

**Report on the Mission to Graz,
(World Heritage site in Austria)
from 25. – 27. February 2005**

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The World Heritage Committee, at its 28th session (Suzhou, China, 28.June – 7. July 2004) examined the state of conservation of the City of Graz – Historic centre, Austria, and requested to undertake a mission to the property and to report on this mission at its 29th session in 2005.

The visit to Graz took place from 25. to 27. February 2005.

Members of UNESCO and ICOMOS see above.

Members of the relevant bodies in Austria (see also Annex 7.1)

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1. Background to the Mission

1.1. Inscription of the property on the World Heritage List

The World Heritage Committee during its 23rd Session (Marrakech, Morocco, 29 November - 4 December 1999) inscribed the site on the World Heritage List on the basis of

“Criterion (ii): The Historic Centre of the City of Graz reflects artistic and architectural movements originating from the Germanic region, the Balkans, and the Mediterranean, for which it served as a

crossroads for centuries. The greatest architects and artists of these different regions expressed themselves forcefully here and thus created brilliant syntheses.

Criterion (iv): The urban complex forming the Historic Centre of the City of Graz is an exceptional example of a harmonious integration of architectural styles from successive periods. Each age is represented by typical buildings, which are often masterpieces. The urban physiognomy faithfully tells the story of its historic development.”

1.2 Examination of the State of Conservation by the World Heritage Committee

In regards to the management, the protection and the conservation of the historic centre, there were no changes to be reported.

Conservation issues:

In April 2003 the Centre was informed of the Thalia Centre construction project in the Historic Centre of Graz. In October 2003 the Centre’s attention was drawn to the demolition of the ‘Kommod-Haus’, a protected building dating from 1839 in the Historic Centre of Graz. By a letter dated 14 October 2003, the State Party of Austria was requested to comment on the issues raised; however, no information had been received at the time of the preparation of this document.

The World Heritage Committee, during its 28th Session (Suzhou, China, 28 June – 7 July 2004) examined the Status of Conservation of this site, which resulted in the following decision:

(Extract from WHC-04/28.COM/15B: 28 COM 15B.82)

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Recalling paragraph 56 of the Operational Guidelines,
2. Deplores the destruction of the ‘Kommod-Haus’ as a loss for the historic fabric of the property and its harmonious integration of architectural styles from successive periods;
3. Regrets that the Austrian authorities did not provide information on any of the issues raised in letter of dated 14 October 2003;
4. Requests the State Party to work closely with the World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS on the review of the state of conservation of the World Heritage property with special focus on the current construction plans and the protection of listed buildings;
5. Further requests the Centre and the Advisory Bodies undertake a mission to the property and to report to the World Heritage Committee at its 29th session in 2005;
6. Also requests the State Party to submit a report on the state of conservation by 1 February 2005 to the World Heritage Centre in order that the World Heritage Committee can examine the state of conservation of the property at its 29th session in 2005.

1.3 Follow up realised by the State Party:

The State Party submitted in due time (as it stands above in point 6.) a report explaining the situation of specific cases and a statement of the property's status of conservation. (Annex 7.2)

1.4 Justification of the Mission and Terms of Reference

The World Heritage Centre organised this reactive monitoring mission of experts, with the mandate:

- to review the overall situation in Graz with regard to the state of conservation of the site in its widest context, its integrity and authenticity, and how recent demolitions and constructions have affected the Outstanding Universal Value of the site;
- discuss with national and local authorities how the current construction plans affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the site;
- discuss with relevant authorities, local institutions and organisations the protection of listed buildings;
- discuss with national and local authorities ways and means to strengthen the management of the site;
- consider any requirements to elaborate and/or revise the management plan for the area in order to improve the management capability and effectiveness, and evaluate opportunities for co-operation on conservation management and development through exchange of experience with other World Heritage sites;

1.5 Meetings and discussions during mission

The Mission was warmly greeted by the City Government and by other state-level and local officials, NGO-s (ICOMOS Austria and local NGO-s), and also had the chance to meet with architects and/or investors of two main projects (Thalia project and the new infill building on the plot of Kommod Hause). The Mission was given the necessary support for visits to the specific areas and buildings, and also had a high-quality guided visit of the historic city-center.

Throughout their entire stay and at each meeting and field-visit, the Mission was to hold discussions with the above mentioned representatives of different organisations and bodies concerning the recently reported demolitions, new construction projects (planned or already partly realised), and/or any alterations of historic buildings within the WH core and buffer zone(s). (For a detailed program of the Missions see Annex 7.3)

2. National Policy for the preservation and Management of the World Heritage Property

Austria enacted a Monument Protection Law in 1923 that protects single monuments, but excludes the surrounding ensemble. The legislation does not include ensemble protection nor has the power to prevent demolition in case of economical infeasibility. In the case that an owner of a monument neglects necessary maintenance and/or repair work, under the Styrian Building Law, the City lacks the legal authority to require maintenance or repair work other than through a common consensus resulting from negotiations and/or financial involvement. A second legal framework is the Graz Historic Centre Conservation Act; a local law applying to the City of Graz enacted by the Styrian Parliament. Within this framework, all new projects, changes of existing projects or other related developments are presented to the "Old Town Commission" (ASK) which acts as advisory board to the city. While the city may not follow the recommendation of the ASK due to legal obligations, economic pressure or actual danger for human life or health, the role of the advisory board fosters discussion, a careful weighing of issues and transparency in the decision making process.

The management structure is rather complicated due to the different levels of responsibilities, however the clarity of the rules governing the different responsibilities allow the system to function. The City has final decision power in granting or refusing building licences or demolitions, but the owner has the right to protest the decisions in court. This lack of consensus between the city and the owner often results in the lengthy process that in some cases is not very convincing or appealing to the general public. It was therefore recommended to the City of Graz to search for various voluntary management changes and strategies to identify dangers at an earlier stage (see pt. 5).

Besides the aforementioned issues, there is no doubt that the City of Graz highly appreciates the immaterial values of the inscription in the World Heritage list and is ready to follow the relevant guidelines. The City of Graz is accepting that it was an error not to have contacted UNESCO and ICOMOS in advance concerning construction and other projects that affected the Historic Centre, such as the *Kunsthhaus*, *Thalia* and *Kommodhaus* projects. To avoid similar problems occurring in the future, there was an agreement made on conclusions and recommendations. (see pt.5)

3. Identification and Assessment of Issues

Identification of issues has been realised in the context of interventions in the WH site:

In the five years since the inscription of the Historic Centre in the World Heritage List, the following events have been reported in chronological order. Among them are two cases which were reported to UNESCO by ICOMOS. (see Annex 7.4)

1) Kommod-Haus – demolition

Having been summoned to report, the City of Graz sent by letter on 18.3.2004 a report of the Directorate of the Magistrate of Graz of 26.1.2004 to the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, explaining the legal situation which led to the dismantling and destruction of the “Kommod House.” In the same letter an “Early Warning System” was announced, which will prevent such situations in the future. A copy of this report was delivered to the world Heritage Centre by a representative of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture personally on 26.4.2004.

2) Thalia-Project – vertical extension

ICOMOS Austria has criticized the vertical expansion of the Thalia-Premises. However, this extension was approved by the responsible Bundesdenkmalamt (Federal Office of Historic Monuments) by decree of 28.5.2003. The Thalia-Premises were built in 1956/57 after plans of the Viennese architect Vorderegger in the “International Style” and includes a cinema, a club-café, a dance-café and club facilities. Together with the Graz Opera, the building lies in the buffer-zone around the World Heritage Site Historic Centre of the City of Graz.

3) Kunsthaus (Art Exhibition House) – new construction

Graz was named **the** “European Cultural Capital” in 2003. The construction of the “Kunsthaus” (Art Exhibition Hall) was one of the projects within the framework of this event. The new construction is situated on the opposite side of the river Mur from the Historic Centre, but still within the core zone of the World Heritage Site. It is an addition to an existing listed monument, the so-called “Eisernes Haus” (Iron House) which itself was revolutionary when it was built in 1848/49 employing a cast-iron façade. Graz has a long tradition of including modern architecture of high quality within the historic parts of the city. Following this tradition, the Bundesdenkmalamt (Federal Office of Historic Monuments), which is responsible for changes to the “Eisernes Haus,” gave its permission for the construction of the “Kunsthaus” by decree of 10.8.2001.

The “Mur-Insel” is another new construction in the middle of the Murau River. Despite its 21st century shape, it does not harm the historic complex as a contemporary addition. Similarly the case of “elevator in the mount” can also be considered as a well-fitting contemporary development.

Other projects of “European Cultural Capital Year,” such as the "Schattenturm" (Shadow Tower) beside the "Uhrturm," were only permitted temporarily. Others, such as the elevator in the Herrengasse, are still extant today.

3.1 Management issues

At the time of nomination to the WH List, the City of Graz presented and extensively documented a detailed and convincing control/management system for the conservation of the nominated portion of the city. This system is based on national (federal) and state-level legislation for historic (scheduled) monuments, as “individual” (or separate) values, and of the state legislation entitled the “Graz Historic Centre Conservation Act 1980” which designates the historic center as the “Grazer Altstadt” (Old city of Graz). This regulation system defines areas (zones) of protection with detailed prescriptions for the preservation of buildings, public surfaces and so on. It also directs how to manage “new buildings, additions, structural alterations, measures contrary to regulations” and gives “procedural provisions”. Creating a “Historic Centre Conservation Fund” in order to assure subsidies for different purposes of relevant conservation activities has further strengthened these regulations. There are also other Styrian state regulations concerning the preservation of roofs-cape and the obligations of owners (or other responsible parties) in maintaining facades, etc.

This system has been working well in every-day circumstances. However, when special challenges emerged, some weaknesses of these regulations became apparent:

- The lack of a relevant, updated (and adequately detailed) **Master Plan**, defining the framework for new developments, possible replacements or enhancements in detail (height, volumes, parcels and/or building lines, roof-characteristics, materials, main descriptions of possible usages/functions, and welcomed architectural features like proportions, etc.) – not only for individual buildings, but also for urban-structural elements (like parking places etc.). The current system with its *reactive character* is already handicapped when the investor begins developing a project based only on the economic parameters, *without knowing exact and binding limits* or, in a positive wording: the heritage based definitions (rules) concerning how to add new values to the existing properties without harm. This Master Plan should be clear, strict and flexible in order to allow a creative management of life-indicated changes – as far as the flexibility is not harming to the existing values.
- The lack of a real **Management Plan** could be responsible for other current difficulties. This MP obviously should be seen together with above mentioned Master Plan, but should deal with a more varied content (this is not the appropriate place to discuss what a Management Plan should address – but it is important to underline the need for the adoption of this tool with care for the site/property in question).
- The city of Graz possesses a well developed “**management structure**” in general, but lacks many of the oversight structures necessary for WH purposes. In other words, after 6 years of inscription, as the special difficulties and exigencies, consequences of its WH status, are emerging, the weaknesses of a “normal” city-management will become a threat for the future of this particular property.

Recognising the weakness and the possible difficulties, the City of Graz after receiving signs given by the WH Committee, recently started to develop a new regime for enhancement of management issues. As

- a first measure or first step, a so-called “contact person”, with responsibility for the Word Heritage issues has been nominated by the City of Graz: Mr. Bertram Werle, Stadtbaudirektor (Director of the Urban Development Section of the City), whose name was announced¹ at the time of this reactive monitoring mission lead by UNESCO WH Centre.
- a second measure was the establishment of an “Early Warning System” – a kind of monitoring system – in order to prevent future unfavourable situations. However the real structure and the working method were not further explained during consultations held in the framework of this mission. The only “news” is that all representatives of each concerned bodies – like city administration, federal monuments protection office (Bundesdenkmalamt), and also from the local NGO – appear to have a regular system of co-operation².

3.2 Factors affecting the property

1. Development pressures
 - Financing restorations or “infill buildings” by new, so called “integrated,” but in reality only joint, periodically “parasite,” projects;
 - Non-appropriate use of old roof-spaces
2. A number of old/protected buildings in the WH site are subject to, or are in danger of, inappropriate use (e.g Kommod Hause or Palais Attems).
3. Tourism oriented actions, e.g. “prettifications” of public spaces, and the temptation of overdoing things and the addition of new, “interesting” elements (such as the – fortunately temporary – constructions for the Graz’s year 2003 as “Cultural Capital of Europe”).
4. Need to enhance the current legal and/or operational framework in some areas:
 - Discontinuity between federal monument protection and state-level protection of urban ensembles. During discussions, it became clear that monument protection has almost nothing to do with protection of urban ensembles. Furthermore, if a monument is lost (destroyed), the conservations authorities have no possibility to participate in the process of replacing of the former protected building.
 - Overlapping and in some cases controversial regulations of Building Codes and Monument Protection Laws. (See example of demolition of the “Kommod Hause” declared dangerous for human-life on the basis of building regulations)
 - Weaknesses of a “Consecutive” urban-planning system (cases of replacement of Kunsthhaus, or – less damaging version – the creation of an underground parking at Karmeliten platz). The heritage protection mostly deals with monuments, lacking real and institutional possibilities to influence future urban planning/ developing decisions from the heritage based point of view, even the neighbourhood of protected monuments (see example of situation of new ramps of above mentioned parking place).

¹ However it still remains a subject to be also submitted by written form.

² This operation or activity also should be presented by written form, with detailed explanations and presentation of each participants and working methods.

- Lack of (precise) definitions for new constructions in the historic context. Not only in theory, but also in the practice. E.g. the representative of the monument protection office is not a standing member of the expert committee charged to prepare decisions for the territory of Historic City of Graz. This expert committee, formed mostly of architects of whom not one represents a historic-value protection oriented view on urban development.

5. Gaps in the site-management

- Lack of a proactive system for management of changes
- Lack of systematic monitoring/maintenance activity.

There is no need for further explanation in this topic. It is however worthy to add that as for building conservation, the city of Graz has an established and large tradition, in co-operation with NGO-s, which has resulted in a seemingly efficient system. The only problem is that this “normal” system is not well suited to answers the new challenges emerging from the WH status of the old city of Graz.

4. Assessment of the State of Conservation of the Site

Obviously the economic pressure for change is increasing,

The historic centre as a whole is lively, overall well maintained and accepted by the population. In many cases small changes are visible: shops-windows, doors, colours, skylights in the roofs, several technical addition, lighting, delivery and parking difficulties. But all these elements do not disturb the character as a whole. Obviously there is a general agreement in the city of the preciousness of the historic core. But on the other hand, it seems that approaching an invisible limit where all the small changes are becoming obvious. And in the mirror of these reflections and reactions the *Kunsthhaus* is seen. It is not a discussion of whether the architecture is excellent or not, but it is the question of whether this project in its dimension, material, language of architecture and proportion is appropriate considering its proximity to the Old Town. The question should be put on the table, in what direction does the City of Graz wants to go with future projects? The decision for the new *Kommodhaus* shows that once again dimension, material and language of the intended building does not correspond with the existing urban fabric and the *Kunsthhaus may be the model for these implementations of modern architecture* (for documents concerning the *Kunsthhaus* see Annex 7.5).

Review in a detailed manner, evaluating whether or not the values on the basis of which the property was inscribed on the World Heritage List are being maintained - The way of controlling values is to use “Brief Description” (as an excerpt from inclusion’s text) – as follows:

“Graz is

- ...a particularly fine example of a central European urban complex,...

This statement *still remains valid*, despite multiple inadequate local interventions. In order to be more clear on this:

- the implementation of an “extremely contemporary” architecture, in the case of “Kunsthause” is not to be seen only from the point of view of the quality of architecture, but rather as an influential factor on this urban complex, as an additional element of urban-public life. If it was seen as an example to be followed, it would be a greater danger for the integrity and the authenticity of the property.
- the loss of “Kommod-Hause” in itself is a real and dangerous loss, and like this, it is a very serious alarm-sign, but fortunately it has only a limited impact on the urban complex as a

whole. The real threat is in the replacement of this element (formerly a historic monument) with context-breaking new architecture;

- the Thalia-komplex (see Annex 7.6), with its already-realised increased density for Opera Haus purposes, and with its planned vertical extension – and also taking into account the level of architectural ‘quality’ of the proposed solution – could lead to major modifications of this historic urban complex. Despite that this ensemble forms a portion of the buffer zone, it is in both close physical and visual contact with the core zone. The neighbourhood of the Opera Haus without and predominately with the Thalia-komplex has been one problematic area in the historic centre of City, with multiple unfinished projects over time, in a wish to enhance the vicinity. The classification of the Thalia-komplex (dating back to the 1950’s) as a monument does not simplify the case... Unfortunately the proposed answer by investors and the architectural project is far from resulting in an adequate solution. If we evaluate the impact on the urban complex, this project was harmful due to an almost total misunderstanding of the importance and role of this place and space in the close surroundings of the Opera-Haus. The execution of the project is not yet finished, however it would prove to be a substantial challenge for urban planners and architects to remedy the current situation with an alternative proposal.

b) ...which experienced many centuries of Habsburg rule...

All imprints of above-mentioned centuries are still apparent, if we are dealing with the site as a whole – in other words the overall integrity of the site has not been damaged. The only problem is if the loss of historic buildings one by one – like in the case of “Kommod Hause”, and more likely in the cases of other, non-classified (!) “common”, or “simple” elements (representing any “century” as relics of them) – is not strictly prohibited!

c) ...The old city is a harmonious blend of the architectural styles and artistic movements that have succeeded each other since the Middle Ages, ...

This is the main issue for this particular WH property. The process forming the old city (centre) of Graz obviously reflects historic circumstances of development, and does not hide what in some cases are drastic replacements, modifications, and changes on the previously existing building stock. What is important is that with (national) protection and future protection (based on the inscription on the WH List), this property is not subjected to the “simple continuation of this historic process of an architectural succession” stemming from contemporary architecture and construction.

The harmonious blend is not injured at a level that would need immediate reactions or actions. It is also clear that the conservation of historic settlements does not demand “do not change anything” – but the possible threat lies in an improper management of changes due to an inadequate definition of “harmonious” and/or an over-estimation of “rights” of our times as an additional period in the historic context.

d) ...together with cultural influences from the neighbouring regions.”

This characteristic of cultural interrelations remains a crucial point for the property’s evaluation, but it is not to be interpreted as a licence for the inclusion of every new cultural initiative. As an existing value, this is connected to the existing building stock and urban structure, so it could be compromised by injuring these values.

In a summary: the values on the basis of which the property was inscribed on the World Heritage List are being maintained with their integrity and authenticity, but there are serious signs of a real threat even in the close future – if the management system is not enhanced immediately.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

From the recently reported changes to the property of the Old City of Graz, at least 3 separate cases must be seen as serious signs of a possible trend or tendency to replace historic buildings with new architectural creations, in order to answer the challenges of economically supported development needs or expectations.

The current legal and management framework for heritage conservation, and more closely those for historic cities as world heritage sites, does not have the capacity to cover all issues raised by the new challenges. The situation in the WH site of the City of Graz has to be dealt with seriously, but until now the alterations are not deeply damaging or ruining of the O.U.V. of this property. Because of the presence of a dangerous and damaging trend for the future, the following recommendations were seen as adequate:

5.2 Recommendations:

The WH Committee is advised to ask

- for additional measures from the State Party in order to assure a more efficient conservation for WH properties on the basis of following recommendations and
- to report on the S.o.C. of City of Graz in two years to allow the Committee to evaluate and note the progress or decide on the necessity of further measures e.g. putting the site on the Endangered WH List.

The State Party (in case of Austria at the federal level) is to be

- asked whether it has the possibility to evaluate a future refinement of legislative framework for world heritage issues, focused on the priority of conservation, also for urban entities. In this line it is also
- advised to investigate the possibility of creating legal instruments for heritage protection for larger ensembles (e.g. historic settlements, heritage landscapes) at the State (federal) level.

The City of Graz (at some points in close co-operation with federal state of Styria if necessary)

- should work on a holistic urban Master Plan for the historic centre of the City of Graz, trying to define in what direction the development of the city is to be influenced and to try to recognise in advance those areas in which changes are to be expected;
- should contact UNESCO before a new project is approved, as it stands in Operational Guidelines (2005 / Para 172);
- should renew its management structure and develop an up-to-date Management Plan for implementing above mentioned Master Plan; and in connection with this,
- should implement a monitoring system as a result of the *Kommod* experience;
- should look for critical points within the “red zone” of the protected Historic Centre to begin a dialogue with the owners and perhaps help support maintenance efforts in any

direction (not only building construction, but housing, shops, events, traffic, etc.), with a similar approach for in “buffer zone”;

- should reaffirm the nomination of a permanent contact person to UNESCO (DI Werle’s name was mentioned by the City Councillor Dr. Rüscher)

6. Final remarks

The members of the joint UNESCO – ICOMOS mission to Graz are fully recognise and thank all persons, institutions and organisations taking part in the preparatory work, logistics and organisation of this mission. Special thanks are to be given to Austrian and Styrian authorities and above all to the City of Graz. Despite the wintertime weather, the mission had the ability to fulfil its duties, thanks mainly to the program, carefully organised and executed by the city officials.

7. Annexes

- 7.1 Persons contacted during the Mission
- 7.2 Documents/Materials submitted by the State Party
- 7.3 Program of the Mission
- 7.4 Orientations Map on the reported cases, other maps
- 7.5 Information materials on the “Kusthaus of Graz”
- 7.6 Presentation on the “Thalia-Komplex” Projekt
- 7.7 ToR of the Mission
- 7.8 Photos