

Graz (Austria)

No 931

Identification

Nomination City of Graz – historic centre

Location Province of Styria

State Party Austria

Date 18 June 1998

Justification by State Party

The historic centre of Graz, with its group of well preserved buildings dating back to several periods, is an outstanding example of an historic Central European city. Its authenticity has not been affected by the wars or the subsequent periods of economic expansion. An "urban organism," between the river and the Schlossberg, emerged from the Middle Ages, and was to play an important role in Europe as a princely court and as a bastion of the Empire against the Ottomans.

The various stages of urban development can be clearly identified. Each epoch is represented by typical architectural styles which form a harmonious whole. Even now, the city is a melting pot for an unusual mixture of Mediterranean and Nordic influences, evidence of the vast expansion of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, reflected in its urban structure, in the atmosphere of its streets and squares, and in the elaborate architecture of its churches, monasteries, palaces and big houses.

When the city spread in the 19th and 20th centuries it left behind a green zone all round the historic centre on the site of the old fortifications. The social structure of the historic centre has been preserved to a high degree by adapting areas of traditional life within the walls of old buildings.

The Middle Ages bequeathed churches with vast naves, as well as an urban system and large houses clustered around the foot of the Schlossberg and on the two banks of the river Mur. The Renaissance and Baroque periods are represented by numerous religious buildings, imposing aristocratic residences, courtyards enclosed by elegant arches, and splendid facades. Finally, the Classical period left numerous buildings of interest in the south and east of the historic centre. The heart of Graz therefore has exceptional value as an urban structure and as an example of remarkably well preserved traditional architecture.

Criterion iv

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the World Heritage List of 1972, the historic centre of Graz is a *group of buildings*.

History and Description

History

The first traces of continuous human settlement of the site goes back to the Neolithic period. The site was not used as a Roman settlement, even though a few roads crossed it. After the fall of the Roman Empire, it was invaded, first by Alpine Slavs, the Avars, a horse-riding nomadic people subjugated by Charlemagne; then by the Hungarians, who were defeated at the battle of Lechfeld in 955; and finally by German settlers. Graz was thus included in the march of Carinthia. A small fortress (*gradec* in Slavic, hence the name of Graz) was erected on the Schlossberg hill, while a few houses and a church were constructed around it. Graz was mentioned for the first time in an official deed of 1128/29.

It was around this time that an open market began to thrive, leading to the first urban development with the immigration of Bavarian settlers. Besides the local nobility, the population consisted of traders and artisans, as well as a Jewish community which remained there until the 15th century. Graz was governed by the Houses of Traungau and Babenberg, and was given the status of a city.

After the Treaty of Neuberg in 1379 and the first division of the Habsburg heritage, the city came under the rule of the line established by Leopold III. Graz became the capital of Inner Austria, composed of Styria, Carinthia, Carniola, Istria, and Trieste. Graz also became a favourite royal place of residence, particularly for Frederick III (1453-93), who granted it many privileges, had many buildings erected, and rebuilt the Church of St Aegidius, now the cathedral.

The city and region then became involved in serious armed conflicts with Hungarian and Turkish invaders. In 1480, the Turks even arrived the gates of the city: this episode is portrayed in a fresco in the cathedral entitled "The Scourges of God," a Gothic masterpiece by Master Thomas von Villach. The 16th century was marked by constant threats from the Turks, as well as religious turmoil. To confront these threats, the medieval fortifications were completely reorganized and modernized according to the rules in force during the Renaissance. In 1559, the Clock Tower, the symbolic monument of Graz, was given its characteristic appearance, which has remained unchanged to these days.

In 1564, as a result of a new partition of the Habsburg lands, Graz became the capital of Inner Austria, despite the danger of Turkish invasions and the advances made by the Reformation. Three-quarters of the inhabitants were Protestants, active in the burgeoning Protestant Foundation where Kepler, the famous astronomer and mathematician, taught.

However, the city was soon to undergo the most important phase of its development with the arrival of the Jesuits in 1572. Archduke Charles II supported the Counter-Reformation, established the Jesuit University and went to great lengths to undermine the Protestant Foundation, which disappeared in 1600. His son Ferdinand had a monumental mausoleum built by the artist Pietro de Pomis. However, on his election as Emperor in 1618, he transferred his court to Vienna and Graz underwent a relative economic recession.

During the 17th century, several mansions were built in the Renaissance or early Baroque styles: the Kollonitsch Palace, the Effans von Avernas Palace, and the Stubenberg palace, the last-named passing on to the Welscherheim family. Facades were remodelled in these styles and courtyards enclosed by arches were added to existing buildings. In the western part of the city, the Governor of Inner Austria, Hans Ulrich von Eggenberg, built a ducal palace of great artistic interest; it is the most important Baroque palace in Styria. The great architect Johann Bernhard Fisher von Erlach, was born in Graz in 1656. When the danger from the Turks was finally averted thanks to two decisive victories, Saint Gothard in 1664 and Vienna in 1683, the economy boomed once again. Aristocrats and bourgeoisie competed with each other in their aspirations for honours and culture.

Graz subsequently expanded towards the south and south-west. Factories and banks were set up and started to thrive. However, the movement to centralize Austrian power, ending in the abolition of Inner Austria, weakened the institutions of Graz. At the same time, pilgrimage centres, such as Maria Hilf and Maria Trost, became monumental sanctuaries. The suppression of convents undertaken by Joseph II led to the closing of nine out of sixteen monasteries, whilst the University Library as enriched with works from forty monasteries in Styria and Carinthia. In 1786, the Bishop of Seckau transferred his residence to Graz and turned the Church of St Aegidius into a cathedral. The Jesuit Order was dissolved in 1773 and their university turned into a State university.

The economic growth of the city was severely affected by the wars between the Coalition and France. French troops occupied Graz on several occasions, in 1797, 1805, and 1809, imposing heavy war levies. They besieged the Schlossberg, which put up a brave resistance; however, under the terms of the Treaty of Schönbrunn, the fortifications had to be demolished. In 1839, a public park was laid out over the Schlossberg, giving it its present aspect.

The 1848 Revolution was a fairly moderate one. The pro-German middle class governed the city until 1918. It was a flourishing period for modern town planning. The city acquired military land to create green areas for the public and declared them as *non aedificandi* zones. Urban expansion was channelled outside this green belt and influenced by the *Biedermeier* style and then the *Jugendstil*, whilst the historic centre continued to be the social and commercial hub of the town.

The assassination of the heir to the throne, Archduke Franz-Ferdinand, who was born in Graz in the Khuenburg Palace, triggered off the hostilities of World War I in 1914. When the new frontiers were drawn up in 1918-19, Graz lost its hinterland and to a certain extent was relegated to the fringe from the geographical and economic points of view. In 1938, the seventeen surrounding municipalities formed a town incorporated into Greater Graz. World War II was followed by a slow return to normal, and Graz once again became a modern garden city, a cultural and industrial centre, and a university town.

Description

The inscription of the city of Graz on the World Heritage List is justified, above all, by the exceptional character of the urban complex as such and by the harmonious example of town planning and architectural styles

reflecting successive periods in the history of the city and its development.

Among the hundreds of buildings of great historic and architectural interest, a few particularly remarkable edifices are worthy of note.

- The Castle

Of the original castle where Emperor Frederick III resided, all that remains is a Gothic hall, a Late Gothic chapel, and a double spiral staircase going back to 1499. The wing constructed by Archduke Charles in 1570 has remained largely intact. A monumental Early Renaissance portal leading to the inner courtyard is the work of Domenico dell'Aglio, and shows the influence of Sebastiano Serlio which had spread all over Europe.

- The Seminary (former Jesuit College)

Unlike other colleges, this impressive complex, started in 1572, was not remodelled in the Baroque style and is therefore an important illustration of the severe Renaissance architecture adopted by the Order when it was first established in the German Province.

- The Old Jesuit University

After the dissolution of the Order in 1773, the University came under public control. In order to safeguard its collection, the library was installed in the old *magna aula* and in the theatre, on the orders of Empress Maria Theresa. Its decoration and furnishings make it a significant manifestation of the transition from the Rococo to the Classic style, and it now serves as a show case for the Styrian Archives.

- The Cathedral

Frederick III built the present cathedral in the Late Gothic style (1438-64) alongside a Romanesque church dedicated to St Aegidius. It contains admirable frescoes such as the "Scourges of God" (the Plague of Locusts, the Turkish Invasion, and the Black Death) attributed to Thomas von Villach (1480). Following the transfer of the bishopric from Seckau to Graz, the church of St Aegidius, used for 200 years as a centre for the Counter-Reformation, became the cathedral of the new diocese in 1786.

- The Mausoleum of Emperor Ferdinand II

Started in 1614 by Giovanni de Ponis, the mausoleum was only consecrated in 1714 when the interior decoration, entrusted to Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, was completed. The facade, in particular, reflects the transition from the Renaissance to the Baroque style and is an original synthesis between a powerful architecture topped by light domes.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The area proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List covers 72ha and includes 450 buildings. Most of them are privately owned and are regularly maintained. Many buildings of major importance belong to the Austrian Federal Government, the Province of Styria, and to several churches and other public institutions.

The area is subject to legal and statutory protection at federal, regional, and local levels. Very strict directives

are based, in particular, on the Act on the Protection of Monuments (*Denkmalschutzgesetz*) of 1923, amended in 1978 and 1990, as well as the Act for the Conservation of the Historic Centre of Graz (*Grazer Alstadterhaltungsgesetz*) of 1980.

Management

The above-mentioned directives are supervised by the Bundesdenkmalamt, which is also responsible for the direct management of public buildings. Any transfer of property or changes made to the buildings must be authorized by this government service, through the Landeskonservatorat of Styria, which has its seat in Graz. In compensation, subsidies are granted for restoration works.

The Act for the Conservation of the Historic Centre defines four zones of protection of various degrees. The first zone covers the perimeter proposed for inscription and is subject to the highest degree of protection, whilst the three others serve as a buffer zone. The Government of Styria took complementary steps in 1986 to protect the "roofscape" and traditional windows. Special subsidies have been granted for conservation and restoration work in the protected zones, the expenses being borne by the Fund for the Conservation of the Historic Centre.

Two specialized services are responsible for safeguarding the historic centre. The first permanently monitors the works undertaken and the changes of attribution. The other one oversees major rehabilitation projects and manages a Programme of Urban Renovation.

Among the urban protection measures, the following should be mentioned:

- overall control of traffic and parking of cars, and definition of the areas reserved for pedestrians;
- monitoring of the flow of the river Mur to prevent flooding;
- efficient handling of tourism to make it compatible with the aspirations of the inhabitants.

Complementary arrangements will be added to protect the natural heritage, such as the Schlossberg and the City Park.

The construction of modern buildings is authorized with elaborate precaution. In this respect, the Graz School of Architecture enjoys an international reputation. Such operations are usually the outcome of a competition.

Several protection associations are involved in the conservation of the city of Graz, the most important being the *Internationales Städteforum Graz*.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

For decades respect for the original urban plans and traditional architecture has been common practice; this has been institutionalized by protective laws and regulations. A comprehensive documentation has been compiled showing the care paid to maintenance and conservation works with a view to preserving both the configuration and the social functions of the historic centre, especially after the wars of this century.

In the course of the last ten years, the controlling bodies have supervised works in over half of the historic monuments and most of the public areas, on the basis of preliminary historical and architectural studies.

Authenticity

The historic centre of the city of Graz has a high degree of authenticity, given normal urban dynamics. The city has not suffered much from war damage, and changes have usually been limited and harmonized with the existing constructed environment.

The historic centre has retained its morphology and traditional structures. The boundaries of the districts and old fortifications are still very visible. The two urban focal points, the old market and the ducal residence, still have their original character. The detailed survey has been fully preserved, and the same applies to the boundaries of the glacis, transformed into a green area.

The major historic monuments have kept their architectural and decorative authenticity - for instance, the Armoury with its original weapons, or the vast Stadtkrone complex of the Palace, University, Cathedral and Mausoleum.

The authenticity of the 19th century districts is of a different nature, but just as genuine. The houses of the *Gründerzeit* offer greater flexibility for changes of attribution over time.

There is a problem of authenticity over the transformations of ground-floor windows which contrast with the historic architectural environment. Nevertheless, the urban integrity is not compromised and, moreover, corrective measures are being implemented within the framework of the rigorous management procedures described above.

Evaluation

ICOMOS action

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Graz in January 1999.

Qualities

The historic centre of the city of Graz is an exceptional example of town planning over the centuries, with a harmonious integration of buildings constructed in successive architectural styles. The centre therefore has a value as a historic monument while continuing to lead a contemporary and dynamic social life. Surrounded by green areas, the old city has kept its urban configuration and urban scale, as well as an atmosphere marked by the fruitful encounter between different cultural and artistic movements.

Comparative analysis

The city of Graz is part of a fairly diversified network of central European cities in the south-west. Its origins are medieval. It is distinguished by architectural expressions of an age-old emulation between the high aristocracy and a very active merchant middle class. It also clearly illustrates the episodes of resistance to invasions from the east, the historic tensions between religions, and the synthesis of cultural influences from the Danube, the Balkans, and the Adriatic.

Brief description

The historic heart of the city of Graz is a central European urban centre marked by the centuries-old presence of the Habsburgs. The old city forged an unusual image through a harmonious integration of architectural styles and artistic movements which have succeeded each other since the Middle Ages, as well as the different cultural influences of the neighbouring regions.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii and iv*.

Criterion ii The historic centre of the city of Graz reflects artistic and architectural movements originating from the Germanic region, the Balkans, and the Mediterranean, for which it served as a crossroads for centuries. The greatest architects and artists of these different regions expressed themselves forcefully here and thus created brilliant syntheses.

Criterion iv The urban complex forming the historic centre of the city of Graz is an exceptional example of a harmonious integration of architectural styles from successive periods. Each age is represented by typical buildings, which are often masterpieces. The urban physiognomy faithfully tells the story of its historic development.

ICOMOS, September 1999