

CZECH REPUBLIC

Historic Centre of Prague

Brief description

Built between the 11th and 18th centuries, the Old Town, the Lesser Town and the New Town speak of the great architectural and cultural influence enjoyed by this city since the Middle Ages. The many magnificent monuments, such as Hradcany Castle, St Vitus Cathedral, Charles Bridge and numerous churches and palaces, built mostly in the 14th century under the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles IV.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription 1992

Agency responsible for site management

- National Institute for the Protection and Conservation of Monuments and Sites
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2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria C (ii), (iv), (vi)

Justification provided by the State Party

§ 24 /i/ Historic Prague is one of the most significant of the European representatives of urbanistic development over the course the 1100 years of its existence. Specimens of all periods of style from the Pre-Romanesque up to modern times are welded together into a compact entity. In a number of style periods Prague architecture rose right up to the very summit of artistic development on a European and even world scale. Historic Prague is truly a masterpiece of the artistic spirit of mankind.

§ 24 /ii/ The historic areas of Prague's New Town, especially its squares and adjoining residential blocks, represents the highest manifestation of Medieval urbanism. The architectonic works of Prague's gothic period of the 14th and 15th centuries and in the high Baroque of the first half of the 18th century and also in the years before and after the first World War, influenced the development of architecture in central Europe and possibly in the whole of Europe. Prague is one of

the most important world centres of artistic life in the spheres of urbanism and architecture.

§ 24 /iii/ Attention in Prague must be drawn to the complexes of archaeological monuments, as, for instance, the below-ground parts of Prague Castle and the large numbers of former romanesque houses in the Old Town which were incorporated into the body of gothic houses. They demonstrate the advanced life style in Prague in the Middle Ages.

§ 24 /iv/ The architecture of Historic Prague contains excellent examples of the development and typology of its burghers' houses between the 12th and the 18th centuries, the most varied types of churches, especially from the gothic and baroque ages, and finally, numerous, very interesting examples, of apartment houses from the 19th and 20th centuries. Prague palaces from the romanesque age right up to 19th century are a specific and impressive type of architecture. Some types of public buildings are also very remarkable.

In the sense of § 24 /v/, Prague historic architecture is a unique collection of traditional dwelling houses the ground plan, location, fittings, and architectonic details of which depict the very multiform and dynamic development of Prague civilization as well as the culture of housing from the Middle Ages up to more recent times. There is perhaps no other city which can boast of such a quantity of historic dwelling houses whose architectonic organism is a result of long-term development and transformations in style in the course of centuries.

§ 24 /vi/ Already in the Middle Ages, Prague had become one of the leading centres of culture of west European Christianity. In the last decades of the 14th and the first years of the 15th century, the atmosphere at Prague university contributed towards the formation of the ideals of the Hussite Movement and these represented the first steps on the road to reformation. The mood in Prague in the 16th and early 17th centuries was one of unique, highly humanistic religious tolerance which, regrettably, was brought to an early end by the Thirty Years War which began and ended in Prague.

There is nothing to compare with historic Prague whose panoramic values within an exceptionally impressive natural frame, are in harmony with its internal urbanistic and architectonic content, characterized both by the large amount of historic buildings and also their excellent quality. The whole 1100 years of development of Prague is clearly seen on its architectonic manifestations of all periods of style. In the gothic, renaissance, baroque

and more modern times, before and after the First World War, Prague architecture rose to the heights of European and even world development. Prague's medieval urbanism is unique.

For all these reasons historic Prague stands beyond comparison with other large historic cities of Europe, perhaps only with the exception of the absolutely incommensurable Rome.

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

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.

Committee Decision

Bureau (1992): The Bureau recommended the inscription of this property and took note of the new proposal for the boundaries of the buffer zone, but requested ICOMOS to consider the possibility of applying criterion (vi) for this inscription as well.

Committee (1992): The Committee made no statement.

- Statement of significance adequately defines the outstanding universal value of the site
- No change required

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone: adequate

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained so far
- Significant changes to the authenticity/integrity have occurred: due to the functional overloading and unsuitable re-building of some monuments for new purposes, in recent 15 years cases of losses of the original historic layouts have been seen, incorrect selection of building materials and building procedures and loss of art and craft details; trend of the interfering, mass and volume over-dimensioned new buildings in the buffer zone of the site, with direct visual contact with the historic centre; free courtyards and other historically non-built up areas were built up; new buildings filled the building clearances or replaced the demolished individually unprotected buildings; unsuccessful loft building-ins or additional buildings of town houses were performed that cause negative changes of the roofs landscape even in the most picturesque parts of the city; valuable archaeological terrain of the city is interfered with new construction
- Major changes to the Outstanding Universal Value may occur: other high-rise buildings in the buffer zone and new buildings in historically never built-up lands in exposed views at the embankment of the river; problems also reflected by the Strategic Plan of the Capital of Prague for the period 1999 – 2006

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- Law No. 20/1987 Coll., on the state monuments care; decree of the government of the Czech Socialist Republic No.66/1971 Coll., on the conservation area in the capital of Prague; decision of the Department of Culture of the National Committee of the Capital of Prague No. kul/5 – 932/81 of May 19, 1981 by which the buffer zone is determined of the conservation area in the capital of Prague; decree of the government on the declaration of some cultural monuments national cultural monuments; decrees of the government No.182/1993 Coll. and 182/1996 Coll. on the conditions of protection of the national cultural monument of the seat of the Parliament of the Czech Republic in Prague; decree of the

government No.55/1954 Coll., on protected area of the Prague Castle

- The town-planning plan of the settlement formation of the capital of Prague; the strategic plan of the Capital of Prague of May 25, 2003 for the period 1999-2006; transfer of decision-making competences to the individual municipal parts, especially in the field of town-planning decision-making; regulation No.26/1999 of the Capital of Prague on common technical requirements for the construction in the capital of Prague; regulation No.6/2004 of the Capital of Prague by which regulation No.27/1998 is amended
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective.

Actions proposed:

- Legislative protection is a sufficiently efficient instrument. However, for the territory of the site it is necessary to elaborate the regulatory plan, because the plan of the settlement formation is not detailed enough to ensure sufficiently the protection of the cultural values of the site.

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Urban centre, religious use, visitor attraction, functions of capital city

Management /Administrative Body

- Steering group to be established following up with the establishment of the function of the coordinator in 2006. At present its function is fulfilled partially by the Commission of the Board of the Capital of Prague for the monuments care in the territory of the Capital of Prague
- Coordinator to be appointed
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: regional
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

Actions proposed:

- At the level of the Municipal Authority of the Capital of Prague the steering group will be established and the coordinator appointed by the end of 2005

5. Management Plan

- Management plan is under preparation
- To be completed and adopted: 06/2007

- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: Municipal Authority of the Capital of Prague

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- State funds: Programme of regeneration of Municipal Conservation Areas and Municipal Conservation Zones, Programme of Rescue of Architectonic Heritage, Emergency Programme and Programme of Restoration of Movable Cultural Monuments and financing of the Management of the Prague Castle; local administration – funds of the city and subsidies of the region; the churches; private funds – owners of the objects, foundations
- World Heritage Fund
- Solidarity Fund of the European Union; Prague Heritage Found; Getty Institute
- Sufficient funding for management; adequate funding for conservation and protection

7. Staffing Levels

- 49 full-time staff members

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Very good: conservation, promotion, visitor management
- Good: interpretation; education; management
- Additional professional staff resources from organizations of the monuments care available in Prague in the field of history of art and architecture at the universities, in the institutes of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, in galleries and museums
- Volunteers e.g. from NGO Club for Ancient Prague

8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- National Committee ICOMOS; scientific council of the National Institute for the Protection and Conservation of Monuments and Sites; universities of all directions with their seats in Prague; Archaeological Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic; Institute of History of Art of the Academy of Sciences; Institute of Theoretical and Applied Mechanics of the Academy of Sciences; Company Archaia Praha

- National Library; State Central Archive; Archive of the Capital of Prague; National Museum; National Gallery; Museum of the Capital of Prague; Gallery of the Capital of Prague; Jewish Museum; Memorial of the National Literature
- Training on site management available for stakeholders

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 2871636 (accommodations according to Czech Statistical Office), 2004
- Visitor facilities: visitor centre, museums, and all facilities of large capital city
- Facilities considered adequate
- No visitor management plan

10. Scientific Studies

- Risk Assessment; studies related to the value of the site; monitoring exercises; condition surveys; impact of World Heritage designation; archaeological surveys; visitor management; transportation studies; statistical year-book
- Studies mainly used for conservation of the site

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- An adequate number of signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on some publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors, local communities, businesses, local authorities
- Special thematic exhibitions
- Web sites available: www.prague-info.cz; www.praha-mesto.cz
- Local participation: Election of the municipal board of representatives, election of the boards of representatives of the municipal parts and participation in the commissions, e.g. in the commission of the Council of the Capital of Prague for monuments care. The inhabitants may also give their opinions on the problems of the monuments care for the site through Internet pages www.pamatky.praha-mesto.cz

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

Conservation interventions

- Conservation and restoration works at the most significant monuments, mostly in the state, municipal ownership or ownership of the churches: overall repair of the representative building of the Municipal House, overall repair, restoration and partial making accessible of the Wallenstein Palace restoration of the interior and exterior of the Old-new Synagogue, restoration of the jacket of St. Nicholas church in the Lesser Town, repairs performed in a demanding manner and restoration of the Lichtenstein, Tuscan and Nostic Palaces, St. Vitus cathedral, several churches, the repair and restoration of the Emauzy Abbey and the Strahov Monastery, the repair of the southern wing of the Old Town Townhall, securing of the pillars of Charles Bridge. Overall repair was performed in the majority of valuable historic gardens (the Wallenstein, Vrtbovská gardens, the gardens under the Prague Castle). In the large part of historic centre asphalt was cancelled and replaced by stone pavements with mosaic patterns in the pavements characteristic of Prague; care for public verdure both in the parks and by new planting in the streets
- Present state of conservation: Patchy

Threats and Risks to site

- Development pressure; environmental pressure; natural disasters; number of inhabitants; tourism visitor; criminality and vandalism
- The interest in investments in the historic centre of the city was caused by the enormously increased tourism and prestigious address in the centre of the capital of the country. The trend of re-building of objects, pressure on additional buildings, building up of all free lands, including courtyards, loft additional building-ins, underground parking places and changes of use do not stop, they rather increase; volume of personal and freight transport increased rapidly with increase in emissions of nitrogen oxides and secondary dustiness; both banks of the Vltava river endangered by higher stages of flood activity. In 2002 the most extensive flood occurred for more than 100 years and extensive material damages to the objects and infrastructure of the city; decrease in the number of inhabitants residing permanently in the historic centre dropped from 41,848 to 32,853 persons between 1992 and 2004 due to re-buildings of some residential houses into hotels, deterioration of the residential environment due to the influence of tourism; tourism pressure concentrates on the

so-called Royal Path in the Old Town and the Lesser Town and on the area of the Prague Castle. Despite the unambiguous economic benefit for the lessees and owners, it seems that tourism at those places is on the verge of bearing capacity and should not be increased, rather dispersed also to other places. After 1992 criminality increased in the fields of pick pocketing, prostitution, street sale of drugs; Damaging of the parterres, houses, sculptures and sculptural groups, and also destroying or misappropriation of the art-craft components of the objects. A serious problem is the damaging of monuments objects by graffiti.

- Emergency measures to be taken: Elaboration and approval of the town-planning plan, elaboration and approval of the regulatory plan for the territory of the site; plan of building transport rounds for relieving of the transport loading of the historic centre; plan of protection of cultural monuments in the territory of the site. The risk of floods was decreased by anti-flood measures accomplished in 2000-2005; municipal security camera system against criminality

13. Monitoring

- Formal monitoring programme since 1998
- Key indicators: Panoramas; town-planning with historic street lines, municipal blocks and the character of built-up area; demolition of areas and objects; inclusion of new buildings into the character of the built-up area; roofs landscape and its changes; decrease in the permanent residential fund, sociological changes, vacated and dilapidated objects
- Continuous photographic documentation of positive and negative changes

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation; social; economic
- Strengths: condition of public areas improved markedly (arrangements of the streets, squares, return to the traditional pavement of the road surfaces and pavements, planting verdure, municipal movables), parks and historic gardens; majority of churches and a number of palaces and monumental buildings in the territory of the estate repaired in an exemplary manner; several remarkable buildings originated of an excellent architectonic quality; Quantity of sulphur oxide decreased

significantly slowing down corrosion of stone and other building materials; increased interest in monuments care with new civil and interest groupings oriented at the knowledge and preservation of monuments

- Weaknesses: town-planning plan not approved yet; mass tourism; Pressure of investors on increasing of capacity of the repaired buildings; strong pollution of the atmosphere and noise; low permeability of the municipal roads for transport, lack of by-pass routes around the internal city and retention parking places in its periphery

Future actions:

- The town-planning documents including the solution of the transport problems will be completed and approved. The function of the coordinator and the steering group will be established and, subsequently, the management plan of the site will be elaborated.
- Financing by grants of the Capital of Prague, municipal parts, the state in the form of subsidies programmes of the Ministry of Culture and the European Union