



Dr. Michael Häupl
Mayor of the City of Vienna
Town Hall Vienna
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1010 Vienna
Austria

Paris, 18 December 2015

Subject: ICOMOS Heritage Alert for the Otto-Wagner-Hospital, Steinhof, Vienna

Dear Sir,

ICOMOS international and ICOMOS Austria wish to express their deep concern at the situation of the Otto-Wagner-Hospital, Steinhof, Baumgartner Höhe 1, 1140 Vienna, owned by the City of Vienna.

The significance of the site as an extensive ensemble, built from 1903-1907 by Otto Wagner with the participation of Heinrich Goldemund, among others, is beyond doubt and has been confirmed by several scientific studies (notably most recently by Jäger-Klein, Caroline & Plakolm-Forsthuber, Sabine (ed.). (2015). *Die Stadt außerhalb: Zur Architektur der ehemaligen Niederösterreichischen Landes-, Heil- und Pflegeanstalt für Geistes- und Nervenranke Am Steinhof in Wien*, Birkhäuser-Verlag)

The importance refers to both the architectural characteristics and the spatial planning of the site, including the horticultural design of the gardens. In addition, its relevance to developments in medical and therapeutic history are eminent and therefore of major cultural value.

Whilst the core area (Kernbereich, pavilions and church) of the site benefits of Statutory Monument Protection, no protection is afforded to the so called economic area (Wirtschaftsbereich) in the eastern part and today the site is gravely endangered by:

- Already newly erected constructions (VAMED) and buildings under construction;
- Change in land use/dedication of the so called economic area (Wirtschaftsbereich) in the eastern part of the ensemble;
- The planned closing of hospital services within the next decade.

Due to the extraordinary characteristics of the site, in recent years numerous suggestions and appeals have been made from various quarters to the authorities of Vienna and Austria to consider nominating the Otto-Wagner-Hospital for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage list. In this light, ICOMOS Austria asked internationally renowned expert Dr Leslie Topp (University of London) to make an assessment, on the basis of a comparative analysis, on whether the site may possess potential for the values which would argue in favour of such a nomination. Dr Topp's study came to a positive conclusion. In addition, a citizens' initiative (Initiative Steinhof) independently consulted Dipl.-Ing. Christian Schuhböck, Alliance of Nature, whose expertise came to the same conclusion.

Based on these findings, and considering the dangers the site is facing, ICOMOS Austria made several petitions to the authorities of the City of Vienna, also highlighting the values of the site. Due to increasing public attention, a mediation process among the various stakeholders was initiated by the City of Vienna. In addition, an Expert Committee was established to review the development potential of the area taking into account the preservation of the existing core site. The result was that it was suggested to reduce the originally planned 600 new building units in the eastern part of the area to 440 units. However, another 100 additional apartments are planned by conversion of usage of protected estate buildings.

Although the findings of the Expert Committee, established by the City of Vienna (in which ICOMOS did not participate), have led to significant changes in the foreseen usage of the area, the new planning basis still remains in contradiction with the multifaceted significance of the site. Taking into account its values, it is beyond doubt that the site must be maintained intact in its entirety. The new structures, that have regrettably already been built, serve as a reminder of a misguided concept and unsuccessful policy.

Also a number of the historic structures are in an increasingly poor state of conservation, especially the building originally used for "Pathology" – associated with the terrible memories of Nazi crimes, and in need of urgent attention.

ICOMOS therefore again calls upon the authorities of Vienna and Austria not to allow economic aspects to override the cultural importance of the ensemble and to urgently:

- Extend the status of protection to also include the so called economic area (Wirtschaftsbereich) in the eastern part of the site;
- Reconsider the development and conservation concept for the entire area;
- Develop a usage programme for the future when the hospital services close, which takes into consideration the exceptional importance and history of the whole ensemble.

ICOMOS, through its Austrian National Committee, remains at the disposal of the City of Vienna and the Austrian governmental authorities, for all advice they may wish to undertake the above actions.

Yours sincerely



Kirsti Kovanen
ICOMOS Secretary General



Wilfried Lipp
President of ICOMOS Austria

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