

AUSTRIA

The Austrian examples are notably precarious and the results are not satisfactory in spite of complying with § 172 of the Operational Guidelines. ICOMOS has to learn its lesson – to defend the concerns of cultural heritage more clearly and explicitly against contradicting interests. To hopefully avoid such cases in the future the National Committee of ICOMOS Austria has established a Monitoring Group especially for World Heritage sites.

High-rise buildings behind Belvedere Palace in Vienna – project for the area Main Station Vienna

In combination with the planned “Bahnhof-City” in Arsenalstrasse the project for a new main station is threatening the visual integrity of Belvedere Palace and Park. On the very edge of the core zone of the World Heritage site Historic Centre of Vienna the “Bahnhof-City” with 11 high-rises of up to 100 metres is to be erected. Because of the impact on the main axis Lower Belvedere – Upper Belvedere the high-rise buildings were slightly reduced and rearranged in the revised master plan of February 2006. Consequently, according to the latest view analyses only one 100-metre high-rise building would still be visible in the main axis to the right of the Upper Belvedere. However, the serious impact of the development area on the visual integrity of the main palace – viewpoint in front of the south side of the Belvedere and view of the “Bahnhof-City” from the Belvedere – and of the park to the south were not taken into account in the description and analyses of plans presented to UNESCO by the City of Vienna. On this matter see the following statement by ICOMOS:

The project for the area of the Main Station Vienna-Central Europe (...) adjoins immediately to the core zone of the ensemble Historic Centre of Vienna (inscribed in the World Heritage List in 2001), stretching south with the park of Belvedere Palace. The project for a new main station with a large development area including a series of high-rise buildings situated 2.5 km south of the city centre goes back to an urbanistic competition of 1995. The corresponding master plan was adopted by the Vienna City Council in December 2004 under the condition that “the compatibility of the project with the

importance of the Belvedere complex as part of the World Heritage site must be safeguarded.” The revised master plan of February 2006 shows that some high-rise buildings were modified (reduction of one of the two 100-metre towers to 60 metres, certain changes in locations). (...) However, these changes are not sufficient to ensure a real compatibility with the World Heritage.

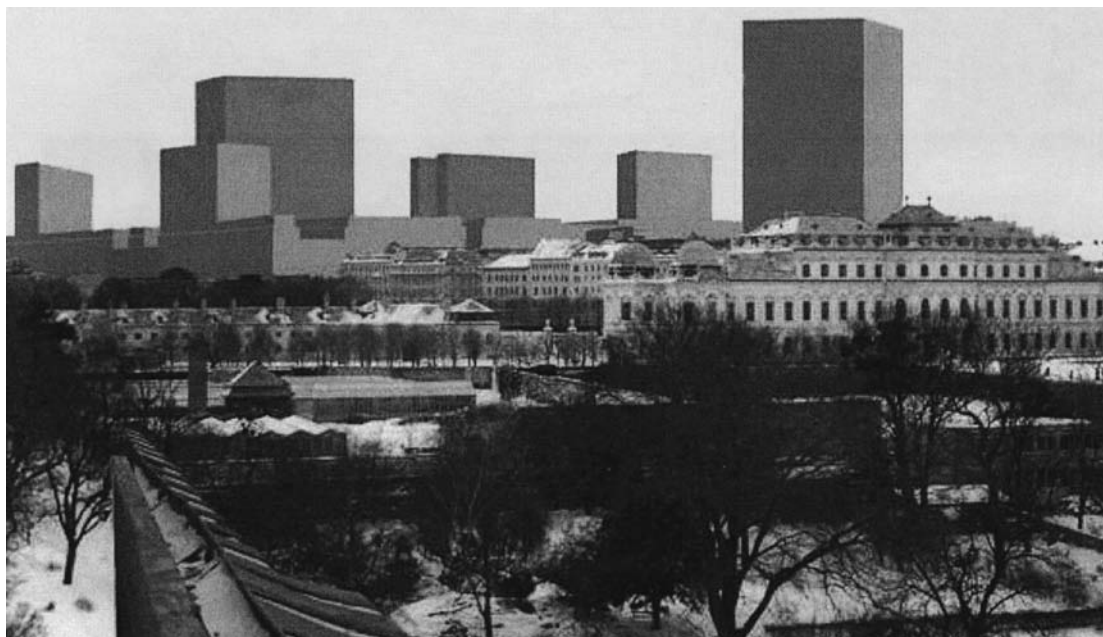
The presentation by the City of Vienna refers first and foremost to the central visual axis Lower Belvedere Palace – Upper Belvedere Palace (also to the visual axis towards St Elizabeth Church). In this context the added computer simulation is also meant to give the impression as if this important historic axis would remain largely undisturbed. In reality, however, the 100-metre tower to the right of the Upper Belvedere Palace would appear above the trees and would also seriously disturb the visual integrity of the famous baroque palace from possible lateral perspectives. Besides, it needs to be taken into consideration firstly that the existing backdrop of trees is without leaves in the winter and thus transparent, and secondly that the illumination of the groups of high-rise buildings at night would interfere with the integrity of the park. Therefore, the heights of the clusters of high-rises need to be reappraised and corrected once more.

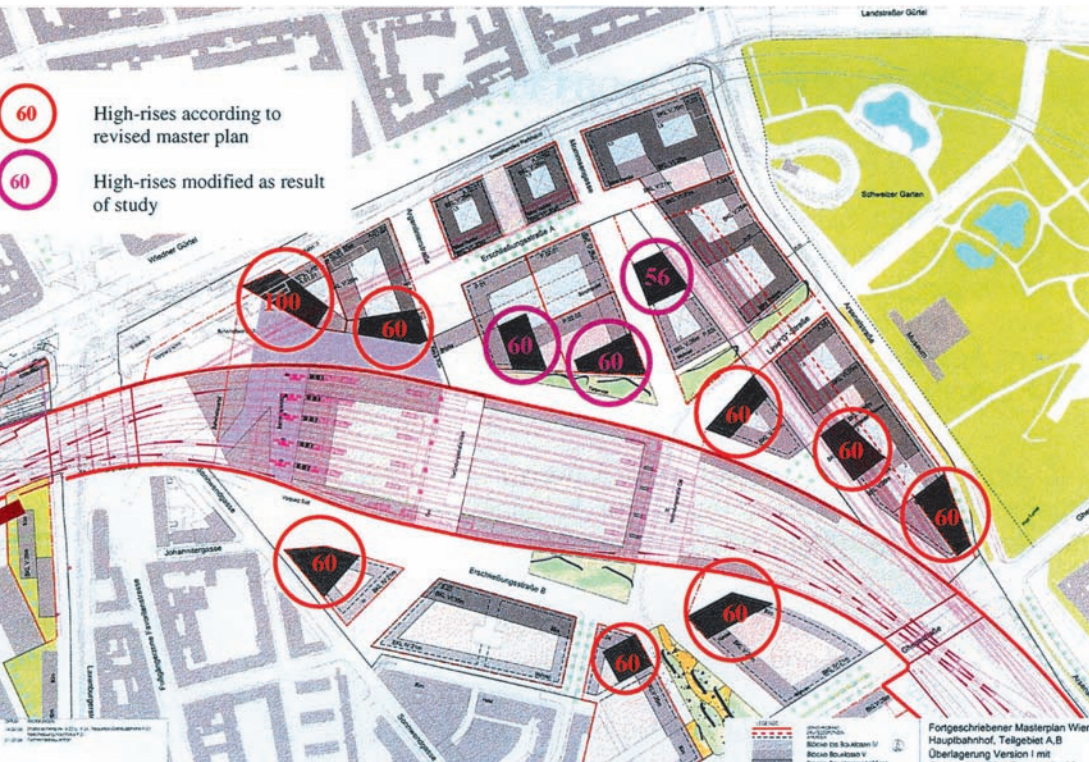
In the evaluation by the City of Vienna the possible consequences of the new urban quarter and the series of high-rise buildings for the south front of the Upper Belvedere Palace and the area of the park which, as part of the core zone of the World Heritage, immediately adjoin to the grounds connected with the main station, are totally suppressed. Here a detailed investigation must be asked for, which also takes into consideration the view from the palace towards the new development area and the consequences for the entire surroundings of the southern Belvedere Park.

Considering that the City of Vienna has tried several times to enforce ruthless projects near the World Heritage sites – for instance high-rise projects close to Schönbrunn Palace – highest caution is also advised in this alarming case. Further details and guidelines concerning the “compatibility” of the project Main Station Vienna-Central Europe with the World Heritage would urgently call for an ICOMOS mission to the site.

Michael Petzet
President of ICOMOS
13 November 2007

Planned high-rise buildings behind Belvedere Palace, view from the roof of Rennweg 16, visualisation of the development of the Südbahnhof area, first project of 2004/05 before the revision of the master plan (Photo: Martin Kupf, Österr. Gesellschaft für Denkmal- und Ortsbildpflege)





Elevation points according to revised master plan for Vienna-Central Europe Railway Station, February 2006 (Wimmer, Masterplan Bahnhof Wien – Europa Mitte – Überarbeitung, 2005/2006)



View from the east side of the park towards the Upper Belvedere (Stadt Wien, Magistratsabteilung 41)

Roof alteration to the department store Kastner & Öhler – an attack on the roofscape of Graz

ICOMOS Austria already gave a detailed account of destructions of the roofscape in the historic centre of Vienna with its roof-on-roof alterations etc (see H@R 2004/2005, pp. 41-45). Here is a similar case in another historic Austrian city, Graz.

The traditional department store Kastner & Öhler is situated amidst the core zone of the World Heritage site “Historic Centre of the City of Graz”. It was constructed by the renowned theatre architects Fellner & Helmer at the end of the 19th century. This store has been remodelled several times in the course of the last century. The latest construction phase resulted in putting up a multi-gabled trench roof above the top floor ceiling, tiled with red clay tiles in accordance with the historic roofscape of Graz. In yet another extension scheme Kastner & Öhler then planned a new roof construction, designed with various capped steep gables with a ridge height more than 9 metres, according to the project of the Spanish architects Nieto/Sobejano, who were the winners of an architecture competition.

In spite of protests from ICOMOS Austria the “compromise” found after a UNESCO/ICOMOS mission in October 2006 only resulted in a slightly reduced solution (slight changes in design and reduction of height). This could be understood as a signal for more roof alterations disturbing the visual integrity of the ensemble.

The result of the competition is a totally inadequate and misunderstood interpretation of a medieval roofscape without any connection to the typology of the building. The multiple gabled and pointed zigzag structure of no regularity shows arbitrariness. Above all a roof covering in metal is now envisaged: a disaster.

ICOMOS Austria holds the opinion that the project is in blatant contrast to the intentions of the World Heritage Convention.

ICOMOS Austria

Wachau Cultural Landscape

The so called „Kellerschloessel“ is situated in Duernstein, one of the most beautiful villages in the Cultural Landscape Wachau. This charming baroque castle was built by the famous architect Jakob Prandtauer during the reign of Hieronymus Uebelbacher, Abbot of the Duernstein Monastery, at the beginning of the 18th century. It was placed as “Lusthaus im Weinberg” at the outskirts amidst the winegrowing cultural landscape. Therefore the castle was always thought to be situated as a solitaire within the vineyards.

Through a re-designation of areas within the immediate surroundings the view has already been disturbed. Now a further residential settlement, the result of a competition, is meant to be constructed. The key question should have been: Is it generally adequate to erect buildings close to the Kellerschloessel? The decision to grant a building permit affects the World Heritage site and the result of this competition poses the problem whether the consistent limitation of exclusively “modern architecture” is justified in such a region.

ICOMOS Austria



Graz, state of the city centre at the beginning of the 1960s



Graz, current state of the historic city centre



Graz, awarded project of the architects Nieto/Sobejano

Altered project after UNESCO/ICOMOS-joint mission



Threat to the cultural landscape at Neusiedler / Fertő Lake

Both ICOMOS Hungary and ICOMOS Austria protested against plans for a 73-metre-high building in Parsdorf/Burgenland. The 18-storey hotel building “would seriously damage the Fertő/Neusiedler Lake area inscribed on the World Heritage List as a remarkable cultural landscape. The (...) building would visually destroy the nature reserve of Fertő Lake and its boundaries. After the examples of Vienna and Cologne, another high-rise building is endangering a World Heritage site” (appeal of the Hungarian National Committee of 12 September 2006). The project, situated at the exit of motorway B 50 and already

approved by the town council of Parsdorf, stands for a new escalation in the uncontrolled development of the cultural landscape of the Burgenland. Unfortunately, most of the places on the Austrian side are already severely disfigured by inadequate new buildings – contrary to the much better preserved stock of vernacular architecture in the Hungarian villages on the other side of the lake.

At the General Assembly of the World Heritage Committee it was demanded that the height of the hotel tower be reduced to 47 metres.



Duernstein, construction work in front of the Kellerschloessel



Duernstein, design for buildings to be erected in front of the Kellerschloessel