partly older buildings along the streets Steingasse and Arenbergstrasse. Although the Expert Commission for the Preservation of the Old Town (SVK) had astonishingly come to a positive statement (“The planned project fits in harmoniously into the townscape, as the existing typical elements of the surrounding setting will be incorporated into the new construction and further developed”), the ICOMOS advisory mission of April 2–3, 2013 came to the conclusion that the project as possible example for further experiments of “city renewal” in the ensemble of the old town is incompatible with the character of the World Heritage of Salzburg. The project does not “fit in harmoniously” at all, contradicts especially § 5 of the Salzburg Altstadterhaltungsgesetz and thus also the Salzburg Altstadtverordnung of 1982 (AStEVO, II § 2-6), attached to the management plan of 2008 for the World Heritage of Salzburg, which includes regulations for facades, windows, roofs, etc. Furthermore, reference was made to art. 26 of the Vienna Memorandum (2005): “Special care should be taken to ensure that the development of contemporary architecture in World Heritage cities is complementary to values of the historic urban landscape and remains within limits in order not to compromise the historic nature of the city” – limits which the project did not respect. In order to find an adequate solution for this special situation on the fringe of the World Heritage zone and opposite the emergency hospital, the project is presently being revised in accordance with the recommendations by the monitoring group of ICOMOS Austria and by the advisory mission (“reduce the disturbing height of the project along the entire length by giving up the fifth storey, to separate the structure into two or three clearly defined solitaires and to orientate the structure of the facades and the windows on the formats found on-site”).

The **project Ernest-Thun-Strasse 2/Schwarzstrasse 45** in the area along the bank of the Salzach near the railway bridge is situated in the buffer zone of the World Heritage and in protection zone II of the Altstadterhaltungsgebiet. It is a disturbance for its surroundings, especially for the architectural monument Ernest-Thun-Strasse 3/Schwarzstrasse 47, restored some years ago with the support of the city. Taking into account the neighbouring buildings and because the result of the building project inside the buffer zone is visible from the banks of the Salzach, which are very important for the visual integrity of the World Heritage, it was recommended to better integrate the two modern structures into their surroundings.

For the high-rise structure **Nelböck Viaduct Rainerstrasse/Bahnhofsvorplatz** an already legally binding development plan (2007) allows a building height of 42 m at the corner Saint-Julien-Strasse/Nelböck Viaduct, but in the meantime, there are plans for a building height of 58 m. Together with the “historic” high-rise building Hotel Europa, opened in 1956, this additional high-rise



Rehrlplatz, design for new buildings (status: April 2013)

structure is meant to be an architectural “signal” for the square in front of the station. The ICOMOS advisory mission pointed out that the “skyline” of the city of Salzburg does not need any high-rise buildings, as it is already characterised in an exceptional way by the near and distant mountains, the steeples and domes of the churches as well as by the fortification Festung Hohe Salzburg on Mönchsberg. Under these circumstances a development with additional high-rise structures in the historic urban landscape of Salzburg and in the wider surroundings is hardly imaginable. A certain building height in the area of the station already exists with the Hotel Europa and the neighbouring buildings from the 1950s. Nonetheless, it does not seem compulsive that the planned new high-rise in Rainerstrasse must necessarily have the same height as the Hotel Europa, as suggested by the Architectural Advisory Board (Gestaltungsbeirat). The ICOMOS advisory mission therefore recommended that in accordance with the already approved development plan the height be reduced in relation to the 59-metre-Hotel Europa.



Building project Ernest-Thun-Strasse 2/Schwarzstrasse 45, visualisation of situation in Schwarzstrasse



Visualisation north-east corner Schwarzstrasse (left), north-west corner Elisabethkai (right)



Rehrlplatz, model of the planned complex of buildings (status: April 2013)

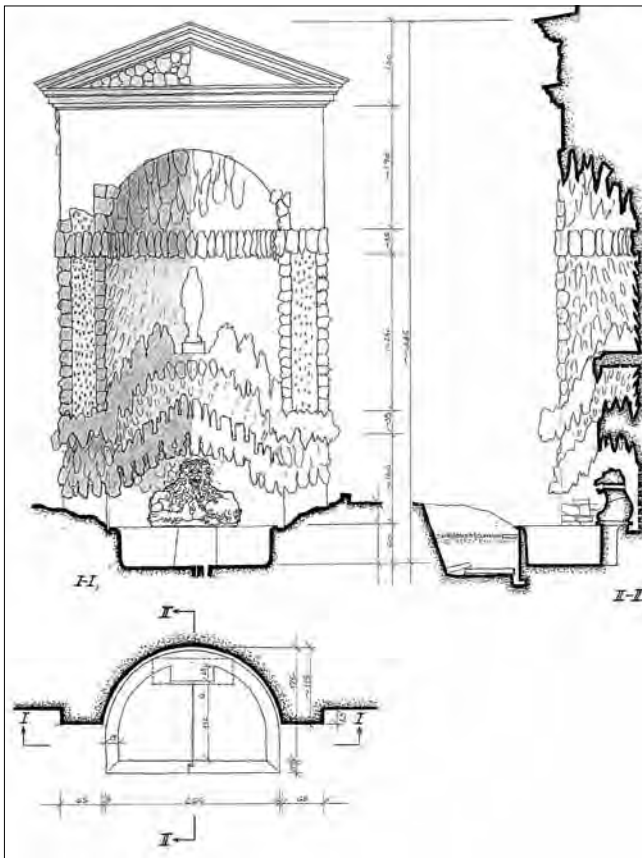
Another example of aggressive urban development in the historic centre of Salzburg is the **project Priesterhausgarten in Paris-Lodron-Strasse**. The Priesterhausgarten lies in the core zone of the World Heritage area and in protection zone I. The grounds behind the late medieval town wall in Paris-Lodron-Strasse became the property of the Priesterhaus in 1848. Today the grounds are used as access to the underground garage and to the neighbouring houses as well as a car park. The regrettable condition of this area bordered by the town wall and the wall of the Loreto monastery hardly shows that these are remains of a once important garden complex extending to the later Dreifaltigkeitsgasse. This early baroque garden laid out in 1630 was part of the primogeniture palace erected by Archbishop Paris Lodron: A view of the town (Philipp Harpff 1643) shows these gardens in the centre of the “Lodronstadt” erected by the Archbishop, including a precursor of the later Mirabellgarten – all in all a very important site for the World Heritage Salzburg, the historic view also showing a pavilion in the central axis which after a great



High-rise project Nelböck Viaduct Rainerstrasse/Bahnhofsvorplatz, visualisation



Ph. Harpff, map of Salzburg, 1643, detail showing the Priesterhausgarten. The arrow indicates the position of the grotto.



Priesterhausgarten, view, ground plan and section of the grotto

Priesterhausgarten, visualisation of building project



circular flower bed ends in front of the still existing grotto at the wall of the Loreto monastery. This grotto with its already exposed water basin of Untersberger marble would have to be carefully restored. Besides, the traces apparently located one metre below ground would have to be further investigated in an archaeological excavation, i.e. before new constructions of whatever kind could be planned. Sadly, this historic open space so important for the World Heritage of Salzburg is no longer a green area. Instead, it has been declared building land. The result of an architectural competition of 2012, presented to the ICOMOS advisory mission, envisages a compact mixture of apartments, cinemas, garages, and public lavatories. The three-to-four-storey rows of houses separated by strips of lawn would be visible high above the town wall in Paris-Lodron-Strasse. The grotto would be eclipsed by the new constructions that negate the historic qualities of the place. The advisory mission recommended in 2013 to reconsider and reverse the classification as building land. In the case of a considerably reduced development, fitting in harmoniously according to the regulations of the Law for the Preservation of the Old Town Centre (Altstadterhaltungsgesetz), the visual integrity of the grotto and the central axis in the historic garden leading towards the grotto would have to be taken into account.

Concerning the World Heritage Salzburg with its protection zones I and II, particularly in large areas of Zone I, in the old town embedded between Mönchsberg and Kapuzinerberg, the overall state of conservation is still rather good. A serious problem for the World Heritage and its characteristic values are several examples of a new trend towards aggressive town renewal incompatible with the Law for the Preservation of the Old Town Centre (Altstadterhaltungsgesetz): the project “Residential Buildings City Life” near Rehr-Platz, which has already led to fierce protests from the citizenry, the development project for the Priesterhausgarten in Paris-Lodron-Strasse, and the project Ernest-Thun-Strasse 2/Schwarzstrasse 45. The formalistic exercises carried out in this context, comparing heights and cubic capacities, should in these cases not hide the fact that according to the Altstadterhaltungsgesetz the aim should not be the usual architecture of contrasts. Instead, there is a demand for harmonious integration, correct heights of eaves, simply designed facades, yes even modesty and restriction.

In the buffer zone and far beyond the protection zones I and II there are more than enough critical issues: From the castle on Mönchsberg one can see the total **urban sprawl in the surroundings of the city**, which in recent decades has increased dramatically. It is difficult for the municipal and state authorities, who seem to act from case to case without general urban land-use planning, to get this general destruction of the landscape under control. City quarters such as Lehen are already covered with concrete structures and in the quarter of Riedenburg an overdimensioned residential complex is presently under construction. Also for the benefit of the World Cultural Heritage Salzburg it would be imperative to protect at least certain green areas and to keep the still existing far-reaching axis of the Hellbrunner Allee free from any development.

Michael Petzet



Semmering Railway viaduct Kalte Rinne (© C. Schuhböck)

World Heritage Semmering Railway

For many years, various names were used for this railway World Heritage site, but it was clear that they all meant the entire Semmering region. Consequently, at all the stations along the Semmering Railway one can find UNESCO World Heritage panels referring to the “Semmering Railway with surrounding landscape”. Only when in 2005, in the course of the Styrian electoral campaign, the national decision on the governmental level was taken to build the much disputed “Semmering Base Tunnel” (SBT) as a double-tube tunnel with a length of 28 km between Gloggnitz (Lower Austria) and Mürzzuschlag (Styria), a step-by-step “dismantling” of the World Heritage took place. To begin with, the stations Gloggnitz and Mürzzuschlag were removed from the monument list – after the nomination of the Semmering Railway as World Heritage site by the Republic of Austria in 1995. In the notification of monument status issued by the Aus-

trian Federal Monument Protection Office on March 17, 1997, the Semmering Railway (between the Gloggnitz and Mürzzuschlag stations) is described, but only the stretch between railway kilometres 75,650 and 114,820 was put under monument protection. The stations Gloggnitz and Mürzzuschlag thus lost their monument status, probably because the planned Semmering Base Tunnel will be looping in in these areas. Not only the Semmering Railway but also the surrounding landscape lost part of their protection status in favour of the project “Semmering Base Tunnel new” (SBTn). The Styrian landscape protection area “Stuhleck-Pretul”, decreed in 1981, was reduced to approximately one third of its original size in 2007, after the governmental decision (2005) to build the “Semmering Base Tunnel new” – in the area of the planned building site of the SBTn (Fröschnitztal).

Summary of a report by
DI Christian Schuhböck