

SWITZERLAND

Bern – Underground Car Park

An underground car park is being extended immediately in front of the baroque 'Waisenhaus', in the heart of the city of Bern, while another one is to be enlarged at the 'Casinoplatz' in November 2001. At this very moment, important historical and archaeological remains of the 13th to the 18th century are being sacrificed for 140 new parking spaces. Of course, scientific salvage excavations have taken place. The archaeological excavation started in March 2001 and was almost entirely financed by the authorities. It particularly well illustrated why such a site should be protected, because the affected area of about 900 square metres had only been previously disturbed by a minor duct. The uncovering of the site, which became the garden of the orphanage (Waisenhaus), revealed the relics of the ancient constructions exactly as they were when abandoned at the moment of their destruction in 1783/84: a street from the late Middle Ages leading to a fountain in the natural trench, a stone building from the 14th century and foundations of a town residence near the town-ditch, as well as two well-preserved cellars with courtyard buildings. In addition, the site revealed different developments relating to the construction of the orphanage that was built in 1783.

At least the remaining part of the city wall – which is under protection – will be integrated into the construction project. Of the original 20,000 square metres of open space in the inner city –

composed of the well-known squares of Waisenhausplatz, Bärenplatz and the Bundesplatz – only 2500 square metres will retain the potential for undisturbed archaeological evidence after the enlargement of this underground car park. Remains of the 13th-century city wall, as well as parts of the Jewish quarter, still slumber under the Bundesplatz. But is 15% of the former archaeological patrimony enough to testify to the history of the city? And what are we to think of this when we know that any archaeological testimony is already reduced by the passage of time.

The city of Bern is not alone in the destruction of its historical underground. In many cities of Switzerland and Europe, the necessity for new constructions has resulted in increased underground disturbance. But should not Bern – as a UNESCO World-Heritage listed city – show the way? It is certainly in this perspective that the national commission for the conservation of sites (Eidgenössische Kommission für Denkmalpflege) passed a leading bill with detailed theses, reflections and arguments concerning 'underground building in historical sites'. This bill was sent to all leading cantonal authorities responsible for archaeology and monument conservation. The conclusions of this bill were to refuse all three forms of underground building: the building of cellars and other constructions under historical buildings, public squares and historical parks.

Bern, Waisenhausplatz. The excavation pit for the underground car park goes right up to the walls of the Waisenhaus.



Bern, Waisenhausplatz. Before its destruction, the archaeologists document the last witnesses of the history of this part of the city.



Bellinzona – Interference in the Middle-Age City Walls

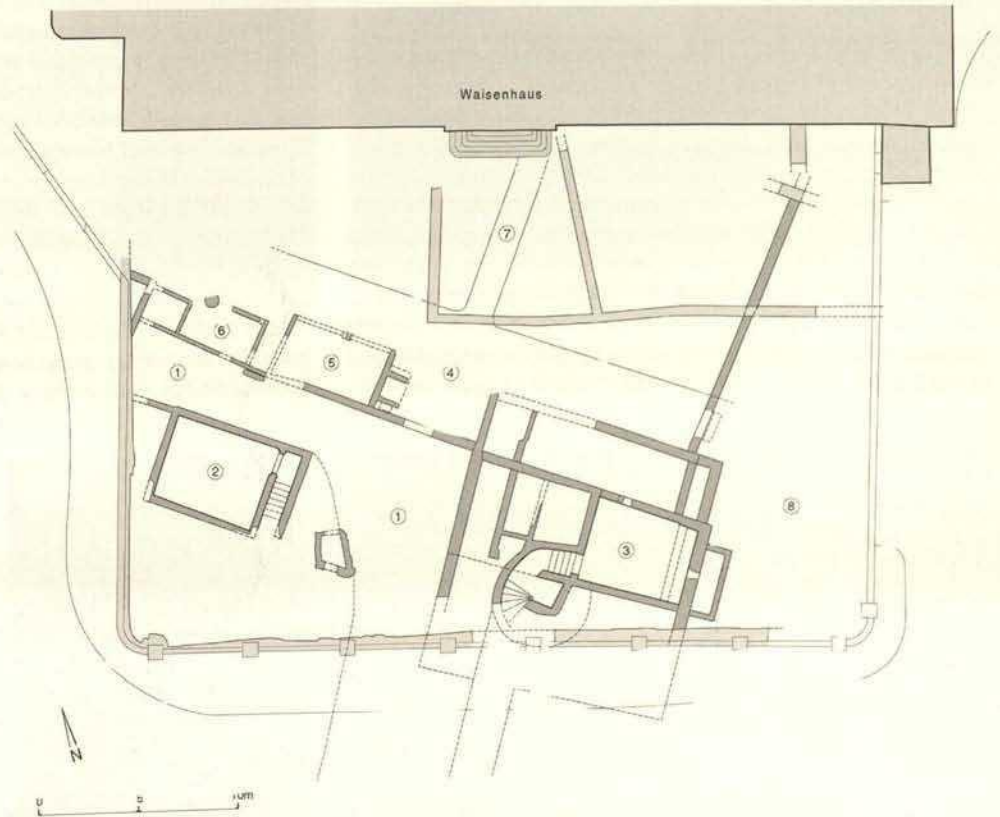
The 'Castello Grande' has recently been accepted as a UNESCO World Heritage monument. But destructive interventions on the historical walls have already been perpetrated. Niches have been built and cemented in the wall for the electricity supply. Was it carelessness, a harmless crime or neglect? And this is not the only example. It does, however, show how important it is to supervise works associated with our World Heritage listed monuments and to encourage a sense of responsibility among the local authorities and all those who work with these monuments. This was stressed in the ICOMOS colloquium held in Bern in 1999.

Switzerland, as a country, has committed itself to the international community. However, the sovereignty concerning archaeology and conservation in Switzerland belongs to the cantons; as a consequence, it is up to them to provide the necessary intervention. The only way the national government can positively influence these efforts is in supporting them financially, and yet it shirks from its responsibility.



Bellinzona, Castello Grande. Retaining wall with electricity box.

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Bern, Waisenhausplatz. Overall view of the archaeological site: 1. street from the late Middle Ages (Schegkenbrunnenstrasse), 2. vaulted cellar, 3. town residence of the Tschiffeli family (with a spiral staircase leading to the cellar), 4. paved courtyard, 5. stables, 6. workshop, 7. paved path leading to a tower of the town wall (Schwefelturm), 8. town-ditch.