

LITHUANIA

Vilnius Historic Centre

Brief description

Political centre of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the 13th to the end of the 18th century, Vilnius has had a profound influence on the cultural and architectural development of much of Eastern Europe. Despite invasions and partial destruction, it has preserved an impressive complex of Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and classical buildings as well as its medieval layout and natural setting.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription

1994

Agency responsible for site management

- Vilnius City Municipality
Konstitucijos pr. 3
LT-09601 Vilnius
e-mail: e.vicemeris@vilnius.lt
website: www.vilnius.lt

2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria

C (ii), (iv)

Justification provided by the State Party

The Vilnius Old Town as a historical city conforms to the category of the historical cities of the world cultural heritage (ii), as an exceptional universal cultural value, which has accumulated in itself the peculiarities of the town's development since the 13th century up to the present days, the town, which has the population of nearly 27 ths. of inhabitants, and the attempts to preserve it during the period of forty years present a real possibility for its survival.

The Vilnius Old Town in respect to its historical and cultural value can be compared to the Old Town of the Polish city Cracow. Both towns in their historical past performed the functions of two capitals in the Rzeczpospolita. Vilnius is also one of the most significant consequences of the culture of the Balts and its interlacement with the traditions of other European countries. Besides, Vilnius has made a great impact on Byelorussia, the Ukraine and Poland and was highly important to them.

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

At the request of the World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS nominated an expert to visit Vilnius in January 1994. Professor Panu Kaila (President, ICOMOS Finland) spent a week there, holding many discussions with those responsible for management, conservation and restoration as well as carrying out a detailed examination of the historic centre.

Qualities

To quote Professor Kaila's report, "the historic centre of Vilnius is a rich collection of buildings from different ages and full of everyday life . . . Personally I am convinced that [it] has an outstanding universal value, that it sufficiently meets the test of authenticity, and that it merits to be nominated to the World Heritage List." Having studied the documentation provided by the State Party and Professor Kaila's report, ICOMOS fully concurs with this view.

Comparative analysis

Vilnius forms part of the extensive network of medieval and early modern trading towns that stretch from Ireland to Russia. It is of special importance in that it is situated in the pivotal trading area of the Baltic States. The only comparable towns in this region are Tallinn (Estonia) and Cracow (Poland). However, Tallinn is significantly different, in that it is a seaport and also because of its important role in the Hanseatic League. It thus followed a different historical and cultural trajectory from Vilnius which is manifested in its present-day form. Cracow has more similarities with Vilnius, but its history and urban fabric demonstrate significant differences, due to its divergent historical and cultural evolution.

At its 14th Meeting in June 1990 the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee referred this nomination back to the Soviet authorities to provide additional information on the town planning schemes which exist in the immediate vicinity of the historic centre and called upon ICOMOS to provide an additional evaluation of the property. This information has been provided and has been evaluated by ICOMOS (see above, "Action by ICOMOS"). ICOMOS has also had the opportunity to study the additional data provided by the Lithuanian authorities in September 1994.

Recommendation

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

Criterion (ii) Vilnius is an outstanding example of a medieval foundation which exercised a profound influence on architectural and cultural developments in a wide area of Eastern Europe over several centuries.

Criterion (iv) In the townscape and the rich diversity of buildings that it preserves, Vilnius is an exceptional illustration of a Central European town which evolved organically over a period of five centuries.

Committee Decision

Bureau (1990): The Bureau referred this file back to the Soviet authorities to provide, before the next session of the Committee, additional information on the town planning schemes which exist in the immediate vicinity of the historic centre, until such time as ICOMOS has provided an additional evaluation of this property.

Bureau (December 1994): The Bureau recalled that the Historic Centre of Vilnius was nominated by the USSR and examined by the Bureau at its fourteenth session. The Bureau referred this nomination back requesting additional information on the town planning schemes which existed in the immediate vicinity of the historic centre. After Lithuania became an independent state it signed the World Heritage Convention in 1992. The Lithuanian authorities then renewed the process of nomination and provided the additional information requested.

ICOMOS informed the Bureau that it considered the protective legislation for the nominated site and a wide area surrounding it adequate but that the only reservation it had was that the private owners do not have the obligation to maintain and restore their properties. The Bureau recommended that the World Heritage Committee inscribe the property under criteria (ii) and (iv).

- Statement of significance by ICOMOS adequately defines the outstanding universal value of the site
- State Party has not stated if the ICOMOS text is considered to be the official statement of significance
- UNESCO official description of site should be improved; State Party has provided suggestion

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone: a buffer zone has been defined

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- Integral character of authenticity of the World heritage Site has been changed, which is historic centre of a living city
- Foreseen reconstruction of several former historic areas destroyed during the WWII

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- Vilnius Old Town (the World Heritage site) Regeneration Project; Rules for the Maintenance and Construction in Vilnius Old Town; Special Vilnius Old Town Plan; Vilnius Old Town Preservation Regulations; the conceptual part (Summary Protected Properties' Plan, Landplots, Landuse and Maintenance and Construction Regulations Plan) of the Old Town Detailed plan; urban analysis of Vilnius City Centre
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Urban centre

Management /Administrative Body

- Steering group: Supervision Council of Vilnius Old Town Renewal Agency was set up to suggest on priorities and principles of implementation of Vilnius Old Town Revitalisation Program
- Formally constituted
- Management under protective legislation
- No site manager
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national, local
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

5. Management Plan

- Management plan is being implemented
- Implementation commenced: December 2003
- Adequate
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: Department of Cultural Heritage at the Ministry of Culture, Vilnius Municipality, State Cultural Reserve of Vilnius Castles; Vilnius Old Town Renewal Agency

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- Ministry of Culture; Vilnius municipality's Cultural Heritage Division; State Cultural Reserve of Vilnius Castles; Vilnius Old Town Renewal Agency
- Extra funding has been drawn from World Heritage status
- An NGO Vilnius Old Town Renewal Agency (OTRA) was founded by Vilnius Municipality in 1998 for preparation and coordination of the Old Town–World Heritage site's Revitalisation Program
- National and/or regional projects of UNDP, the World Bank or other agencies; Bi-lateral cooperation; ICCROM, OWHC, European Commission, Danish and Norwegian Governmental Funds
- Funding available for the adequate management of the site: insufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- 19 staff

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

- Good: conservation, promotion, interpretation
- Average: management, education, visitor management

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

- Academy of Cultural Heritage at Vilnius University (NGO) provides training for heritage management experts; Vilnius University, and Academy of Arts provide educational and post-graduate studies, Conservation laboratory of the National Museum conservation of movable cultural heritage and archaeological properties; Pranas Gudynas Restoration Centre (for movable cultural heritage properties); Chemical and Materials' Laboratory of the Centre of Cultural Heritage at the Department of Cultural Heritage provides chemical and physical research of construction materials; Paper Conservation centre of the National Library – conservation/ restoration of documents, books, etc.

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 900,000 in 2004 - tendency rapid increase

- Visitor facilities: There are two municipal tourism information centers within the historic centre – the World Heritage site; information boards and guideposts have been installed since 2002; historic centre two viewing sites were installed in 2004 and other two are planned to be installed in the near future; special guide bus is offering the tour within and around the historic centre; municipality supports small private galleries promoting traditional crafts and arts in the historic centre
- Tourism/visitor management plan (National level: www.tourism.lt; Municipal: www.Vilnius.lt; Tourism association: www.Itas.lt)

10. Scientific Studies

- Studies related to the value of the site, monitoring exercises, archaeological surveys, transportation studies
- Urban and architectural studies are used for preparation of Vilnius Old Town Detail Plan and for the update of Vilnius Old Town (the World Heritage site) Preservation Regulations as well as the area Special Plan. Results of these studies are also taken into account currently updating Vilnius City Master Plan and preparing Maintenance Plan of Vilnius Old Town

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- Not enough signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Emblem used on some publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors; local communities; local authorities
- Special youth and residents' awareness raising activities: special lectures, discussions, seminars, sightseeing walks, exhibitions have been permanently organized by the Old Town Renewal Agency since the year 1999; World Heritage Status of Vilnius Historic City Centre is promoted during the annual celebration of European Heritage Days as well as World Heritage Cities' Days; annual Cultural Heritage Day celebration in April
- Web site available
- Some participation of local communities in the process of the World Heritage site preservation management; possibility to take part in the meetings of Vilnius Old Town Senate; participation in the consideration process of the Vilnius Old Town Detailed Plan

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- World Heritage Bureau sessions: 20th (1996); 21st (1997); 24th (2000)
- World Heritage Committee sessions: 19th (1995); 20th (1996); 22nd (1998); 30th (2006)

Conservation interventions

- Complex archaeological research of Cathedral and Town Hall squares, Gediminas avenue and Vrublevskio street; complex historic, architectural and archaeological research and comparative studies of the remains of Great Dukes' Palace (Lower Castles area); rehabilitation and restoration of number of monastic and palace complexes as well as dwelling houses adopting them to contemporary uses: educational, hostels and hotels, living or commerce
- Present state of conservation: adequate

Threats and Risks to site

- Development pressure, change of property ownership, ineffective system of property maintenance

Actions taken

- Urban Analysis of Vilnius City Centre and preparation of the Old Town Detailed Plan

13. Monitoring

- Formal Monitoring Programme
- Measures taken/planned: Following Vilnius City Master Plan (currently passing the update) there are 19 viewpoints selected around and within the historic city centre allowing to observe changes in cityscape, silhouettes and decide on relevance of new construction (2004); Monitoring of contents (substance) of cultural heritage properties of Vilnius historic centre has been implemented since 1998

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: economic
- Strength: Successful reconstruction of public spaces; rapid growth of tourism and admiration of local communities; intensive growth of private service and leisure businesses in the Old Town made the area most vibrant, attractive and visited part of the city; growing awareness, consultation, and financial support of local property owners; active participation of local communities in the process of the World

Heritage site preservation management; Reconstruction of the former Lithuanian Great Dukes' Palace (Lower Palace); extensive scientific research and studies in archaeology, history, urbanism and architecture; growing international interest in Vilnius city and its history; emerging cross-regional technical advise role on historic city centre regeneration management offered by Vilnius municipality institutions through UNESCO WHC and ICCROM to post-Soviet countries in transition

- Weakness of management: Insufficient quality of management and funding for research, conservation and restoration works; missing immovable properties' maintenance system; insufficient green areas: regeneration and maintenance of squares, parks and gardens; insufficient extent of exemplary conservation or restoration works; lack of effective stimulation and/or support means for the property owners to properly conserve and/ or maintain their property; ineffective restoration/ construction work quality control and penalization system

Future actions

- Reorganisation of the state cultural heritage management system
Timeframe: 2005-2006
- Improvement of quality of the site management
Timeframe: 2003-2007
- Improvement of research, conservation and control quality
Timeframe: 2006-2007
- Strengthening of supervision of quality of conservation, restoration and maintenance
Timeframe: 2004-2007
- Activities do require funding from the World Heritage Fund