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## Listing Le Corbusier as UNESCO World Heritage



*Tsentrosoyuz, 1928–37, arch. Le Corbusier, P. Jeanneret, N. Kolli. View from Sakharov Prospect in the 1930's*

During a sixty-year-long career, which started in 1907 in his hometown of La Chaux-de-Fonds, Le Corbusier built some seventy-five buildings in a dozen countries. Many of these structures are well preserved and protected, an increasing number is restored, a certain number are in a danger, and the condition of a small batch is unknown. However, in the changing context of UNESCO's policies for the World Heritage, reaching a new level of international visibility was considered necessary by scholars and Le Corbusier supporters alike. The number of 20<sup>th</sup>-century objects and sites featured on UNESCO's World Heritage List is growing, yet some major documents of Modernism and Modernization are still missing, and this is the case with Le Corbusier's work, despite its seminal importance. Interestingly, in its session held in Suzhou during the summer of 2004, the World Heritage Committee earmarked the work of Aalto, Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright as eligible for the List.

Hence the Paris-based Foundation, whose mission is to protect the architect's archive and its moral and cul-

tural legacy took the initiative of organizing a collective program for the inclusion of a cluster of his work on the World Heritage List in 2006. The story started, not surprisingly, with an international seminar held in June 2004 in Paris by the Foundation, the French National UNESCO Commission, the French Ministry of Culture and Communication and the France-UNESCO Convention for Heritage. Representatives of these organizations and institutions met with experts designated by several countries concerned, in order to establish a provisional list meant to start the negotiations with the countries concerned by the initiative. The discussion confirmed the interest of developing a transnational approach, leading to the presentation at the World Heritage Committee of a single application assembling several buildings, but based on comparable, if not uniform criteria underlining the issues of preservation, maintenance, promotion and management of the sites.

France appointed Gilles Ragot, art historian and professor at the Bordeaux school of architecture, and Pierre-An-



*Tsentrosoyuz, 1928–37, arch. Le Corbusier, P. Jeanneret, N. Kolli. View from Sakharov Prospect on the former club*



*Tsentrosoyuz, 2005, 1928–37, arch. Le Corbusier, P. Jeanneret, N. Kolli. Double-glazed façade in 2005*

toine Gatier, architect in chief for historic preservation, in order to establish a unique analytical grid allowing to determine the situation and the eligibility of the buildings, taken one by one. The buildings initially considered covered all the types built by Le Corbusier. The list included artist studios such as the Ozenfant house in Paris

or the Guiette house in Antwerpen, single-family residences such as the Jeanneret-Perret house, the Schwob house or the “Petite villa” in Switzerland, the La Roche, Savoye, De Mandrot and Jaoul houses in France, the Curutchet house in Argentina and the Shodhan and Sarabhai houses in India. Minimal housing such as the Pessac settlement, the Stuttgart houses and the Cabanon at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, and collective housing schemes such as the Clarté building in Geneva, the Salvation Army, the Porte Molitor building, the students’ dormitories in Paris and the four French Unités d’habitation were featured, as well as public buildings like the Tokyo museum, the Millowners building in Ahmedabad or Harvard University’s Carpenter Center and religious buildings such as the Ronchamp chapel and the La Tourette monastery. Finally, the initial listing included large urban schemes at Firminy and at Chandigarh.

If the initial goal was to submit to UNESCO the largest possible number of buildings in the largest possible number of countries, various institutional or political motives have tended to limit the proposal. In some cases, as for instance with the sports facilities built by Le Corbusier in Baghdad in the 1960s, the reasons are easy to understand. In other instances, the internal structuring of the administrative bodies in charge and the sometimes narrow definition of the built heritage excluding recent buildings has led to the provisional exclusion of important structures. In the case of the French work group, clearly the most important one in quantitative terms, severe limits were put to the number of sites proposed, as UNESCO’s evaluation abilities are not infinite.

Thus, the list finally drawn in early 2006 for submission to the World Heritage Committee will be only a first ensemble of buildings, to be extended in the future, as it is the rule for such groupings. The project has the firm backing by France’s government, which will include the entire list in its yearly quota of one cultural site only, not preventing therefore the other states involved of presenting their own applications, often limited to pre-modern objects.

Moscow’s Tsentrosoyuz, although partially transformed already during its construction between 1929 and 1936, is the largest structure built by Le Corbusier before the Second World War, if we consider that the Brazilian Ministry of Education and Health in Rio was a collective work. In order to be included among the buildings submitted to UNESCO, several key issues should be considered. The first one is the preservation of the authenticity of the architectural elements, which seems to have been jeopardized, for instance by the recent transformation in the main spaces. The second issue is of course the willingness of Russia to include the building, in its requests, even at no institutional “cost” in respect to other sites, by joining the initial proponents.