



ICOMOS

international council on monuments and sites

ANNUAL REPORT 2015

The International
Congress Centre
Berlin – one of the most
exceptional landmarks
of post-war German
architecture

Heritage Alerts

ICOMOS Heritage Alerts draw on the knowledge of the ICOMOS professional network, as well as the information supplied by third parties, such as civil society organisations, to investigate requests for international action where potentially significant heritage places are threatened, in order to achieve a rigorous, independent assessment of the situation.



Detail of the Dome of the Kirche am Steinhof designed by Otto Wagner

OTTO-WAGNER-HOSPITAL – VIENNA, AUSTRIA

ICOMOS and ICOMOS Austria wrote to the Mayor of Vienna in December 2015 to express their deep concern for the situation of the Otto-Wagner-Hospital, owned by the City of Vienna. Opened in 1907 as a sanatorium and psychiatric hospital, it is still partly used as a hospital.

The significance of the site as an extensive Art Nouveau ensemble, built by Otto Wagner with the participation of Heinrich Goldemund, has been confirmed by several scientific studies. The importance refers to both the architectural characteristics and the spatial planning of the site, including the horticultural design of the gardens. In addition, its relevance to developments in the history of medicine and therapy is of major cultural value. Whilst the core area (Kernbereich, pavilions and church) of the site benefits of Statutory Monument Protection, no protection is afforded to the economic area (Wirtschaftsbereich) in the eastern part. Today the site is gravely endangered by recent and ongoing constructions; change in the land use of the “Wirtschaftsbereich”; the planned closing of hospital services within the next decade; and the increasingly poor state of conservation of a number of the historic structures.

In its letter, ICOMOS calls upon the authorities of Vienna and Austria not to allow economic aspects to override the cultural importance of the ensemble and to urgently extend the status of protection to include the “Wirtschaftsbereich”; to reconsider the development and conservation concept for the entire area; and to develop a usage programme for the future when the hospital services close, which will consider the exceptional importance and history of the whole ensemble. The Vice Mayor of Vienna replied to ICOMOS on 20 January 2016 providing a number of assurances related to the “core area” of the site. For this reason, ICOMOS replied on 16 March 2016 that its concerns for the site remain until the whole ensemble – including the “economic area” – receives full protection, based on a holistic approach. No new construction should take place until appropriate discussions based on ongoing studies have occurred.

BANQUE POPULAIRE DE L'OUEST – RENNES, FRANCE

In July 2015, ICOMOS wrote to the French Minister of Culture, concerning the fate of the building housing the Banque Populaire de l'Ouest (BPO) in Montgémont, near Rennes. This iconic piece of contemporary architecture dating from 1990, with its innovative approach of mixing architecture, engineering and industry in search of a new spatiality, was threatened by a demolition permit. The petition to save it included the signatures of Daniel Buren, Frank Gehry, Norman Foster and Jean Nouvel, among others.

Conceived by French architects Odile Decq and Benoit Cornette and the American engineer Peter Rice, the building received 12 national and international prizes including the Benedictus Award in 1994 and the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale in 1996, and has been widely published and researched. It features in the permanent exhibition of the Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine in Paris. Technically exceptional with its architectural experimentations, such as its suspended double glazing facades, the BPO building embodies the “high tech” movement at the same level as the HSBC Tower in Hong Kong or the Lloyds Headquarters in London.

ICOMOS advocated withdrawing the demolition permit and exploring the building's reuse by increasing the buildable area of the 7 hectare site, and put its expert advice at the disposal of the Ministry. The international and national efforts had a positive outcome. The demolition permit has since been withdrawn, and it was announced 19 May 2016 that the BPO building will welcome the Training Centre for Construction Apprentices in Brittany in September 2019.

The suspended double glazing façade of the BPO building



ICOMOS

A unique non-governmental, democratic not-for-profit international organisation committed to furthering the conservation, protection, use and enhancement of the world's cultural heritage.

ICOMOS was created in 1965 in Warsaw following the adoption the year before of the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, also known as the Venice Charter.

ICOMOS is dedicated to the development of common doctrines, the evolution and circulation of knowledge, the creation of improved conservation techniques, and the promotion of cultural heritage significance. ICOMOS has built a solid philosophical, doctrinal and managerial framework for the sustainable conservation of heritage around the world.

As an official advisory body to the World Heritage Committee for the implementation of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, ICOMOS evaluates nominations and advises on the state of conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List.



International Secretariat:

Marie-Laure Lavenir, Director General
Gaia Jungeblodt, Director

Administration

Bernadette Bertel-Rault, Executive Assistant
Henri Verrier, Administrative Manager
Maureen Pelletier, Assistant Communication and Projects

World Heritage

Regina Durighello, Director of the Advisory and Monitoring Unit
Tara Bushe, Assistant to the Advisory and Monitoring Unit
Gwenaëlle Bourdin, Director of the Evaluation Unit
Anaïs Andraud, Assistant to the Evaluation Unit
Apsara Sanchez, Assistant to the Evaluation Unit

Documentation

Lucile Smirnov, Head of Documentation Centre

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ICOMOS

11 rue du Séminaire de Conflans
94 220 Charenton-le-Pont
France
Tel. + 33 (0) 1 41 94 17 59
e-mail: secretariat@icomos.org
www.icomos.org

President of ICOMOS: Gustavo Araoz / **Authors:** besides the signed articles, texts have been written by: Samir Abdulac, Gaia Jungeblodt, Marie-Laure Lavenir, Maureen Pelletier, Andrew Potts, Britta Rudloff, Lucile Smirnov, Kai Weise, IUCN, ICOMOS World Heritage Units, ICOMOS Australia, ICOMOS Chile, ICOMOS Ireland, ICOMOS Netherlands, ICOMOS Turkey, ICOMOS UK / **Coordination:** Marie-Laure Lavenir, Gaia Jungeblodt / **Editing-layout coordination:** Gaia Jungeblodt and Maureen Pelletier / **Iconography:** Gaia Jungeblodt and Maureen Pelletier with the support of Lucile Smirnov, Apsara Sanchez, Trina Moine... and some of the authors mentioned above / **Design:** Vanessa Paris / **Proofing:** Marie-Laure Lavenir, Gaia Jungeblodt, Maureen Pelletier, Lucile Smirnov.

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