

**IDENTIFICATION**

- Nomination** : Historic core of Prague
- Location** : Central Bohemia
- State Party** : Czechoslovakia
- Date** : 26 September 1991

**DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY**

The historic city of Prague comprises three separate cities - the Old Town (Staré Město), the Lesser Town (Malá Strana), and the New Town (Nové Město).

The earliest settlement on the banks of the Vltava River dates back to prehistory, as excavations have shown. In the late 9th century a fortified settlement was built on a hill on the left bank of the river, the site now occupied by Prague Castle. This extended down towards the river, whilst a second fortress was constructed on the opposite bank (Vyšehrad). During the 10th century the intervening areas were gradually settled.

In the 10th century Prague became the capital of the Bohemian state, and a bishopric was founded there in 973. Construction of the early Romanesque Cathedral of St Vitus began in the later 11th century. In 1135 Soběslav II began work on a large stone castle, replacing the earlier wooden structure. The 12th century saw considerable expansion of the city, with a Premonstratensian monastery being built at Strahov and the construction of a new stone bridge across the Vltava, which led to the growth of the Staré Město.

The mid 14th century saw further growth, with the foundation of the Nové Město, which was encircled by a defensive wall. From the mid 14th century onwards Prague became a major centre of culture, with artists and architects coming from all parts of Europe, but notably Italy. The result was a massive programme of rebuilding.

A disastrous fire in 1541 destroyed much of the settlement on the left bank of the Vltava, and in the rebuilding Renaissance styles predominated. The end of the Thirty Years War in 1648 saw Prague declining, and it was not until the end of the century that it recovered, commemorated by the vigorous development of High Baroque.

Urban development from 1880 onwards resulted in the demolition of many old buildings, notably in the Jewish Quarter on the right bank of the

Vltava. However, the city benefited from the construction of a large number of outstanding buildings in contemporary style.

The city is rich in monuments from all periods of its history. Of particular importance are Prague Castle, the Cathedral of St Vitus, Hradčany Square in front of the Castle, and the Valdštejn Palace on the left bank of the river, the Gothic Charles Bridge, the Romanesque Rotunda of the Holy Rood, the Gothic arcaded houses round the Old Town Square, and the High Gothic Minorite Church of St James in the Staré Město, and the late 19th century buildings and town plan of the Nové Město.

### **AUTHENTICITY**

The authenticity of Prague is unquestionable. It represents an organic urban development over more than a thousand years. There are some examples of insensitive over-restoration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but work since the end of World War II has been of the highest quality - as, for example, around the Old Town Square or more recently in Paris Street.

### **MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION**

The Historic Reservation created by Decrees in 1971 and 1981 covers 866 ha and includes 3670 buildings, of which 1540 are designated cultural monuments. A comprehensive management plan has been in force since 1986 and is administered by the relevant municipal, regional, and central government authorities.

### **EVALUATION**

#### **Qualities**

Prague is one of the most beautiful cities in Europe in terms of both its setting and its individual buildings. As an urban ensemble that demonstrates its long history: through its plan and structures it has few parallels anywhere in the world. This fact has been acknowledged by the responsible authorities since the mid 1950s, and a sensitive programme of restoration and conservation has been in force since that time, albeit one that has been handicapped owing to a chronic lack of funds, despite the considerable efforts made, especially by the municipal authorities.

#### **Additional comments**

The area is large and it is inevitable that lack of adequate funds will have meant that restoration and conservation have had to proceed gradually. As a result there are buildings and areas where the state of conservation is inadequate. However, the management plan provides for progressive

restoration and conservation on a systematic basis, dealing with urban blocks rather than individual buildings.

Nine members of the ICOMOS Bureau had personal knowledge of Prague.

### **ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION**

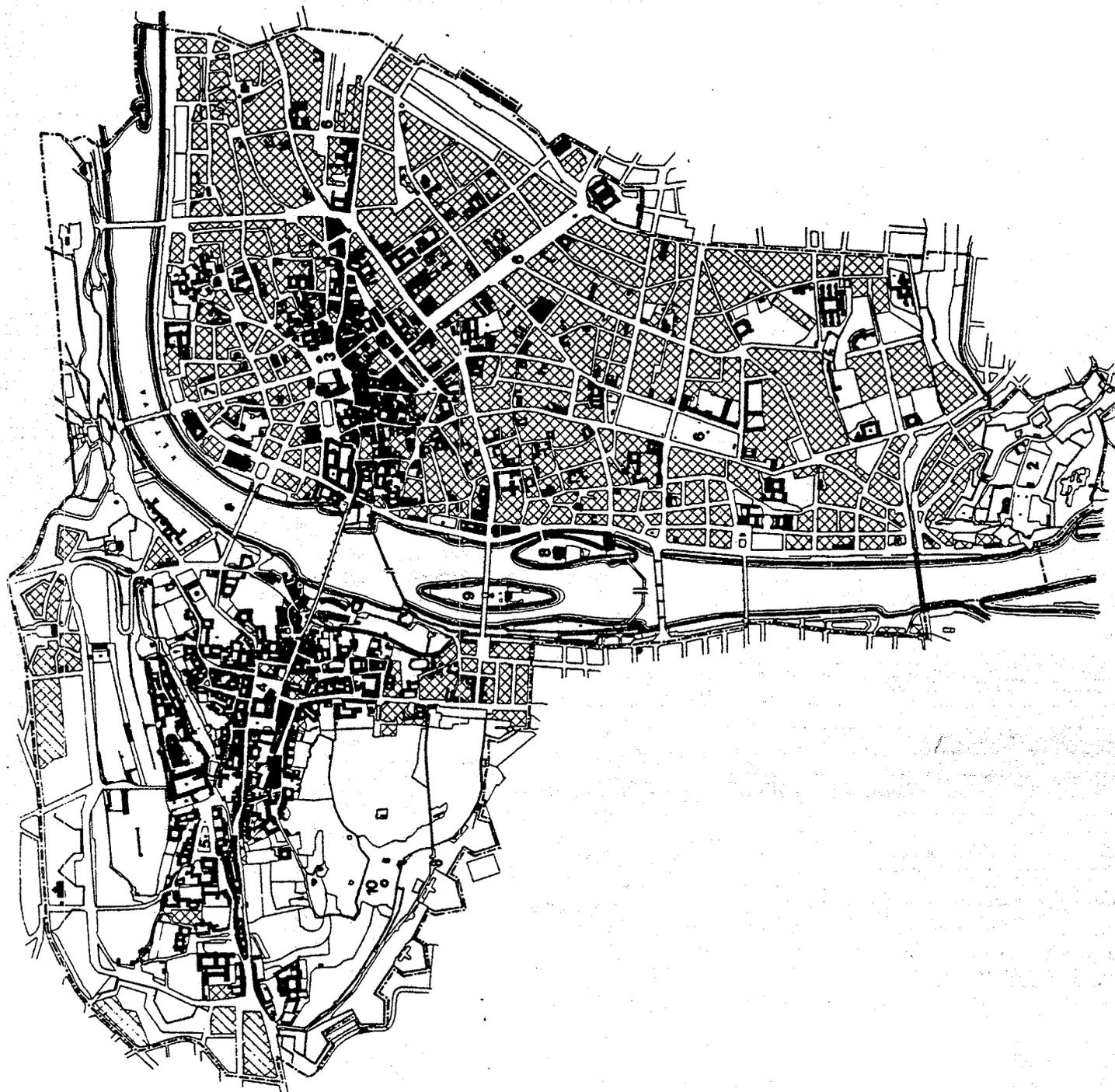
That this cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of Criteria ii, iv, and vi.

- **Criterion ii** : The historic centre of Prague admirably illustrates the process of continuous urban growth from the Middle Ages to the present day. Its important role in the political, economic, social, and cultural evolution of central Europe from the 14th century onwards and the richness of its architectural and artistic traditions meant that it served as a major model for urban development for much of central and eastern Europe.

- **Criterion iv** : Prague is an urban architectural ensemble of outstanding quality, in terms of both its individual monuments and its townscape, and one that is deservedly world-famous.

- **Criterion vi** : The role of Prague in the medieval development of Christianity in central Europe was an outstanding one, as was its formative influence in the evolution of towns. By virtue of its political significance in the later Middle Ages and later, it attracted architects and artists from all over Europe, who contributed to its wealth of architectural and artistic treasures. The 15th century creation of the Charles University made it a renowned seat of learning, a reputation that it has preserved up to the present day. Since the reign of Charles IV Prague has also been the intellectual and cultural centre of its region, and is indelibly associated with such world-famous names as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Franz Kafka.

ICOMOS, October 1992



Prague : plan de la zone protégée /  
plan of the protected area