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# World Heritage

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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,  
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POUR L'EDUCATION, LA SCIENCE ET LA CULTURE

CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD  
CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

CONVENTION CONCERNANT LA PROTECTION DU PATRIMOINE  
MONDIAL, CULTUREL ET NATUREL

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE / COMITE DU PATRIMOINE MONDIAL

Thirty-second session / Trente et deuxième session

Quebec City, Canada / Quebec, Canada  
2 – 10 July 2008 / 2 – 10 juillet 2008

**Item 7 of the Provisional Agenda: State of conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List and/or on the List of World Heritage in Danger.**

**Point 7 de l'Ordre du jour provisoire: Etat de conservation de biens inscrits sur la Liste du patrimoine mondial et/ou sur la Liste du patrimoine mondial en péril**

JOINT ICOMOS/UNESCO (WHC) EXPERT MISSION REPORT / RAPPORT DE MISSION CONJOINTE DES EXPERTS DE L'ICOMOS ET DE L'UNESCO (CPM)

Historic Centre of Prague (Czech Republic) (C 616) / Centre Historique de Prague (République Tchèque) ( C 616)

27 February – 2 March 2008 / 27 février – 2 mars 2008

This mission report should be read in conjunction with Document:  
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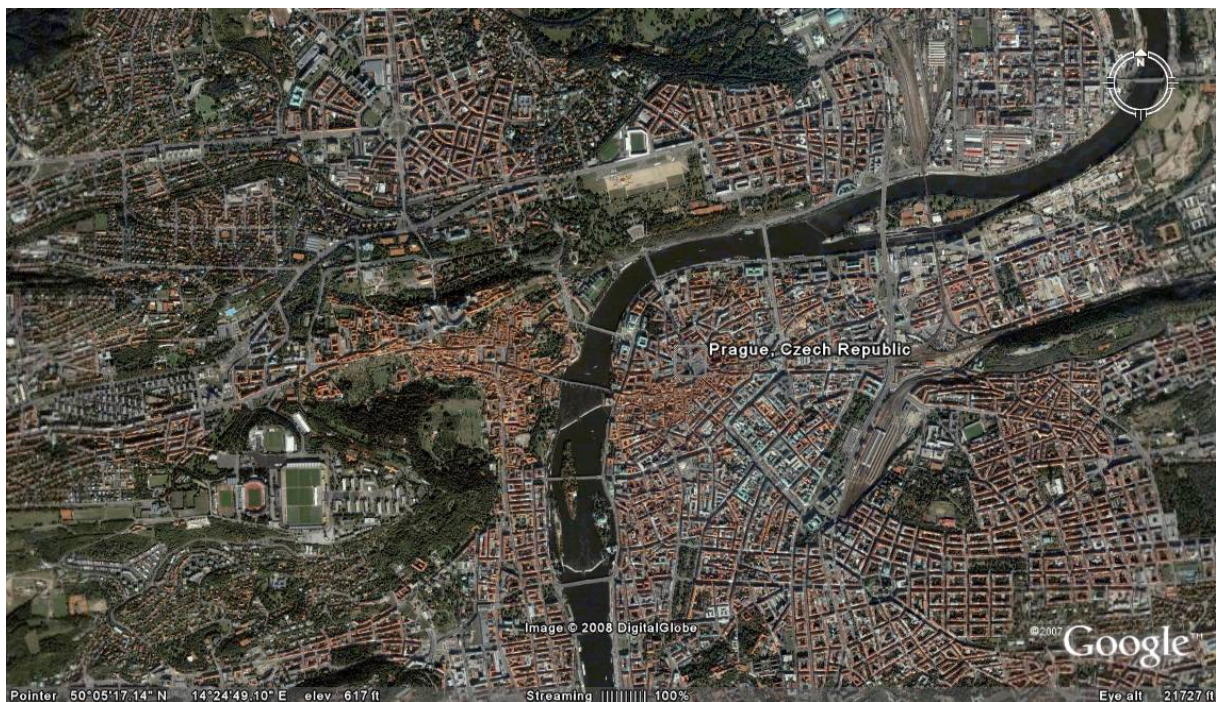


International Council on  
Monuments and Sites

Conseil International  
des Monuments et des Sites

## REPORT OF THE UNESCO-ICOMOS REACTIVE MONITORING MISSION TO THE HISTORIC CENTRE OF PRAGUE

27 FEBRUARY - 2 MARCH 2008



**Members of the Mission to Prague:**  
**UNESCO: Mr Francesco Bandarin, Director of World Heritage Centre, UNESCO**  
**ICOMOS: Mr Bruno Maldoner, Representative of ICOMOS**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Particular thanks go to the Permanent Delegation of the Czech Republic to UNESCO, in particular to Mr. H. E. Mr. Petr Janyska, Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the Czech Republic to UNESCO, for the excellent cooperation and organization of the mission.

Special thanks go to Mr. Zdenek Novak, Director General, International Affairs Section, Ministry of Culture and Ms. Lada Pekárková, Département de la culture, de la protection du patrimoine et du tourisme, Mairie de la capitale Prague, as well as Mr. Michael Benes, Secretary in charge of collaboration with UNESCO, Ministry of Culture, Mr. Borek Votava, Executive Director of the City Development Authority, City of Prague, who provided valuable information on the current situation of the World Heritage property during the meetings, presentations and site visits and to Ms Daniela Zitková, interpreter.

We would also like to acknowledge the great interest of the different stakeholders at the World Heritage property, in particular Mr Josef Stulc, President ICOMOS Czech National Committee and the representatives of the civil society, in particular Mr Martin Skalsky, Association Arnika.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

Following the Decision 31 COM 7B.94 of the World Heritage Committee at its 31st session (July 2007), the State Party provided on 12 February 2008 the state of conservation report of the property, including the first draft of the visual impact study of high-rise buildings on the Historic Centre of Prague, as well as inviting the joint UNESCO-ICOMOS monitoring mission to Prague from 27 February to 2 March 2008.

The Mission successfully concluded its technical review of the situation based on on-site visits and on extensive documentation and meetings with relevant stakeholders. A report will be provided to the World Heritage Committee at its 32<sup>nd</sup> session in July 2008, based on the following conclusions and recommendations:

- i. The Mission acknowledged that the City of Prague has been able to manage successfully an important restoration and conservation program and that significant improvements have been brought about in the overall legislative, planning and management system related to urban conservation.
- ii. The Mission recommended to strengthen the authority of the National Heritage Institute to enable it to orient the main decisions affecting the integrity of the Historic Centre.
- iii. The Mission recommended that the rules presently in force to manage processes such as infill, reconstruction, rehabilitation and conservation should be clarified and integrated in

a unitary code. Their primary aim should be the conservation of the integrity of the original fabric of the City.

- iv. The Mission recommended to urgently complete and approve the Conservation Plan for the Historic Centre in order to provide an effective zoning and planning tool for the conservation process of the World Heritage property.
- v. The Mission recommended to complete and adopt the high-rise limitations plan, in order to avoid possible visual intrusion in the Historic Urban Landscape of Prague.
- vi. The Mission recommends to conduct an evaluation of the present buffer zones of the Historic Centre in order to assess their effectiveness in protecting the visual integrity of the City and recommends, if needed, to extend them or to adopt new appropriate zoning regulations.
- vii. The Mission recommended that, according to Art. 172 of the Operational Guidelines, the State Party informs the World Heritage Centre of any project that could affect the visual integrity of the World Heritage site.
- viii. The Mission recommended, in the case of the Pankrác Plain, to limit the height of the new high-rise constructions to a maximum of 60-70 mt., to limit the visual impacts on the Historic Urban Landscape of Prague.
- ix. The Mission finally encouraged the State Party to complete the Management Plan of the World Heritage property within the year 2008 as a comprehensive tool for the coordination of all the different regulatory and policy framework existing or foreseen for the historic centre, and for strengthening scope and implementation of zoning, and to submit it to the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies for evaluation.

## **1 BACKGROUND TO THE MISSION**

### **1.1 Inscription history**

The World Heritage property of the Historic Centre of Prague (Czech Republic) was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1991, under *Criteria*: Cultural site (ii)(iv)(vi) during the 16<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee. The Committee made no statement.

### **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.

## **1.2 Inscription criteria and World Heritage values**

### *Statement of Significance:*

The outstanding universal value of the Historic Centre of Prague is defined by criteria (ii), (iv) and (vi), adopted by the World Heritage Committee at the time of inscription:

- 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.

## **1.2 Examination of the State of Conservation by the World Heritage Committee and its Bureau**

Following the numerous letters received from local NGOs since June 2005 concerning projects potentially impacting the visual integrity of the property, the World Heritage Centre received the State Party's state of conservation report in September 2005, as well as information regarding a project for new buildings in the Pankrác Plain in June 2006.

On 10 May 2007, the State Party submitted to the World Heritage Centre a report on the state of conservation of the Historic Centre of Prague describing the development of the urban project in the Pankrác Plain, as well as a report on the construction project of two towers. This report specifies that the construction project of the two towers complies with the land-use plan already in enforce at the time of the inscription of the site on the World Heritage List. It also confirms that the two towers are located in the buffer zone of the property.

The World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS expressed their serious concern regarding the two proposed high-rise buildings planned to be added to the skyline of existing buildings constructed before the inscription of the Historic City of Prague on the World Heritage List.

The World Heritage Committee at its 31st session (31 COM 7B.94, Christchurch, New Zealand, July 2007) examined the state of conservation of the property and expressed its serious concern about the proposed high-rise building projects within the buffer zone which potentially could impact on the visual integrity of the Historic Centre of Prague.

The World Heritage Committee requested the State Party to reconsider current building projects as to their impacts on the World Heritage property's Outstanding Universal Value, and also requested that any new construction projects respect the Outstanding Universal Value and important views to and from the property.

The World Heritage Committee recommended to the State Party to conduct comparative studies in terms of sustainable management of historic towns in cooperation with the relevant Scientific Committees of the Advisory Bodies, and requested the State Party to invite a joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS reactive monitoring mission to assess the state of conservation of the property.

### **1.3 Justification of the mission** (terms of reference, itinerary, programme and composition of mission team provided in Annex)

The present Report of the joint UNESCO-ICOMOS mission was requested by the World Heritage Committee (31 CPM 7B.94) to assess the state of conservation of the Historic Centre of Prague, and to evaluate the impacts of high-rise building projects within the buffer zone on the authenticity and visual integrity of the property.

The mission took place from February 27 to March 2, 2008, and was conducted by Francesco Bandarin, Director of the World Heritage Centre and Bruno Maldoner, ICOMOS representative.

## **2 NATIONAL POLICY FOR THE PRESERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTY**

### **2.1. Population and economic trends of the historic Centre of Prague**

The Capital City of the Czech Republic, Prague is home to more than 1.2 million people, while its metropolitan area is estimated to have a population of over 1.9 million.

The Czech Republic has experienced a rapid development process after the fall of Communism in 1989.

The pace of development has been particularly sustained in Prague, a city that has reached in a short time an economic level comparable to many western European Cities.

Today, the GDP per capita of Prague is more than double that of the Czech Republic as a whole. With a per-capita GDP (PPP - purchasing power standard) equal, in 2004, to 157.1% of the European Union average, the region of Prague ranks among the 12 richest EU regions.

The development of Prague is linked to the expansion and modernisation of the service and manufacturing sectors in the city and the surrounding area. The city has attracted many international companies.

The Historic Centre of Prague has been at the core of this rapid development process, based on the growth of tourist services and the location of offices and business centres.

This process, similar to the ones that have characterised the development of most of the historic centres in Western Europe in the post-war period, has resulted in a 25% decline of the resident population in the historic centre in the past two decades (from about 40,877 in 1993 to about 30,714 in 2007), a trend that seems now relatively stabilised.

It appears that in recent years pressures for the location of offices in the Centre have eased, and that the construction of new apartments in the centre has partially reduced the pace of population decrease. Inevitably, there has been a change on the structure of the resident population, as more affluent groups, able to afford the higher housing costs, have moved in.

The main change factor in the historic centre has been the growth of tourism, that has rapidly made of Prague one of the main European destinations. Tourist flows are today above the level of 4 million visitors a year, a figure comparable to cities like Salzburg or Vienna, Berlin or Madrid.

The growth of tourism has prompted the location in the Historic Centre of many services such as shops, restaurants and hotels, thus creating a pressure for the transformation of many historic buildings, and increasing the demand for private transportation and parking.

## **2.2 Institutional system**

The system in charge of the conservation of the Historic Centre of Prague is based on two Institutions, with different goals and responsibilities that cooperate on a day-to-day basis for the effective management of the conservation process.

They are the Department of Culture, Heritage Protection and Tourism of the City of Prague, on one side, and the National Heritage Institute, a State Institution with branches in all the heritage sites in the country, employing over 1500 functionaries, on the other side.

This Institution, established in the 1990's on a model similar to English Heritage, has a Prague branch in charge of all conservation activities in the capital city. The Prague branch is relatively well staffed (45 technical staff) and is in charge of most of the restoration activities, as well as of the controls of modifications of all the listed buildings.

However, the function of the National Heritage Institute remains an advisory one, and the City is not obliged to accept its recommendations for its deliberations. The delivery of building permits is under the authority of a municipal Building Commission that has full authority in this area.

## **2.3. Legislation and planning tools**

The establishment of a conservation legislation and planning system for the Historic Centre of Prague goes back to the period of the independent Republic between the two World Wars, but was developed in modern form under the communist government in the post World War II era.



In particular, in 1971, the historic centre Prague was declared as a Heritage site, and in 1987 a new decree provided protection for individual historic buildings located in the historic centre, as well as protection for the green areas and the skyline.

In 1981, the buffer zone surrounding the historic centre was established on the basis of a national decision. This decision concerned all forms of alterations (infrastructure, buildings) and included a provision to monitor the effects of new construction on the landscape.

Unfortunately, this legislation did not prove very effective, as it was during the last phase of the communist regime that some of the high-rise constructions that today damage the visual integrity of the historic centre of Prague were built.

In 1987, the Government also issued the main legislation on the management of historic buildings and archaeological areas. This legislation defines the roles and the areas of competence of the different administrations, and – even if modernised after the end of the communist regime - provides the basic management framework in place today for the conservation of the historic areas.

The current planning framework existing for the protection of the Historic Centre of Prague dates from the 1990s, and it is based on a zoning plan that regulates the land uses and types of development admissible for the Historic Centre. The regulatory tool has been complemented by several new Plans and Ordinances, and notably the following:

- the 1999 Prague City Development Plan, amended in 2006, that establishes the boundaries of the Conservation zone and of the buffer zones.
- the Ordinance 32/1999 that bans the construction of high-rise buildings in proximity to the Historic Centre.

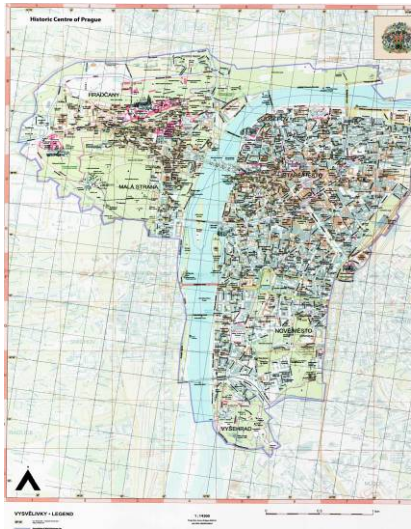
While these tools offer some important elements for the overall management of the development process, the Mission noticed that due to the inadequacy of the basic zoning tool, the current practice is based on variances (over 3000 since the fall of the Communist regime).

This building approval system is clearly not satisfactory, as it leaves the possibility of approval of development projects that could impact on the urban landscape.

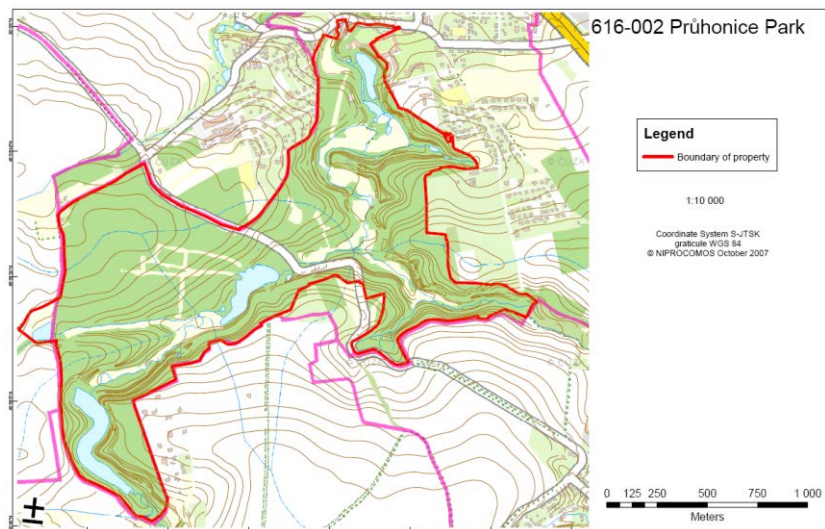
A new Conservation Plan of the historic areas has been started in the year 2000. This plan, based on an integrated approach to urban conservation has unfortunately never been approved, and is now considered outdated. However, it was stated that it is widely used as a basis for decision making by the building authorities.

#### **2.4. Boundaries and buffer zones**

The boundaries of the site as inscribed define a serial property constituted of two components: the Historic Centre (866 ha. in size), which formed the object of the Nomination file submitted in September 1991, and Průhonice Park (251 ha.), whose inclusion was requested in June 1992.

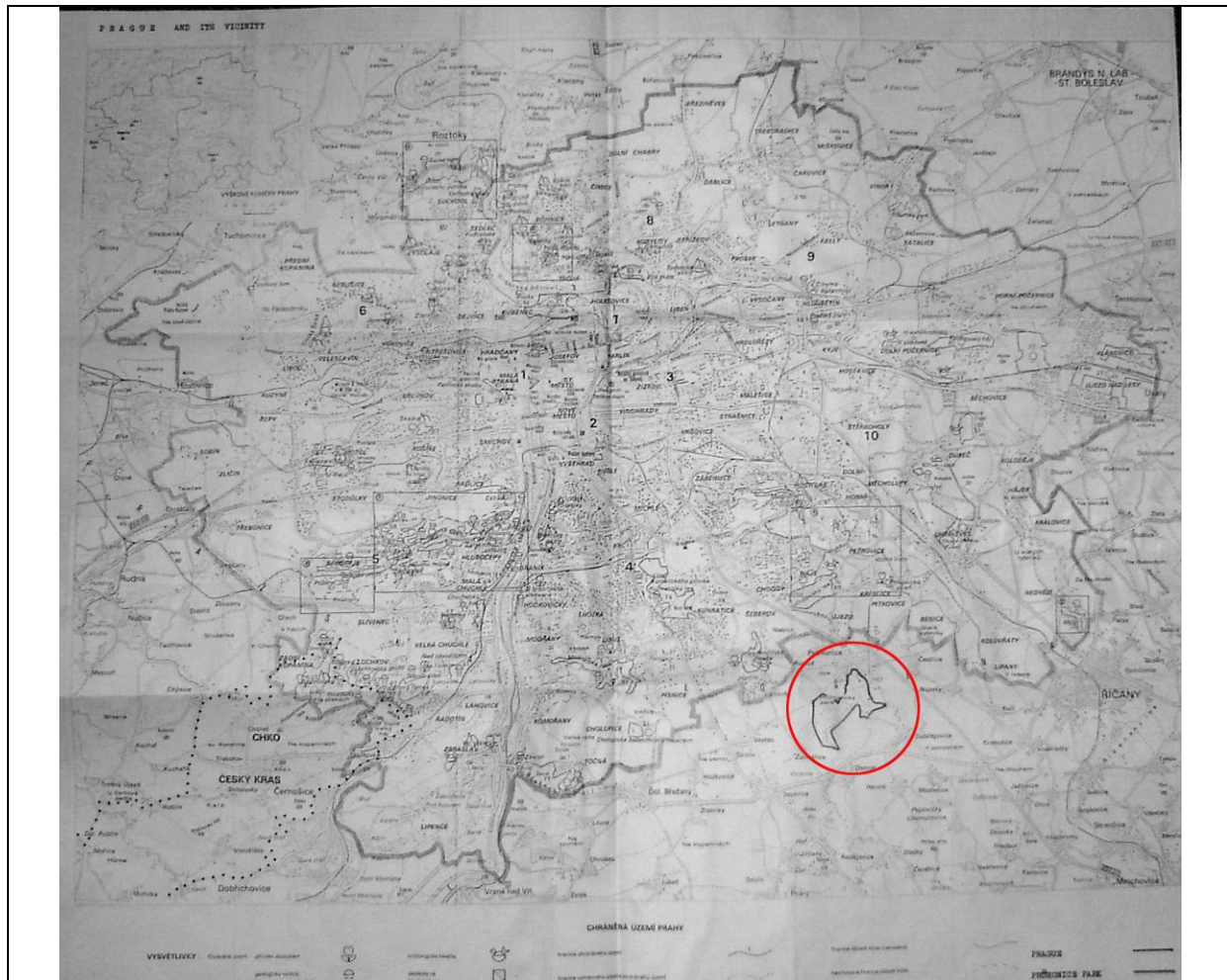


Map displaying the the city



Map displaying Průhonice Park

The World Heritage property is surrounded by a buffer zone based on two levels of protection: the first one has more restrictive limitations on height, while regulations in the second one are more permissive. The buffer zone covers an area of 8963 hectares (2260 in the first level of protection, where high-rise protection has been established).



Map displaying the buffer zone of the World Heritage property (the location of the component Průhonice Park" is displayed with a red circle)

As these levels of protection have been defined on the basis of a district (zoning) delimitation, and not on an analysis of the effective impacts of constructions on the landscape, they do not protect effectively the historic centre's landscape from related construction impacts.

The Mission concluded that while the City and the National Government had promoted very important studies, the legislative and normative framework still needs to be properly established, in order to ensure adequate and long term protection to the historic areas.

In particular, it would be very important to strengthen the powers of the National Heritage Institute, and to give to their opinion a binding nature with respect to the decision-making process on listed buildings and on key interventions.

### **3. IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF ISSUES**

#### **3.1 Positive or negative developments in the conservation of the property since the last report to the World Heritage Committee**

What follows is a summary of the results of the observations of the Mission team on the main conservation issues of the historic centre.

##### **3.1.1. Impact of rapid economic development**

The rapid economic development of Prague during the last two decades has generated many pressures on the historic areas, ranging from the change of the population structure to building substitution and transformation, to the growth of private traffic and the development of tourist-related activities (hotels and restaurants and shops).

The Mission noted that these economic pressures were resulting in unplanned increases of densities. Any out-of-scale density increases for the purpose of making the most of any given plot of land will involve activities bound to disrupt or destroy the urban setting (by attracting traffic, crowds of people, etc.). The Mission felt that the possibility of such density increases should be addressed by tight zoning rules designed to limit density but which would also create a fair and level playing field for those applying for permits for individual investment projects. The Mission also felt the need to very carefully check the interaction between every individual structure and its setting (applying a much wider concept of form and design) and to provide a special warning concerning intrusive horizontal developments, which would disrupt the old system of rows and blocks of buildings (for example, the Copacabana Center Národní).



*Bird's eye view of Prague in 1769, drawing by Joseph Daniel Huber (detail), showing houses with sloped roofs and free courtyards.*

### **3.1.2 Treatment of historic buildings**

In the course of the past two decades, a major restoration program of the historic buildings of Prague has been promoted and implemented, with visible results. At the moment, there are 27 restoration activities underway, concerning important buildings and infrastructures (including the Charles Bridge).

The restoration of the main monuments is almost completed, thanks to a major financial commitment by the Government and the City of Prague.

However, one important conservation issue discussed by the Mission involved alteration of historic structures.

The Mission could confirm the complaints received from many NGOs and experts on excessive internal transformation of many historical buildings. Increasing structural demands on historic buildings prompted by intensification of use inevitably results in the destruction of original fabric (such as an old house's roof system, cellar, intermediate floors, walls, windows, doors, etc.). The historic material and architectural features cannot meet such requirements and will thus be replaced by new ones, which in turn imitate the old. In other instances, it was noticed that some projects allowing retention only of the façade, and complete internal transformation had been authorised.

In particular, it was observed that in several buildings, transformations of the roofs, and the opening of windows and skylights have been allowed, that have significantly altered the “roofscape” of the city. Even very small and colour-masked increases in volume distort a roof shape dictated by former technical requirements. There is a need to ban, as much as possible, attic conversions within the core zone, and more specifically so within the historic centre, which involve substantial loss of historic roof fabric and serious changes to roof appearance.



*Examples of transformation of roofs in the historic centre*

### **3.1.3 Demolitions and new constructions in the historic centre**

The mission also gave attention to a second important conservation issue: the demolition and replacement of historic buildings by contemporary structures.

In the period following the end of the Communist regime, several buildings were demolished in the historic centre of Prague. While most of these buildings did not have a specific monumental value, they were still part of the traditional urban fabric.

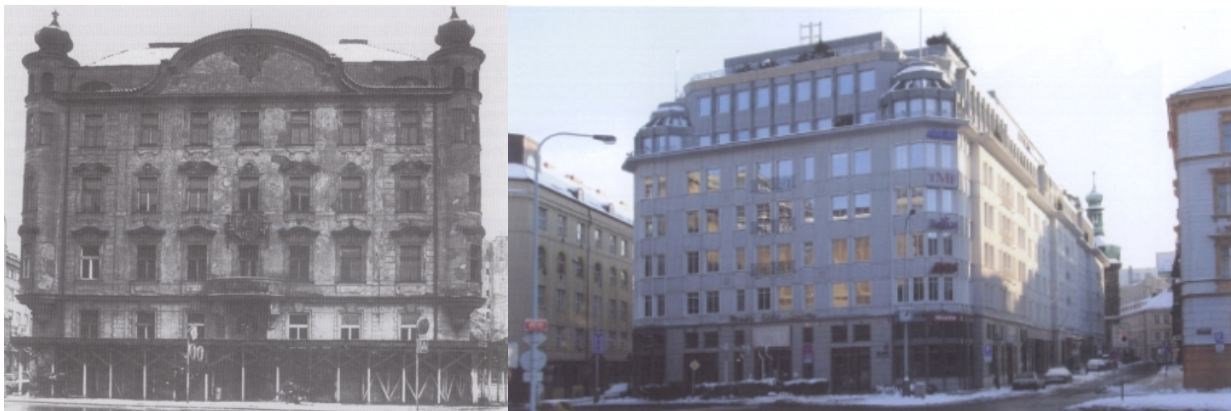
In most cases, these demolitions were replaced by modern buildings of no particular value that did not enrich the fabric or the architectural environment of the city.

This phase, linked to the speculative years that followed the establishment of the new economic freedom is now over, and the era of demolitions to permit building substitutions can be considered concluded. New buildings are nowadays an exception in the historic centre, due to the lack of free areas.

However, some recent examples, such as the Palladium Centre near the National Theatre or the Špaček House show that insertions of modern buildings incompatible in shape, volume and materials with the traditional fabric are still being permitted.



*Examples of modern constructions in the historic centre of Prague (the Palladium building is on the right)*



*Špaček House, demolished in 1993 and the new building that replaced it*

In most instances the new constructions have followed standard international models, without producing particularly interesting architectural results, as can be seen, for instance, in the case of the construction of a large complex in Ovocný Square, in an area that had remained empty for over 60 years.



*Buildings in Ovocný Square, demolished in 1929, and new constructions of the 1990's on the same site*

However, the Mission also observed that in some cases the city was able to promote fine modern architecture, that proved to be at the same time modern, innovative, and perfectly compatible within the historic fabric, such as in the case of the Euro Building in St Wenceslaus Square.

Another example of 1990's architecture is the "Dancing House" of Arch. Frank Gehry.



*The "Dancing House" by Frank Gehry and the Euro Palace in Wenceslas Square by Richard Doležal and Petr Malinský*

The City of Prague has developed specific guidelines for these cases, the "*Methodology for the construction of new buildings and annexes in internal blocks*" that should guide the process.

### **3.1.4 Traffic management**

An overall assessment of traffic management was not foreseen in the Mission's activities. However, it was possible to collect some information relevant for the overall assessment of the conservation policies of the historic centre.

Private traffic has significantly increased in recent years, following the acceleration of economic development. While the situation is by no mean critical, traffic management has become a problem requiring increasing attention and investments.

The response of the City has been along two directions: strengthening the effective public transportation system inherited from the communist era, and based on tram, bus and metro lines; and providing new underground parking, public and private. This latter solution has proved very difficult and controversial, for the possible damages offered archaeological material.



*Traffic has increased in recent years, but remains manageable in the historic centre, thanks also to an effective public transportation policy based on tram, bus and subway lines.*

An important proposal, currently being developed, concerns the construction of a tunnel for the road currently separating St. Wenceslaus Square and the National Museum. This infrastructure will allow the creation of a pedestrian area in this very significant part of the historic centre.



*The area of St Wencelaus Square where a tunnel is foreseen to reconnect the Square and the National Museum*

### **3.1.5 Public spaces**

A significant effort has been deployed to improve the public spaces of the historic centre. In particular, the Mission noticed and appreciated the vast and high-quality program of restoration and reintroduction of traditional street pavements of local stone.

This program, not frequently encountered in historic cities, has a great importance for the conservation of the traditional character of the city.

With a similar goal, a program to re-introduce gas lighting in public spaces has been launched and is already operational in some of the main public squares.

Efforts have been done to improve the street furniture, now managed to the highest European standards, and to control the spread of advertisements and shop signs. While an overall coordination of street signals is still lacking, the situation can be defined in general as satisfactory.

While these ambitious measures help reinstate the original appearance of public zones by eliminating Communist era interventions, the Mission was also conscious of the danger of the historic centre being turned into a carefully staged “miniature theme park” and cautioned against historic homogenization.



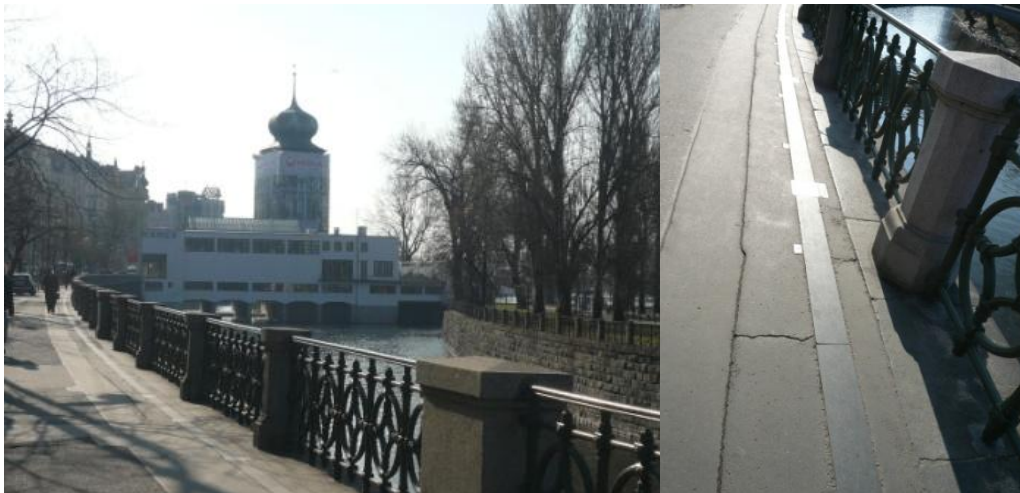


*Examples of restored pavements in the historic centre of Prague*

### **3.1.6. Flood defences**

As Prague is exposed to the risks of seasonal floods, in recent years a complete flood barrier system has been built along the Moldau river banks, thus providing the historic centre with an effective protection against recurrent risks.

The defence system is based on mobile metal barriers that are supported by poles placed in holes positioned all along the river banks. The system can be installed in a very short time (2-3 days) when needed, and has proven very effective during the great flood of 2004, although at that time it had not yet been completed, and therefore part of the City centre was flooded.



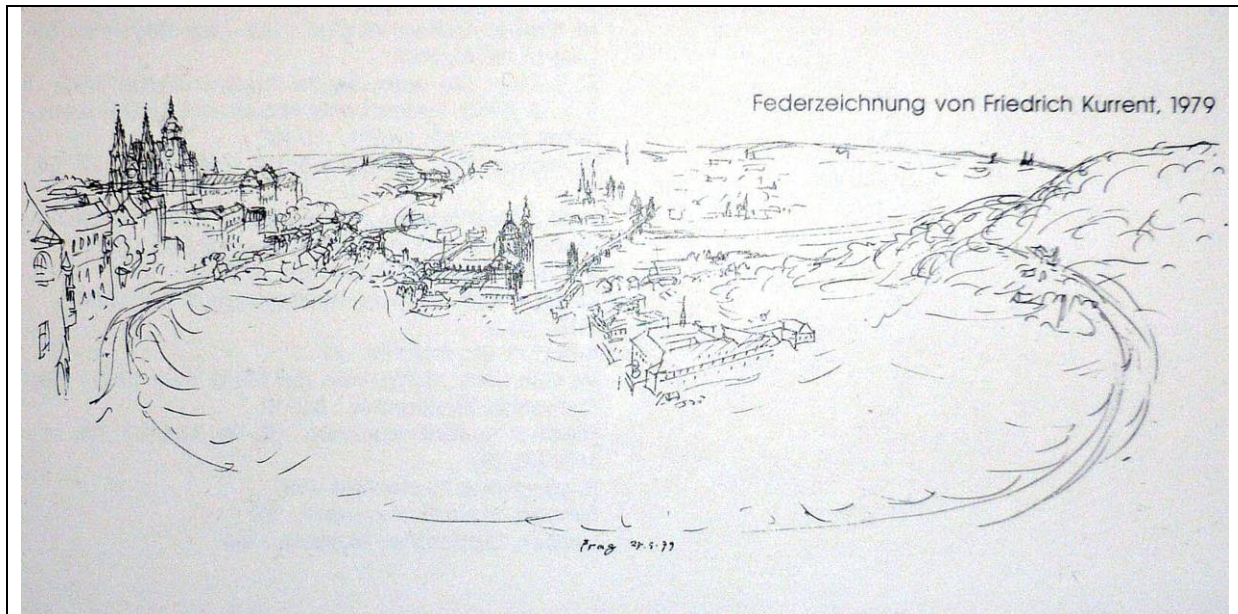
*The mobile barriers railings of the flood protection system for the historic centre of Prague*

### **3.1.7. High rise buildings in the Prague Urban Landscape**

The urban landscape of Prague, as created along the centuries in a harmonious relationship between the built and the natural environment, has been transmitted almost intact to modernity, a rare case in Europe and indeed in most of the world.

Owing to its varied topography along a winding Vltava Valley with wider stretches, basins and settlements on slopes and hilltops, Prague provides a great number of important sightlines, visual angles and views. Therefore, any intrusive urban development will be noticed not only from a pedestrian's perspective in the streets but frequently also within the broader landscape context

and setting. A characteristic feature is that many towers rise above the burgher houses and palaces, and that their outlines forge an inimitable union of grace with the shapes of the surrounding landscape, thus providing an irreplaceable historic townscape (cf. drawing by Friedrich Kurrent of 1979).



*A characteristic feature: towers rise above the burgher houses and palaces, their outlines forge an inimitable union of grace with the shapes of the surrounding landscape, drawing by Friedrich Kurrent, 1979.*

As requested by the World Heritage Committee, the City of Prague has started the preparation of an impact study of the high-rise constructions on the urban landscape.

The study, implemented by a technical Agency (Cosua) has been presented to the Mission team, and brings very important advancements in the understanding of the impacts of tall buildings in the different parts of the City.

A total of 33 locations have been selected as “viewpoints” for the study that allows for the first time a comprehensive understanding and mapping of the areas that need to be protected in order to avoid visual impacts.

One case showed to the Mission demonstrated that even those high-rise buildings that were situated outside the World Heritage property and its buffer zone had an adverse impact on the setting signifying the degree to which out-of-scale buildings pose a great threat to the property’s outstanding universal value. Such out of scale buildings stand out against a townscape characterised by historic towers and involve a shift of focus and thus a serious change to existing patterns. This applies to both vertical and horizontal developments. Moreover, high-rise buildings introduce reflections of a different value system into historic townscapes. The high-rise buildings constructed in the last years of the Communist era on the flat ridge of the Pankrác borough are irrefutable proof of that.

This study is supported by a 3-D computer model of the historic centre, so that in every point of the territory a simulation can be done of the effects of high-rise, at different levels.

This study is an essential tool for any future decision on building development, but it must be supported by an adequate legislative framework yet to be approved.

Even the great historical tragedies of the XXth century, which brought about the destruction of many cities in central Europe, left Prague almost untouched. During the period between the two World Wars, several projects were designed by modernist architects, to cope with the housing and development needs of the time.

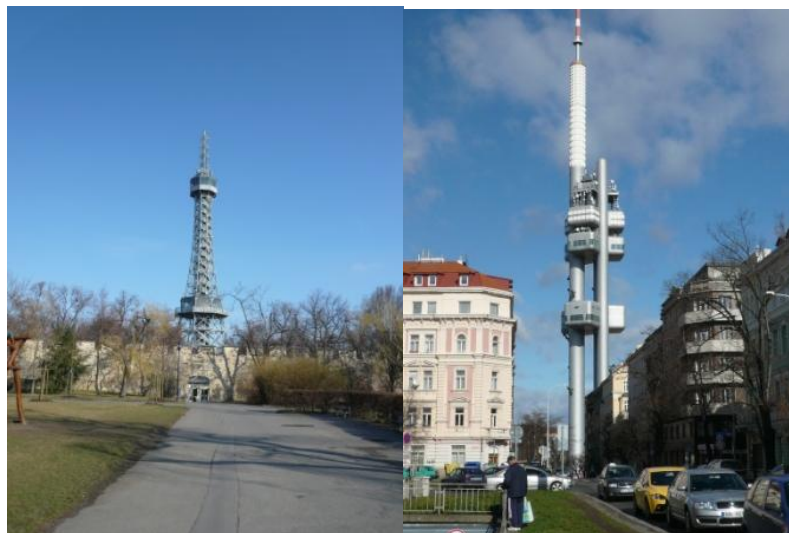
Most of the new constructions inside the historic centre respected the traditional fabric and blended with the mix of styles that gives Prague a rich representation of the history of architecture. Some modern expansion was planned but not implemented on a large scale in areas near the centre.

In the post World War II period, on the contrary, the city of Prague developed into a modern middle-size capital, and many complexes were built in the periphery of the historic centre of Prague. Mostly they are low-rise buildings, with few exceptions, among which are situated the unfortunate developments in the Pankrác Plain (see next paragraph).



*Examples of post-war period complexes in the periphery of the Historic Centre.*

The Mission observed that while some technical towers do intrude in this urban landscape, their presence either constitutes historical evidence (such as in the case of the XIXth Century View tower of Petřín Hill) or an expression of modern technical needs (the recent TV tower).



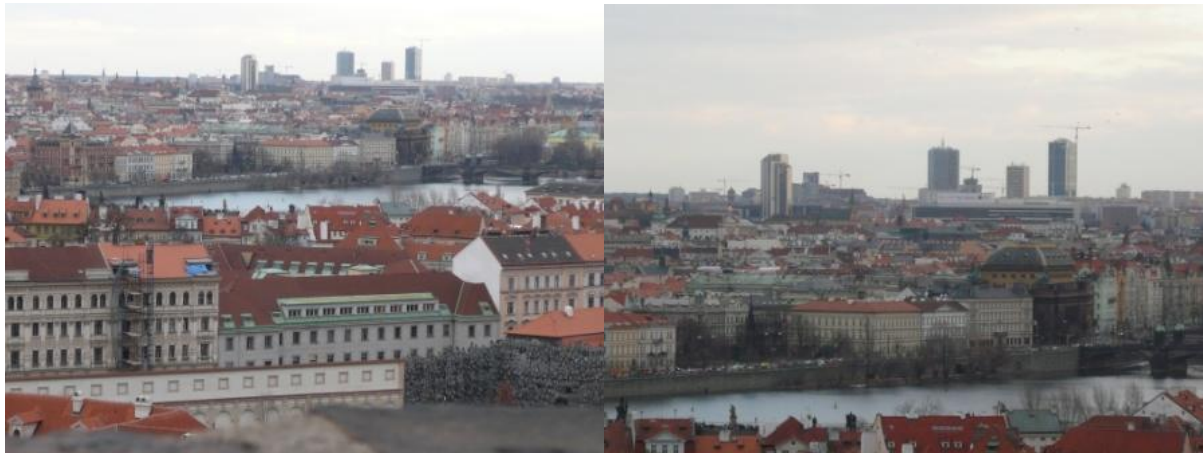
*Two technical towers visible in the Prague landscape.  
The View tower of Petřín Hill dates from the end of the XIXth century. The TV tower was built recently.*

Aside from these exceptions, the historic urban landscape of Prague is almost intact and represents a valuable heritage asset, to be preserved for the future generations.

### 3.1.8 High-rise building on Pankrác Plain

The Pankrác Plain is located in the southern part of the city, and is included in the second buffer zone, where in principle development is possible, under controlled conditions.

In this area, three high-rise buildings were erected in the 1980's, creating a visible impact on Prague's urban landscape, considered today as the main alteration to the visual integrity of the Historic Centre.



*The High-rise buildings erected in the 1980's on the Pankrac Plain as seen from the historic centre*

The area has been privatised after the end of the Communist regime, and sold to a private investor, who has proposed a plan to complete the urbanisation process with several new buildings.

Two of these buildings are high-rise structures: a hotel of approximately 80 m. and a V-shaped double tower residential building of 104 m. (the Epoque Building), both designed by Arch. Radan Hubička.



*The two new high-rise buildings proposed in the Pankrac Plain (left) and the three existing high-rise (right)*

These proposals have sparked a controversy that is at the origin of the request for the UNESCO-ICOMOS mission.

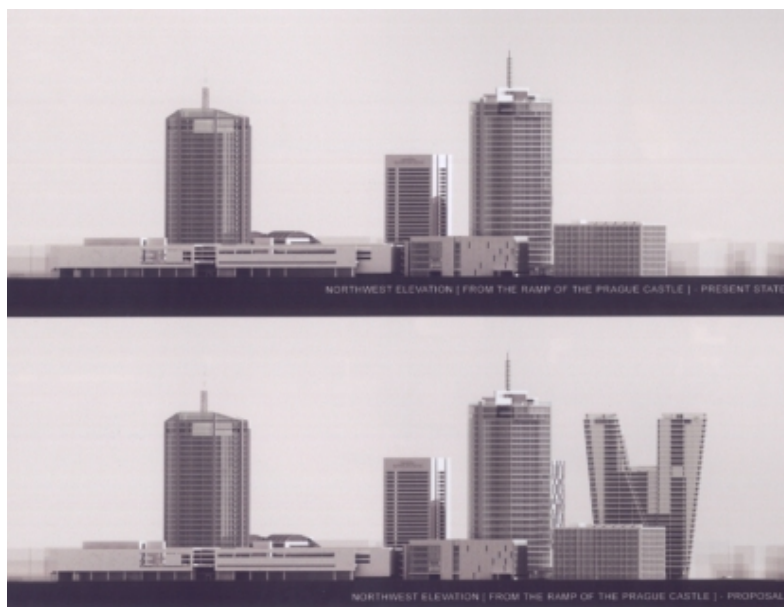
In this area, considered as an optimal location for the modern expansion of Prague, high-rise buildings had been planned since the 1920's, albeit at a much smaller scale. In the 1970s, a first administrative building, the MOTOKOV (104 m.) was built, followed prior to 1989 by the PANORAMA Hotel (86 m.) and the Czechoslovak Radio Building, left incomplete at the end of the former regime.

In 1997, the City of Prague commissioned a competition for the completion of the area of the Pankrác Plain. The competition resulted in a Master Plan designed by the Architect Richard Meier, that proposed the construction of a new high-rise building of 160 m., in order to give a “pyramidal” shape to the area.

The proposal was not accepted by the City, and instead the developer has proposed the scheme presently under consideration. The proposal has been discussed at length by the National Heritage Institute and by the City Development Authority of Prague. They have reached the conclusion that the construction of these additional buildings would not worsen significantly the existing situation, as the architectural scale of the area had been already defined by the previous buildings.



*View of the Pankrac Plain from the Prague Castle.  
The current situation is shown on the left, the new proposed high-rise buildings are shown on the right*



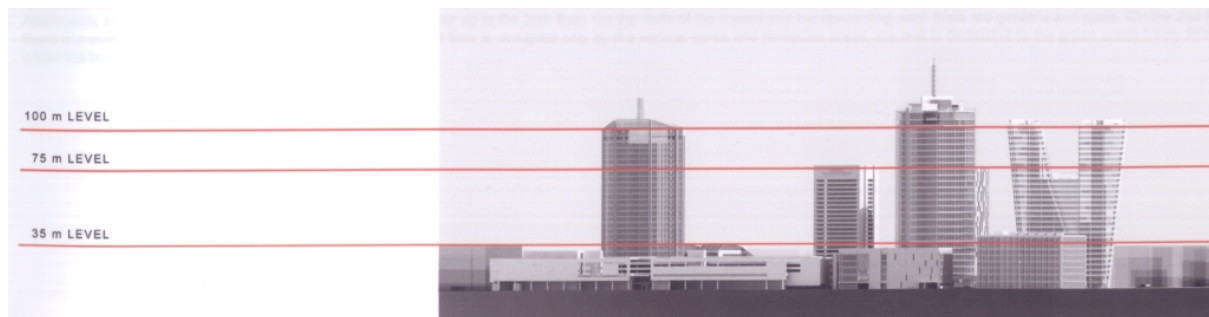
*Drawings showing the current situation of the Pankrac Plain and the new proposed high-rise buildings*

The Mission team examined the positions expressed by the different public bodies, by the Developer ECM and by local NGOs, as well as the conclusion of a consultative Mission that was conducted in 2007 by UNESCO and ICOMOS on the request of the City of Prague.

In particular, the team examined the architectural solution proposed by the Developer to assess the visual impacts of the new constructions as seen from different angles.

While the impact on the Prague landscape produced by the three existing high-rise buildings cannot be reversed in the short term, the team concluded that the solutions to be adopted should at least not extend the visual intrusion on what would be -otherwise- one of the best preserved European urban historic landscapes.

As shown in the drawing below, the overall development scheme foresees three levels for the different buildings: a first level of about 35 m., corresponding to the commercial centre and other lower office buildings; a second level of about 75 m., corresponding to some of the lower existing of planned towers; and a third level of about 100 m., corresponding to the existing tower and to the new V-shaped Epoque Building.



While every solution needs to be verified after an appropriately complete design scheme is submitted, the Mission strongly recommends limiting the height of the new buildings to that governing the second level, and therefore to a maximum height of 60-70 mt.

This height limit will allow, for various design schemes, maintaining the viability of the investment, while reducing significantly associated visual negative impacts on the historic landscape.

In general then, the Mission suggested avoiding construction of high-rise buildings in this homogeneous urban environment, which has grown for centuries at the bottom and on the slopes of the Vltava Valley, and looking for a location outside the valley where settlement should take the form of a cluster (“New Prague”) to provide a consistent and powerful urban centre rather than scattering skyscrapers across the “old city”.

## **3.2 Other outstanding issues**

### **3.2.1. Tourism**

Prague is a well-known tourist attraction. Its visitors come from all over the world. Tourism increases pressures on the city and its ambience, cultural qualities and character, and it also requires that changes be made to the insides of building to accommodate modern tourism needs. Prague needs appropriate design and tourism management measures which can meet the needs of tourists and local people alike.

### **3.2.2. Management Plan of the Historic Centre of Prague**

As requested by the World Heritage Committee, the State Party is preparing a Management Plan for the World Heritage property. The summary of the Management Plan has been presented to the Mission and discussed, and will be completed before the end of 2008.

The Mission recommended to define this management tool not only as a coordination mechanism of the different plans and tools existing for the Historic Centre, but as a dynamic instrument, based on indicators and monitoring systems able to guide the conservation policies and plans as change occurs.

The Mission also took note of the Draft Statement of Outstanding Universal Value presented by the State Party and currently being examined by the World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS.. The Mission suggested that the Statement of OUV needs to be shortened, more precisely focussed on the values defined by the selection of criteria, and that the management planning process needs to be built around the agreed upon Statement of OUV. .

The Mission also noted that planning activities should flow from policy objectives and adhere to policy principles. Through these activities the authorities of the Czech Republic and of the City of Prague could ensure that the elements of good resource management practice are in place in all systems and processes.

The Mission also noted that building permit procedures appear to be very complicated, and gained the impression that efforts undertaken by governmental and municipal agencies do not always produce the desired results in spite of excellent work done by skilled and committed employees. The Mission noted that the management planning exercise can move management authorities beyond case-by-case procedures.

## **4. ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE OF CONSERVATION OF THE SITE**

The State of conservation of the Historic Centre of Prague can be considered, in overall terms, good. Since the end of the Communist era in 1989, a major restoration, maintenance and renovation program has been implemented by Czech Government and by the City of Prague.

This program has been accompanied by important activities of rehabilitation of the public spaces, reconstruction of the traditional street and sidewalk pavements, by the maintenance of the main monuments and public gardens.

The public infrastructure has been renewed and reorganised in special utility collectors, while public transportation has been modernised and upgraded to cope with increased traffic demand.

It is not exaggerated to state that Prague has undergone in the past 20 years an extraordinary period of conservation successes, to be accounted among the most important at the European scale.

Parallel to this, a major nationwide program of privatisation of the ownership of all the buildings has been carried on. Today, only 5 % of the stock is owned by the State, while the Municipalities own 30 %, 17 % has been given back to the Church, and the remaining part to private owners.

This rapid transformation of the property structure has prompted some investors to push for the implementation of projects that were not always respectful of the historic values of the site.

Examples of improper infill, building substitution and extension activities were observed by the Mission and exposed by the NGOs met.

Several modern building have been authorised in the past two decades inside the core area of the World Heritage property: in most cases they do not constitute an enrichment of the architectural quality of an historic city that presents a variety of architectural styles from different times, all blended in a harmonic ensemble.

The main threat, however, comes today from initiatives located in the buffer zone, as high-rise buildings that affect the integrity of the Historic Urban Landscape have been permitted or are in a planning stage.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1. Recommendations for any additional action to be taken by the State Party**

The Mission successfully concluded its technical review of the situation based on on-site visits and on extensive documentation and meetings with relevant stakeholders. A report will be provided to the World Heritage Committee at its 32<sup>nd</sup> session in July 2008, based on the following conclusions and recommendations:

- i. The Mission acknowledged that the City of Prague has been able to manage successfully an important restoration and conservation program and that significant improvements have been brought about in the overall legislative, planning and management system related to urban conservation.
- ii. The Mission recommended to strengthen the authority of the National Heritage Institute to enable it to orient the main decisions affecting the integrity of the Historic Centre.
- iii. The Mission recommended that the rules presently in force to manage processes such as infill, reconstruction, rehabilitation and conservation should be clarified and integrated in a unitary code. Their primary aim should be the conservation of the integrity of the original fabric of the City.



- iv. The Mission recommended to urgently complete and approve the Conservation Plan for the Historic Centre in order to provide an effective zoning and planning tool for the conservation process of the historic centre.
- v. The Mission recommended to complete and adopt the high-rise limitations plan, in order to avoid possible visual intrusion in the Historic Urban Landscape of Prague.
- vi. The Mission recommends to conduct an evaluation of the present buffer zones of the Historic Centre in order to assess their effectiveness in protecting the visual integrity of the City and recommends, if needed, to extend them or to adopt an appropriate zoning regulation.
- vii. The Mission recommended that, according to Art. 172 of the Operational Guidelines, the State Party informs the World Heritage Centre of any project that could affect the visual integrity of the World Heritage site.
- viii. The Mission recommended, in the case of the Pankrác Plain, to limit the height of the new high-rise constructions to a maximum of 60-70 mt., to limit the visual impacts on the Historic Urban Landscape.
- ix. The Mission finally encouraged the State Party to complete the Management Plan of the World Heritage property within the year 2008 as a comprehensive tool for the coordination of all the different regulatory and policy framework existing or foreseen for the historic centre, and for strengthening scope and implementation of zoning, and to submit it to the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies for evaluation.

Adolf Loos (one of Prague's great friends) demanded reverence for the olden days in general and their architectural or other achievements. He declined to look down upon them when he wrote:

*"There is something special about the architectural character of a city. Each has a character of its own. What is beautiful and charming for one (meaning this specific) city, can be ugly and repulsive for another. However, it is not only the material but also the architectural form that is inextricably linked to this place, its ground and air."* (Adolf Loos, *Zwei Aufsätze und eine Zuschrift über das Haus auf dem Michaelerplatz*, 1910)

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

### **Joint UNESCO – ICOMOS mission to the Historic Centre of Prague, Czech Republic 27 February – 2 March 2008**

- 1) Carry out a joint UNESCO-ICOMOS mission, as requested by the World Heritage Committee at its 31<sup>st</sup> session (**31 COM 7B.94**), to assess the state of conservation of the World Heritage property of the Historic Centre of Prague (Czech Republic) inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1991;
- 2) Evaluate the implementation by the State Party of the decision of the World Heritage Committee which requested to reconsider current building projects as to their impacts on the World Heritage property's Outstanding Universal Value, and also requested that any new construction projects respect the Outstanding Universal Value and important views to and from the property;
- 3) Review the overall situation of the property of the Historic Centre of Prague with regard to the factors affecting the Outstanding Universal Value, authenticity and integrity of the property (*by UNESCO-ICOMOS experts*);
- 4) Evaluate the status and the likely impact of the proposed high-rise building projects within the buffer zone which potentially could impact on the authenticity and the visual integrity of the Historic Centre of Prague ;
- 5) Evaluate the progress made concerning the boundary issues and the buffer zone definition as requested by the World Heritage Committee within the framework of the *Retrospective Inventory Project: Clarification of boundaries of World Heritage properties in the Czech Republic*;
- 6) Evaluate the progress made concerning the preparation of the comparative studies in terms of sustainable management of historic towns, the World Heritage Committee recommended to conduct in cooperation with the relevant Scientific Committees of the Advisory Bodies;
- 7) Prepare a detailed report by 15 March 2008 on the state of conservation of the property, including the information on the status and the likely impact of the proposed high-rise building projects within the buffer zone of the World Heritage property, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 32nd session in 2008 and submit the report to the World Heritage Centre in electronic form (not exceeding 10 pages (without annexes) according to the enclosed format).

## PROGRAMME

### Joint UNESCO – ICOMOS mission to the Historic Centre of Prague, Czech Republic 27 February – 2 March 2008

#### Membres de la mission réactive de monitoring :

- Monsieur Francesco Bandarin, Directeur du Centre du patrimoine mondial, UNESCO
- Monsieur Bruno Maldoner, représentant d'ICOMOS
- Accompagnateurs tchèques:
  - Monsieur Zdeněk Novák, directeur général de la Section pour l'étranger, la conception et l'analyse du Ministère de la culture de la République tchèque,
  - Madame Lada Pekárková, spécialiste de conception du Département de la culture, de la protection du patrimoine et du tourisme à la Mairie de la capitale Prague
  - interprète

#### Programme:

##### 27. 2. 2008

14:45            **arrivée à Prague / accueil à l'aéroport** des membres de la mission

##### 28. 2. 2008

8:30-9:00        **accueil par M. le Ministre de la culture**

9:00-12:00      **Déplacement aux sites d'importance pour le panorama de Prague en rapport avec la construction des deux tours en question**

9:15- 9:30      la rampe du Château de Prague

9:45-10:15     la tour de Petřín

10:45-10:55   le pont Jirásek

11:05-11:30   le plateau de Pankrác

11:30-12:15    **rencontre avec les représentants du promoteur ECM et l'architecte des deux tours**

13:00-14:15    **déjeuner de travail offert par le Ministère de la culture**

14:30-16:00    **rencontre avec les représentants du Comité tchèque d'ICOMOS**

- 16:15-17:00 **rencontre avec les représentants des associations de citoyens qui s'opposent à la construction des tours**  
(membres de la mission, les accompagnateurs et les présidents des associations: Centre pour le soutien des citoyens, association Arnika, Atelier pour l'environnement, Initiative citoyenne de Pankrác, société Pankrác, directeur du Département de la culture, de la protection des monuments et du tourisme de la Mairie de la capitale Prague)
- 17:00-18:30 **rencontre avec les membres du Corps d'experts pour la protection du patrimoine de la Mairie de la capitale Prague**  
(membres de la mission, les accompagnateurs, experts, directeur du Département de la culture, de la protection du patrimoine et du tourisme à la mairie de la capitale Prague)
- 19:00-20:00 **accueil par M. le Maire de Prague**
- 20:00 **dîner de travail offert par la Mairie de la capitale Prague**

## **29. 2. 2008**

- 8:45 **départ** de l'hôtel Biskupský dům
- 9:00-12:00 **présentation de l'Étude d'intégrité visuelle du Service de développement de la capitale Prague**  
(membres de la mission, les accompagnateurs, directeur du Département de la culture, de la protection du patrimoine et du tourisme de la Mairie de la capitale Prague, directeur de l'Institut national pour la protection des monuments historiques – section territoriale spéciale de Prague, directeur et collaborateurs du Département pour le développement de la ville à la Mairie la capitale Prague)
- 12:00-13:00 **déjeuner de travail offert par le Département pour le développement de la ville à la Mairie la capitale Prague**
- 13:00-15:30 **poursuite des discussions avec les représentants du Département pour le développement de la ville à la Mairie la capitale Prague et du Département de la culture, de la protection du patrimoine et du tourisme concernant le projet d'un plan de management du Centre historique de Prague et la déclaration de valeur universelle exceptionnelle du Centre historique de Prague pour le Comité du patrimoine mondial**  
(membres de la mission, les accompagnateurs, directeur du Département de la culture, de la protection du patrimoine et du tourisme de la mairie de la capitale Prague, directeur de l'Institut national pour la protection des monuments historiques – section territoriale spéciale de Prague, directeur du Département pour le développement de la ville à la Mairie la capitale Prague)
- 16:00-17:00 **fin de la partie officielle de la mission au Ministère de la culture; récapitulatif des informations recueillies par la mission**

(membres de la mission, les accompagnateurs, directrice du Département de la protection du patrimoine au Ministère de la culture de la République tchèque son assistant, directeur du Département de la culture, de la protection du patrimoine et du tourisme de la Mairie de la capitale Prague)

### **01. 03. 2008**

- 9:45 **départ de l'hôtel Biskupský dům**
- 10:00-16:30 **rencontre avec le directeur de l'Institut national pour la protection des monuments historiques – section territoriale spéciale de Prague et visite de Prague** (y compris des biens figurant sur la liste indicative pour Prague: villa Müller, Eglise du Sacré Coeur du Seigneur etc.)
- 13:00-14:00 **déjeuner informel offert par la Mairie de la capitale Prague**
- 17:00-18:00 **rencontre avec Monsieur Pešek à l'hôtel Biskupský dům**
- 19:30 départ de l'hôtel Biskupský dům pour une représentation de Laterna Magika (la Lanterne magique)
- 20:00 **Laterna Magika** (programme: Cirque magique)

**Dîner informel offert par le Ministère de la culture**

### **02.03. 2008**

- 10:00 **présentation des travaux de restauration réussis** (par ex: l'église Ste Anne, l'église Ste Catherine, le monastère de Břevnov)
- 14h00 Départ des membres de la mission

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

1. State Party's report on the state of conservation of the Historic Centre of Prague, prepared by the Culture, Monument Care and Tourism Department at the Prague City Hall in cooperation with the National Monument Institute, January 2008
2. Study on the visual integrity of Prague Historical Centre / Report on the conducted study, URM – Development Authority of the City of Prague, January 2008
3. Conceptual framework of more efficient care of monument fund in the City of Prague
4. Urban completion of the Pankrác Plain (description of the intent with respect to the Historic Centre of Prague – World Heritage Property), City of Prague, March 2007
5. Development completion of the centre of Pankrác plain from the plain from the point of view of influence on the visual integrity of the Historic Centre of Prague / Comments of the Development Authority of the City of Prague on the building proposal of the Company ECM to add additional high-rise buildings to Pankrác centre, January 2008
6. Map of large development areas of the City of Prague
7. Map of over-dimensioned constructions in terms of proportions, capacities and scale against the historic dominants in the skyline of the Historic Centre of Prague
8. Financial support of monument restoration from municipal and state budgets, focused on the cultural heritage care
9. Comparative photographs
10. Draft of the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value of the Historic Centre of Prague, Ministry of Culture and ICOMOS Czech Committee, February 2008