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Culture Sector  
Division for Heritage

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21 GEN. 2016
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H.E. Mrs Vincenza Lomonaco  
Ambassador,  
Permanent Delegate of Italy to  
UNESCO  
UNESCO House

Ref.: CLT/HER/WHC/8555/IT/AS/MR

15 January 2016

Subject: **ICOMOS Technical Review concerning the World Heritage property "City of Vicenza and the Palladian Villas of the Veneto"**

Dear Ambassador,

Following your letters received by the World Heritage Centre on 3 January, 9 February, 13 February and 5 May 2015, please find enclosed the ICOMOS Technical Review on the state of conservation of the World Heritage property "City of Vicenza and the Palladian Villas of the Veneto".

Your authorities may wish to provide factual comments on the technical review by ICOMOS at their earliest convenience.

We would appreciate it if the Italian authorities concerned submit to the World Heritage Centre for review all documents requested by ICOMOS, as well as inform the World Heritage Centre, in conformity with paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*, on any planned projects within the World Heritage property.

Moreover, I would like to highlight that it is recommended to the State Party to invite an Advisory mission to the World Heritage property "City of Vicenza and the Palladian Villas of the Veneto" to assess its state of conservation, and in particular the impact of ongoing and planned development projects within the property and its buffer zone.

May I take this opportunity to thank you for your support and cooperation in the implementation of the *World Heritage Convention*.

Please accept, dear Ambassador, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Mechtild Rössler  
Director  
World Heritage Centre

Encl. Annex I

cc: National Commission of Italy for UNESCO  
National Focal Point for World Heritage  
ICOMOS International

## ICOMOS Technical Review

Property	City of Vicenza and the Palladian Villas of the Veneto
State Party	Italy
Property ID	712bis
Date inscription	1994
Criteria	(i)(ii)

Projects under evaluation:

1. US Army military base Dal Din – Dal Molin airport (wider setting)
2. Residential building complex in the former Cotonificio Cotorossi area between the Bacchiglione and Retrone rivers (immediately adjacent to the buffer zone, proximity to two Palladian Villas)
3. Newly-planned HD/HC railway line connecting Milan to Venice (wider setting, portions of buffer zone)
4. Related major infrastructure works (large tunnel under the Monte Berico) and modification to road access and traffic circulation (wider setting, portions of buffer zone)

### Background

In 2015, at the 39<sup>th</sup> Session of the World heritage Committee, the Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value for the property was adopted. An excerpt is quoted below:

*The city of Vicenza and the Palladian villas of the Veneto is a serial site including the city of Vicenza and twenty-four Palladian villas scattered in the Veneto area. Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1994, the site initially comprised only the city of Vicenza with its twenty-three buildings attributed to Palladio, as well as three villas extra muros. Twenty-one villas located in several provinces were later included in the 1996 site extension.*

*[...] The definitive Palladian country villa synthesizes, both figuratively and materially, the functional aspects of management of the land and the aristocratic self-glorification of the owner.*

With regard to the integrity of the serial property, the statement notes that:

*The 21st-century industrial development resulted in a strong transformation of the areas surrounding the city, affecting the original relationships between city and countryside. The villas have kept their integrity and are well preserved, within a territorial context which underwent several changes and for this reason was excluded from the site perimeter. Various parts of the property have been exposed to development pressures and the impact of agricultural and forestry regimes.*

The visual interrelationships between the city, the villas erected on the hills overlooking Vicenza and their setting represent an important dimension for the understanding of the complete integration of the Palladian villas within the landscape and their role as regulating elements of the landscape, along with their functional importance for the exploitation of the agricultural land.

Following information received on plans to construct the Valdastico Sud highway, a UNESCO-ICOMOS reactive monitoring mission was carried out in 2005 which recommended the State Party to take measures to prevent inappropriate constructions within the property and to exert strict control on land uses in order to avoid urban sprawl or development of industrial constructions that may affect the landscape surrounding Villa Saraceno.

Since 2005 the state of conservation reports for the property indicate amongst negative factors the uncontrolled construction development throughout the Veneto region.

The Second Cycle Periodic Report for the property indicates among current factors negatively impacting the property housing, pollution, traffic and flooding, whilst commercial development, industrial areas, ground transportation infrastructure, and military training are indicated as at a potential stage. Current negative factors are indicated as having minor, restricted (or localised) impact with a temporal scale varying between 'one off or rare' and 'intermittent or sporadic'. Only air pollution is acknowledged as having an extensive, ongoing, although minor, impact. The management response is assessed between high and medium.

Information was received by the World Heritage Centre in 2013 and 2014 on the above-mentioned large-scale interventions, two of which are located in the immediate vicinity of the property although outside of the buffer zone (the urban redevelopment of the Cotonificio Cotorossi area and the HS/HC railway line and the related transportation infrastructure), while the military base Dal Din – Dal Molin is located in the wider setting of the property, at 1500 – 2500m from the city of Vicenza and Villa Trissino.

The present technical review addresses third party and State Party information and is based on the documentation submitted by both, as well as on a rapid survey of the websites of the appeal groups concerned and of the municipal administration for updated information.

## Analysis

### *Military Base Dal Din – Dal Molin airport area*

An appeal was received by the World Heritage Centre on 21 February 2013 against the construction of the base as it was considered in contrast with the very nature of a World Heritage property and UNESCO's principles. It contained a list of heartening appeals by several individuals. The State Party response was received on 9 February 2015 explaining that this is an expansion of a base existing since the 1950s, that the Municipality has promoted actions to reduce its impact and that adjacent to it a 63ha-area is planned to become an urban park as a filter between the city and the base.

### Evaluation of the information provided

ICOMOS observes that the existing US Army military base is located at eastern end of the city of Vicenza (Caserma Ederle), while the new one is much larger and located at the west end of the city. Although the US military base was built outside the buffer zone of the property, the construction of such an important and impacting infrastructure will certainly have, at least, indirect impacts on the city both in tangible and intangible terms. The latter appear particularly relevant from an imaginary and social perspective, as attested to by the many rallies, petitions and demonstration acts initiated against this new base. This would have called for a preliminary extensive consultation with the citizenship before any decision was taken, even beyond cultural value considerations.

### *Service and residential building complex in the former Cotonificio Cotorossi area*

On 11 August 2014, a petition was sent to the World Heritage Centre by the Osservatorio Urbano Territoriale OUT denouncing the lack of adequate preservation of the historic landscape setting of Vicenza and informing about the authorisation of the development of a large building complex for service, residential and commercial uses in an area comprised between the Bacchiglione and Retrone rivers to the south of the historic city and immediately adjacent to the buffer zone. The development was underway and the new Town Courthouse was recently completed but the residential and commercial section of the programme (further 14 buildings) was yet to be initiated. The petition also expressed preoccupation for the Municipality planning decisions, which would demonstrate that new projects are planned for the buffer zone that would adversely impact on the World Heritage property due to its size and location relative to the city of Vicenza and to the villa Valmarana dei Nani and the Villa Capra "la Rotonda". The appeal concludes with the request that Vicenza be inscribed in the List of World Heritage in Danger. The petition was forwarded to the State Party on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2014 for comment.

The State Party responded on 13 February 2015, informing that the dismissed manufacturing complex of

the Cotonificio encompassed a 300.000 cubic meter built volume. For its rehabilitation, a functional conversion from industrial to mixed functions was envisaged, and the project was included in the PRUSST programmes since 1998. The plan was implemented through an integrated urban and building plan (PIRUEA), which implied variants to the General Town Plan. These variants were approved by the relevant Soprintendenza with prescriptions directed to safeguarding elements of the historic fabric of the Cotonificio (the Ciminiera and the façades), the landscape character and the views from the Monte Berico, these prescriptions were incorporated into the regulations for the implementation of the development plan. In 2009 the original project was modified to mitigate environmental impact and improve its architectural quality, by appointing a landscape architect. The works were in progress but the 14 residential and commercial buildings were still to be built. The State Party also reported that the suspension and cancellation of the project would not have been justified according to the Municipality of Vicenza.

#### Evaluation of the information provided

From the information provided by the State Party and the visual documentation submitted by the appeal group (also confirmed following a rapid survey on the internet), the scale of the development already completed is huge: the new complex encompasses, beyond the already massive building of the courthouse, 6 large multi-storey edifices (6-8) that have completely saturated the small fluvial islet which is part of the building plot, with a substantial increase of the built volume and height when compared to the previous manufacturing facility; however, 14 further buildings of the same scale are planned to be built according to the development project and visual documentation provided by the appeal group.

It is not clear to ICOMOS how the above-mentioned landscape architect has contributed to the project, considering that the development area has been completely saturated by tall buildings. The area is at the fringe of the built-up area of the city, in direct contact with a tranquil and still rather well-preserved agricultural landscape; the existing built fabric is characterised by a much lower height, scale and density and features a semi-rural traditional aspect; both the landscape and this minute traditional, peripheral built fabric have been substantially, adversely and permanently impacted by this exaggerate complex, urban in character and with a design alien to its surroundings. ICOMOS also notes that the prescriptions of the Soprintendenza have not been retained, as nothing of the former complex survives in the area.

ICOMOS notes that no visual documentation has been provided on the possible impacts of this built complex on the visual perspectives from the Palladian villas located on the Monte Berico, located at some 500m from the new complex, or from the monuments within the city, located at a distance inferior to 1km as the crow flies. Therefore visual obtrusions of the views from some of the component parts and the attributes that express the Outstanding Universal Value of the property are almost certain but they are not known in their extent at this stage.

#### *HD /HC railway line and Monte Berico Tunnel*

A further petition was sent by the same OUT organisation on 30<sup>th</sup> December 2014, reiterating the arguments put forth in the previous letter but also informing about the approval of the high-speed railway and related infrastructure works that include the opening of a 1350m long, 14m wide and 17m high tunnel under the Monte Berico, immediately under the Villa Valmarana dei Nani and not far from the villa La Rotonda (inscribed WH property).

The State Party (the Municipality of Vicenza) responded on 14 April 2015 providing a 54-page report and the entire feasibility study prepared by the railway company. The project is included in the list of the transportation infrastructure of major national importance since 2001 and was then inserted in an inter-institutional agreement between the Italian Government and the Veneto Region (2011). The documentation provided by the State Party reports that various alternatives have been explored for the route of the new railway line. The Municipality of Vicenza approved in 2014 the feasibility study with a number of requirements concerning the tunnel for the hydraulic and road bypass, the careful approach to the landscape, historic and cultural relevance of the city of Vicenza and its setting, EIA process being carried out by research institutions, surveys and monitoring of monuments, settlements and existing infrastructures and a series of other requirements for all the related interventions. The final design solution envisages that

the HS/HC new railway line will run alongside the old one, new stations will be built west and east of the city and the old one will be discontinued, and the line will be buried at the part corresponding to the city centre, thus healing the potential fracture to the urban fabric created by the railway and making it possible to envisage improved road access and circulation. The complementary work includes the above-mentioned tunnel, the large size of which is motivated by the fact that it shall act both as a hydraulic – to relieve the problems of the Retrone river - and as a road bypass. Other works encompass the construction of a trolley bus line connecting the western and eastern railway station (Vicenza Fiera and Vicenza Tribunale).

#### Evaluation of the information provided

ICOMOS observes that the programme of the new transportation infrastructure encompasses extensive, technically complex and expensive interrelated works that will certainly have impacts on the entire built urban and socio-economic fabric of the city of Vicenza as well as hydrological and geological complexities. The opening of a large tunnel under the Monte Berico, close to the Villa Valmarana dei Nani, which is famous worldwide for its mural paintings by Tiepolo, and the Villa Capra 'La Rotonda' is of extreme concern, due to the size of the planned tunnel and the vicinity to the villas, as its opening may cause instabilities that may adversely impact on to the above mentioned villa, while further vibrations may be brought by the continuous movement of a great number of vehicles. The eastern exit of the tunnel is planned immediately under and in correspondence of the Villa Capra, therefore the noise pollution that will be produced by the future traffic of the road is also likely to affect the Villa as well as the adjacent residential neighbourhood, which may bring, as a consequence, the obligation of inserting acoustic barriers that, on their turn, may add further negative visual disturbances.

ICOMOS also notes that all these works are likely to last for several years, thus causing substantial inconvenience and indirect negative impacts to the socio-economic life of the city: a consultation process should be established in this regard, in order to both inform the citizens, and to gather information and expert advice from associations, professional organisations, research institutions which are part of the civil society and which altogether may hold a cumulative knowledge that may be useful to improve the proposed solution or to find better ones.

#### **Recommendations**

ICOMOS observes that each of the above-mentioned projects, owing to their large scale and considerable impact on the city of Vicenza, its built and landscape heritage and its wider setting, which support the property's Outstanding Universal Value, as well as on its social profile, should have been the object of Heritage Impact Assessments individually and cumulatively before any decisions were taken.

ICOMOS also regrets that no information was made available on these projects to the World Heritage Committee through its Secretariat at an early stage as requested by paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*, despite the fact that most of them have had an administrative history several years long and in many cases with the direct involvement of the central government (e.g. the military base and the HS/HC railway line), which should have facilitated communication with international agencies.

Furthermore, ICOMOS observes that the periodic reporting does not accurately reflect the current situation of the property, considering the large scale plans and projects that have been and are being implemented and/or scheduled and their likely impacts, which do not find a proper record in the report.

The redevelopment of the Cotonificio Cotorossi has already eroded the values of the landscape setting of Vicenza and of the villas located in its vicinity, while the erection of the military base at Dal Molin site appears to have found strong opposition in the citizenship, and to have also left a sense of distrust in the local, national and international institutions at the community level. According to news found on the internet<sup>1</sup> (dated 5<sup>th</sup> November 2015), the project has been halted recently by the public prosecutor's office

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.repubblica.it/cultura/2015/11/05/news/urbanistica\\_procura\\_vicenza\\_mette\\_sigilli\\_al\\_cantiere\\_di\\_borgo\\_berga-126684624/](http://www.repubblica.it/cultura/2015/11/05/news/urbanistica_procura_vicenza_mette_sigilli_al_cantiere_di_borgo_berga-126684624/)

(procura) due to possible infringements of the existing laws and regulations.

The large-scale programme for the upgrading of the railway line is going to add substantial transformation to the city, is likely to take several years before being completed and may also result in negative and permanent impacts on important attributes of the property.

When considering these projects altogether, their cumulative effects on the city and its historic landscape are likely to cause further erosion of the values of the property's historic setting as well as direct impact on attributes of the property's Outstanding Universal Value.

ICOMOS observes that the city of Vicenza and some of the inscribed villas located in its vicinity, their immediate and wider setting, which are integral to the properties to allow their full understanding and appreciation, appear very vulnerable to development and infrastructure pressure which do not appear being weighed properly against their values. This suggests an inadequate collective understanding, on the decision makers' part, of the role of the property's historic setting in conveying its Outstanding Universal Value, which undermines the effectiveness of a value-based management approach.

ICOMOS therefore recommends that the State Party gives serious consideration to the following:

- Initiate with the maximum urgency a Heritage Impact Assessment aimed at evaluating the cumulative impacts on the city of Vicenza and the villas located in its vicinity of the projects already carried out and of those planned or deriving from the revision of the planning / programming instruments at local, regional or national level. Valid occasions within the national legal framework are offered by the need to prepare an Environmental Impact Assessment for the new railway line and a Strategic Impact Assessment for the modifications to the planning instruments that are mentioned in the documentation sent by the third party and the State Party as well. In ICOMOS' view, the above-mentioned HIA should be prepared by an independent entity with experience in the sector and its results should be delivered separately and only afterwards integrated into the results of the EIA and SIA procedures;
- Use the current halting of the redevelopment project of the Cotonificio Cotorossi to reconsider its completion;
- Invite an WHC-ICOMOS advisory mission as soon as possible to assess the impacts of the works already carried out, of those planned and of the modifications to the planning provisions that may lead to further development projects within the buffer zone, and to advise the State Party on finding appropriate solutions for the visual mitigation of the works already carried out and a way forward to ensure a more effective and value-based management of the property and its setting.

ICOMOS remains at the State Party's disposal for any query or clarification that may be needed and expresses its availability and willingness to provide advice, if considered useful.

ICOMOS, Charenton-le-Pont  
December 2015