

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

Mag. Maria Vassilakou
Vice-Mayor of the City of Vienna
Town Hall Vienna
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Stiege 4, 2. Stock, Tür 451
1010 Vienna
Austria

Paris, 16 March 2016

Subject: ICOMOS Heritage Alert for the Otto-Wagner-Hospital, Steinhof, Vienna
Your Ref.: 12558 – 2016

Dear Honorable Vice Mayor of the City of Vienna,
Dear Mrs. Vassilakou,

ICOMOS wishes to thank you for your detailed reply of 20 January 2016 regarding the Jugendstil Ensemble of the Otto-Wagner-Hospital, which you appropriately described as “one of Vienna’s most important cultural treasures”. The acknowledgment by the City of Vienna of the special value of this area is very welcome, and we appreciate the plan to preserve and revitalize the Otto-Wagner-Hospital so “that it will remain open to all in the future”.

In your letter you underline that the City of Vienna has the intention to maintain the Otto-Wagner-Ensemble “in its entirety by complying with all obligations of monument protection and cultural asset preservation while at the same time revitalizing the area”. ICOMOS appreciates the measures already taken by the City of Vienna, which show awareness of its cultural responsibility. Moreover, the intention to develop a management plan for this site is also a great step forward. As you mention in your letter, you feel that the protective measures that have already been implemented will provide a good basis for the future of the site.

ICOMOS however wishes to stress that these measures only seem to apply to specific parts of the site that relate to its “core area”. Nevertheless, the “economic area” with its historic buildings is neither protected by the Austrian heritage protection law nor by the building code of Vienna. This means, that important parts of the whole ensemble, including both buildings and green spaces, are not fully protected.

For this reason, ICOMOS’ concerns for the site remain and we must consider that the explanations received by the City of Vienna by no means adequately cover the issues of preservation and conservation of the complete ensemble. The invasive projects that have led to the destruction of parts of the area (VAMED Rehabilitation Center with demolition of parts of the protected historic boundary wall), newly dedicated building land entailing the destruction of historic properties (pigsty, horse stable, forge and carriage house), the increasing dilapidation of parts of the ensemble, such as the former butchery, give us reason to fear that the adverse development, which began with the construction of the VAMED-building, will continue. An example is the plot of the former “Pathology” which is attributed in the partition plan of 27 November 2014 to Housing Building Class III (16m high). The building itself, a memorial to the victims of the crimes of the NS – era (“Spiegelgrundkinder”), is left to decay.

The former “economic area” is an integral part of the architectural concept of the Otto-Wagner-Ensemble. This concept also includes the axis focusing on the church. The scientific literature about the site describes these features in detail. The current WSE-Study about the future use of the area is undoubtedly an important step for the proper management of the site. However, ICOMOS recommends that the study in addition to the issue of subsequent use, gives particular consideration to conservation and revitalization measures with special focus on the landscape design, including the retention of unbuilt green space. This indeed poses an enormous challenge.

Such a concept certainly excludes – in line with the City of Vienna's acknowledgement of the special values of the site – constructions, which would affect the visual integrity and authenticity of the ensemble due to their inadequate quantity, volume, height, design etc. In this regard, the intended reduction of rental flats (140) and housing units (60-80) is not compatible with the structures that have been built and are still planned.

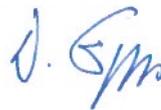
ICOMOS considers it essential that a holistic approach be applied, as a prerequisite for an adequate assessment of this complex issue concerning the values, buildings and historic ensemble. All construction plans should be stopped until the presentation of the WSE-Study and the conclusion of the necessary discussions that should follow.

ICOMOS, also through its Austrian National Committee, remains at the disposal the City of Vienna and the Austrian governmental authorities, for any cooperation in the further decision-making processes.

Yours sincerely



Kirsti Kovanen
ICOMOS Secretary General



Wilfried Lipp
President of ICOMOS Austria

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