

Ávila (Spain)

No 348 rev

1. BASIC DATA

<i>State Party:</i>	Spain
<i>Name of property:</i>	Old Town of Ávila with its Extra Muros Churches
<i>Location:</i>	Province of Ávila, Autonomous Community of Castile-Leon
<i>Inscription:</i>	1985

Brief Description:

Founded in the 11th century to protect the Spanish territories from the Moors, this 'City of Saints and Stones', the birthplace of St Teresa and the burial place of the Grand Inquisitor Torquemada, has kept its medieval austerity. This purity of form can still be seen in the Gothic cathedral and the fortifications which, with their 82 semicircular towers and nine gates, are the most complete in Spain

2. ISSUES RAISED

Background

At its 30th Session (Decision 30 COM 7B. 79) the World Heritage Committee noted that the State Party had reported that it had designated a buffer zone, and requested the State Party to submit detailed maps presenting the boundaries of the property and its buffer zones, and ICOMOS to review the boundaries of the property once the boundary modifications have been presented. The Committee further requested the State Party to provide the World Heritage Centre with a progress report on the legal status and the implementation of the protection zones by 1 February 2006 for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 30th session (2006).

Modification

The State Party has submitted an approval for a minor modification which includes the extension of the inscribed property and the establishment of a buffer zone. These two elements are considered separately.

- Extension of the core zone

The inscribed property includes the walled town of Ávila and four extra muros Romanesque churches, San Segundo, San Andrés, San Vicente and San Pedro. These were included on the recommendations of ICOMOS.

The State Party is now suggesting that the inscribed area is somewhat arbitrary in relation to the extra muros churches included within the boundary and that there are other

churches 'of the same period with the same urban connotations and artistic value which, for no reason having to do with their value or significance, were not included in the candidacy (and were therefore left out of the declaration as well).' The State Party suggests that a further three Romanesque churches (the churches of San Nicolás, Santa María de la Cabeza and San Martín), and three convents from the 15th and 16th centuries (the convents of La Encarnación and San José and the Real Monasterio de Santo Tomás), should be added to the inscribed area. Brief details are given of all six monuments but no photographs have been provided, as well as a map of the enlarged core zone.

ICOMOS considers that the three churches and three convents, although not of outstanding universal value in their own right, should be incorporated into the inscribed area as being part of the overall distinctive urban fabric, pattern and ensemble for which the site was originally inscribed.

- Buffer Zone

At the time of inscription a buffer zone was not established. The vulnerability of one of the extra mural churches was demonstrated by developments in the Plaza of Santa Teresa between the town walls and the extra mural church of San Pedro. This was discussed by the Committee at its 27th, 28th, 29th and 30th sessions. As a result of concerns for the setting of the extra mural churches, at its 29th session, the Committee requested an updated report on the designation of buffer zones, in the context of the Periodic Reporting exercise.

The State Party is now proposing a buffer zone that encompasses the old town, the four extra mural churches which were part of the original inscription and the six further churches now being suggested as part of the extension to the core zone. A map of this proposed buffer zone has been provided.

ICOMOS considers that the proposed buffer zone and the protective legislation applying to it, will enhance the protection of the inscribed property and the proposed additions to the property. Nevertheless the irregular boundary of the buffer zone and the fact that part of the inscribed property still remains with little protection of its immediate setting makes it difficult to understand the rationale for the boundary of the proposed buffer zone. Given that the town is on a high mound and that there are views out from it, there is a need to protect the most important views to and from the town. There is no mention of this approach in the documentation submitted with the buffer zone.

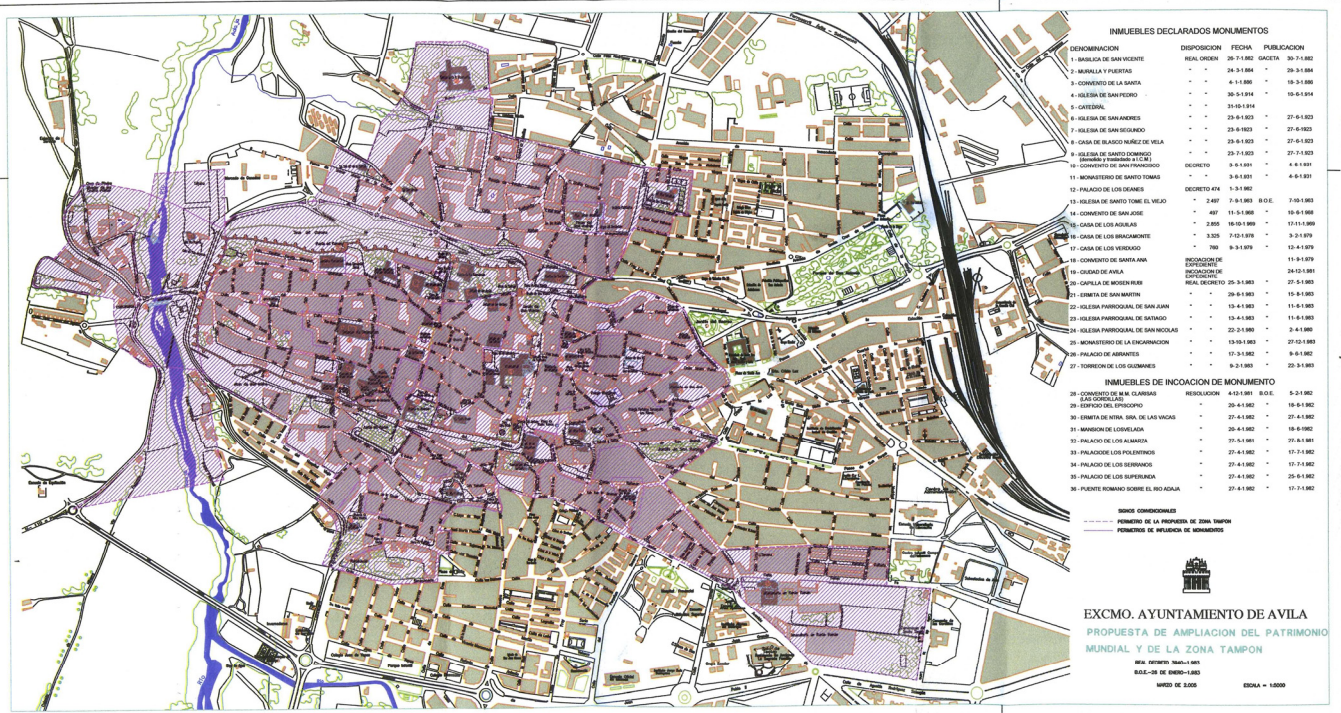
ICOMOS considers that the State Party should explain the rationale behind the proposed boundary of the buffer zone and how key views to and from the property might be protected.

3. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS

ICOMOS recommends in principle the approval of the extension of the boundary of the Old Town of Ávila with its extra muros churches (Spain), but considers that final

approval for this extension should be give at the same time as an adequate buffer zone is approved.

ICOMOS considers that further justification for the protection of the setting of the town and its extra muros churches and views to and from it should be provided.



Map showing the minor modification to the boundaries of the core zone and the proposed buffer zone