

SWEDEN

Stockholm City Library Threatened by Construction Project

In 2007, the winning design of an architectural competition for an extension to the Stockholm City Library (1924–28) designed by Gunnar Asplund was announced. The heritage significance of the library building and its annexes are theoretically protected by a range of Swedish laws, but it is considered that the winning design would have serious adverse impacts on the heritage of the Asplund Library complex. The proposed size of the new buildings would overwhelm the library and the original monumental main entrance would lose its function, thereby diminishing the power of Asplund's original design. The proposed demolition of the three annexes would destroy the overall experience of the site as originally planned and designed by Asplund. The heritage values of this site, and the international importance of the work of Gunnar Asplund requires careful and comprehensive reconsideration of the proposal to avoid such impacts.

The presidents of the International Union of Architects, DOCOMOMO International and the ICOMOS ISC20C jointly requested that the Mayor of the City of Stockholm urgently reconsider the project to avoid any adverse heritage impacts, and to resolve a more acceptable design solution in heritage terms:

14 September 2009

Dear Mr Mayor,

At its meeting held in Sydney, Australia on 7th July 2009, the International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage of ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, was most concerned to learn that the process of architectural competition and planning for the extension of the most outstanding and protected Stockholm City Library complex may be concluding with a proposal to demolish its annexes and replace them with new buildings, which are significantly out of scale with the original historic landmark ensemble.

The Sydney meeting enjoyed the presence of Gustavo Araoz, President of ICOMOS International, Maristella Casciato, President of

Stockholm City Library, main building



Docomomo International, and Louise Cox, President of the International Union of Architects, UIA, who shared an equal concern.

We agree to issue an international ICOMOS Heritage Alert regarding the project. The Heritage Alert process uses the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee's international professional and public networks to promote the conservation of Twentieth Century Heritage and draw attention to the threats which it confronts and to promote good conservation solutions.

The Stockholm City Library, a work by architect Gunnar Asplund, is an exceptional building and an internationally applauded landmark in the history of architecture in the Modern Age. It also forms a remarkable ensemble with its annexes and landscape which are also protected under Swedish heritage legislation. We note that Gunnar Asplund is the author of Stockholm's Woodland cemetery – Skogskyrkogården – one of Sweden's 14 sites listed under UNESCO's World Heritage Convention for their outstanding universal value.

The International Scientific Committee on 20th Century heritage of ICOMOS is very concerned over the current proposal. Whilst appreciating the attention paid by your administration to improving the functionality of the library for contemporary society, we believe that implementing the current proposal would have serious adverse impacts on this very important place of cultural heritage



Winning design for an extension of the library at the site of the annexes

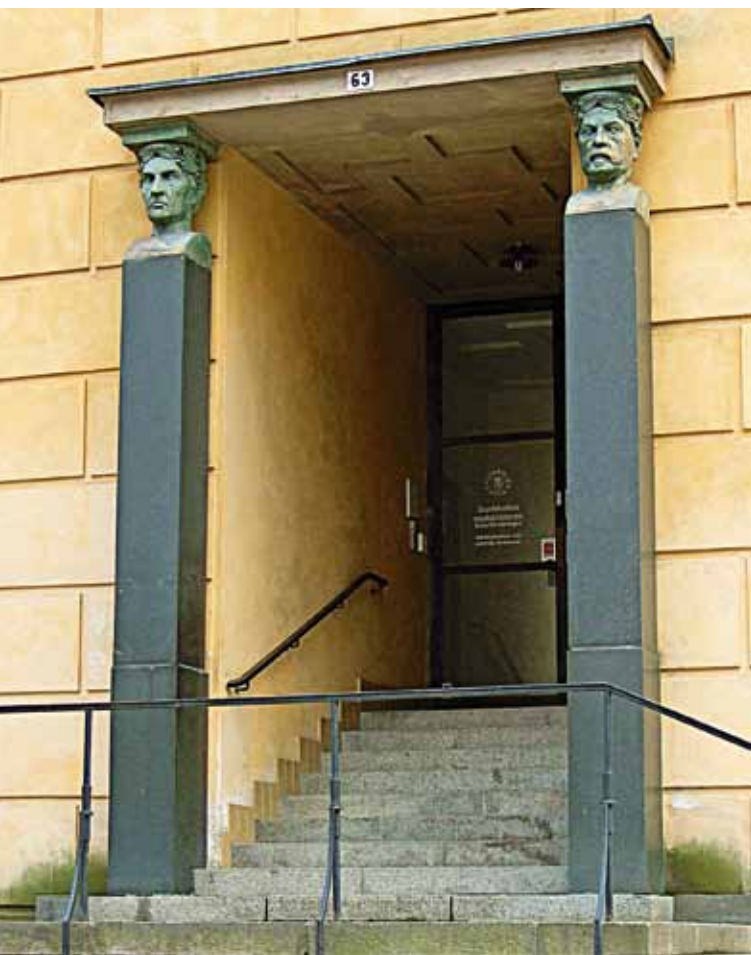
View of the library's main building and annexes (DOCOMOMO Sweden)





The library's central book hall

Entrance to the annex



significance for Sweden and for the world. This loss through the demolition of the library's protected annexes and the dwarfing and marginalisation of the original library by this proposed new construction is not an acceptable solution in heritage terms.

Beside the architectural and heritage loss, this would be seen as a sign of failure of the widely acknowledged commitment of Stockholm and, indeed Swedish society and legislation for the protection and long-term conservation of its cultural heritage and historic sites of all periods, be they ancient or modern.

The world looks to Sweden for inspiration in modern architecture and excellence in heritage conservation practice. However, the undersigned international presidents of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Union of Architects (UIA), the president of The Documentation and Conservation of the Modern Movement (Docomomo) and the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage are unified in their concern about this proposal and urge the City of Stockholm to reconsider the current proposal to eliminate its adverse impacts and thus demonstrate its leadership in resolving appropriate conservation design solutions.

We urge the City of Stockholm to suspend the current proceeding of this proposal and to engage in a process to ensure that the goals of functional upgrades are met with due respect to the heritage significance and maximum retention of this outstanding landmark of 20th century architecture and its setting. ICOMOS, its partners and members of its International Committee on 20th Century Heritage offer the City of Stockholm and the Swedish authorities their assistance in taking on this truly challenging approach, the only one to be considered for such a masterpiece of global influence.

Our representatives would be pleased to have an opportunity to discuss this further with you.

Yours faithfully,

*Sheridan Burke
President, ICOMOS International Scientific Committee, Twentieth Century Heritage*

*Louise Cox
President, International Union of Architects, UIA*

*Maristella Casciato
President, Docomomo International*

(for more information see also <http://icomos-isc20c.org/id3.html>)