
Vilnius Historic Centre (Lithuania) No 541

1 Basic data

State Party

Republic of Lithuania

Name of property

Vilnius Historic Centre

Location

City of Vilnius

Inscription

1994

Brief description

Political centre of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the 13th to the end of the 18th century, Vilnius has had a profound influence on the cultural and architectural development of much of Eastern Europe. Despite invasions and partial destruction, it has preserved an impressive complex of Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and classical buildings as well as its medieval layout and natural setting.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

14 March 2012

2 Issues raised

Background

The World Heritage property inscribed in 1994 comprises the Vilnius Castle zone, the Old Town which in earlier times was surrounded by a defensive wall, and the suburban zone dating from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Around this a protected area described in the Advisory Body's evaluation as "a viable buffer zone" was shown on the maps accompanying the nomination. However no textual definition of this was given in the nomination dossier.

Subsequently the World Heritage Committee noted at its 29th and 30th sessions that the visual integrity of the setting of the Old Town of Vilnius was being compromised by new high-rise constructions and the demolition of wooden buildings, and requested that the State party provide details of the redefinition of the buffer zone around the historic core for consideration by the Committee at its 32nd session (2008). In response the State Party reported that the Ministry of Culture had started correction of the boundaries, but that due to on-going changes in the legislation for the protection of cultural property the process could not proceed any faster. The State party also advised that in cooperation

with the Vilnius City Municipality, a Concept Plan for the protection of the buffer zone for the Old Town of Vilnius World Heritage site had been drafted and this was approved by Vilnius City Council in July 2006. In addition a Special Protection Plan for the buffer zone under the *Law on Protection of Immovable Cultural Heritage* was being drafted and would be submitted to the Government of Lithuania for approval. The buffer zone would therefore come into force once this Plan had been approved by the government. The State Party also stated that protection for the property and its buffer zone is also achieved through planning mechanisms. The new Master Plan for Vilnius, which was approved in 2007 and runs until 2015, recognises the boundaries set out in the Concept Plan and requires visual impact assessment on Old Town panoramas as an obligatory step in the process of designing new buildings in the setting of the historical centre. The viewpoints for the visual assessment are defined in Vilnius' Master Plan and shown on an accompanying map.

The World Heritage Committee acknowledged this information and adopted the following decision (32 COM, Quebec City, 2008):

Decision 32 COM 8B.62:

The World Heritage Committee,

1. *Having examined Documents WHC-08/32.COM/8B.Add and WHC-08/32.COM/INF.8B1.Add,*
2. *Notes the progress made towards defining and providing protection for a buffer zone for the Vilnius Historic Centre, Lithuania;*
3. *Requests the State Party to submit the buffer zone as a minor modification to the boundaries, once the Special Protection Plan has been approved which gives it legal protection.*

In a separate decision at the same session (Decision 32COM 7B.99) the World Heritage Committee requested the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre the new Regulation on the Protection of the Vilnius Old Town, as well as the Master/General Plan and updated documentation on the development of high-rise buildings in the buffer zone for review by the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies.

In its 33rd session (Seville, 2009), the World Heritage Committee reiterated its request for the State Party to submit the information requested by the World Heritage Committee at its 32nd session related to the legislation covering the property (including any new legislation), the planning instruments in force for the protection of the property, and the regulations concerning the construction of high buildings which may have an impact on the visual integrity (33COM 7B.112).

In its response of 31 January 2011 to Decision 33 COM 7B.112, the State Party advised that it had approved

Guidelines for a system of management for the Outstanding Universal Value of Vilnius Historic Centre, including setting up a co-ordinating Commission. Also, the State Party had approved the Special Protection Plan for the boundaries of the Area of Vilnius Old Town and its buffer zone by Order No V-512, 18 October 2010, and advised that the area of the property is slightly changed due to former inabilities to achieve technical accuracy in measurement. It is now 352.09 ha (whereas it was previously recorded in the nomination dossier as 359.5 ha). The property boundary is protected by the *Law on Protection of Immovable Cultural Heritage* 1995 (Article 11, paragraph 2).

The World Heritage Committee noted this information (UNESCO Headquarters, 2011) and again reiterated its request to the State Party to provide adequate information in regard to regulations concerning the construction of high-rise buildings, beyond the proposed buffer zone which may have an impact on the Outstanding Universal Value including the visual integrity of the property, and repeated its request for the State Party to submit a proposal for a minor boundary modification related to the creation of a buffer zone, for review by the Advisory Bodies and approval by the World Heritage Committee (Decision 35COM 7B.98).

Modification

This evaluation is based on the Special Area Plan 2010 map and accompanying explanatory text submitted with the State Party's response to Decision 33 COM 7B.112 referred to above. The area of the proposed Buffer Zone of Vilnius Old Town is 1,912.24 ha, and as shown in the map provided, generally covers the 'Monument Preservation Zones (1, 2, 3A and 3B) of the central part of Vilnius' shown on Map 3 in the revised nomination of 1994. The proposed boundary follows that of 'Vilnius cultural heritage sites and their buffer zones', an area of 1,958 ha shown on the 'Plan of Vilnius Cultural Heritage Sites' relating to the Concept Plan and received as part of supplementary information provided by the State Party in January 2006, except for Vingis Park in the western loop of the river. Comparison of the two maps indicates that the reduction in area of the buffer zone as shown in the Special Area Plan 2010 is due to its exclusion of Vingis Park to the west. This is shown as a Nature Protected Area on Map 3 referred to above. The proposed buffer zone therefore appears to be in accordance with the "viable buffer zone" referred to in the Advisory Body's evaluation of 1994.

The State Party also advised that another Special Area Protection Plan: "design documentation of heritage management" is being prepared to set or amend heritage protection requirements and the system of specific management measures in the Vilnius Old Town and its Buffer Zone. Currently the buffer zone is protected by Article II, paragraph 5 of the *Law on Protection of Immovable Cultural Heritage*, outlined in Annex II to the State Party's response to Decision 33 COM 7B.112, which protects the subzone of visual protection outside the territory of an object of cultural

heritage by prohibiting "activities likely to hinder the survey of the object of cultural heritage".

In addition it is stated that according to the Municipal Master Plan (2007-2015), tall buildings may not be erected in the buffer zone. New buildings may only be erected to reconstruct the destroyed urban plan and spatial structure or in continuation of the traditional principles of space formation. When planning new buildings in the buffer zone an analysis of their visual impact on the protected areas must be carried out. The analysis includes views from Old Town viewing control points and from important public spaces.

This information does not address the concerns of the World Heritage Committee as expressed in previous decisions as to whether there are already high-rise buildings within or beyond the buffer zone which may impact the Outstanding Universal Value including the visual integrity of the property. However ICOMOS considers that the buffer zone boundary which has been established in the Special Protection Plan and approved by the Government of Lithuania appears to be in accordance with the World Heritage Committee's original understanding.

3 ICOMOS Recommendations

Recommendation with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the proposed buffer zone for Vilnius, Lithuania, be **approved**.

ICOMOS also recommends that the State Party be encouraged to complete the Special Area Protection Plan: "design documentation of heritage management" currently being prepared to set or amend heritage protection requirements and the system of specific management measures in the Vilnius Old Town and its Buffer Zone and submit it to the World Heritage Committee for review.

