



REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF CULTURE



Director
UNESCO World Heritage Centre
7, Place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP
France

15 February 2024 No 14-5.3/18-1

Informing UNESCO about possible annex to Estonia Theatre located in Historic Centre (Old Town) of Tallinn, Estonia

Dear Lazare Eloundou Assomo,

We would like to inform the UNESCO World Heritage Centre of the ongoing national discussion regarding the possible annex of the Estonia Theatre, the home of the Estonian National Opera and Ballet. The building is a national monument with outstanding historical, architectural, and cultural value and is an integral part of the Historic Centre (Old Town) of Tallinn, which has been a World Heritage Site since 1997. The Estonia Theatre proposed constructing an annex and applied for state funding in 2020 since the historical building is not suitable for the needs of a modern opera and ballet theatre. The Estonian Parliament decided in 2021 to finance the annex of Estonia Theatre in the future as one of cultural objects of significant importance. Implementing this decision is only possible in accordance with all the requirements of the existing legislation as the decision of the Parliament does not take precedence over the law. The decision does not specify the shape, exact location, or volume of the annex as this is not Parliament's authority. Following the decision, a non-binding visualisation has been created by the Estonian National Opera to illustrate the size and location of the proposed annex that considers the optimal spatial requirements of the theatre.

The local and national heritage protection authorities and experts have found that the proposed annex in the size and location presented in the visualisation does not comply with the principles of heritage protection in Tallinn Old Town heritage conservation area – a World Heritage site – and would have a significant negative impact on the Estonia Theatre, one of the most notable cultural monuments in Estonia. In addition to heritage protection restrictions, the desired scale of annex is not possible due to urban planning considerations.

A joint committee established by the City of Tallinn and the Estonian National Opera in 2022 to deliberate the future of the Estonia Theatre did not find a consensus and the debate is ongoing. The most recent developments include the request of Estonian National Opera to the National Heritage Board to prepare special conditions for heritage conservation. This work is currently ongoing as foreseen under Heritage Conservation Act, Statutes of Tallinn Heritage Conservation area and Planning Act. It is also envisaged to elaborate Heritage Impact Assessment on the potential impact of the proposed construction on the Outstanding Universal Value of the Historic Centre (Old Town) of Tallinn.

This notice is submitted in accordance with paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, which invites the States Parties to the Convention to inform the World Heritage Committee, through the Secretariat, of their intention to undertake or to authorize in an area protected under the Convention major restorations or new constructions which may affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. We also note the request contained in the same paragraph that notice should be given as soon as possible and before making any decisions that would be difficult to reverse.

No decision on a possible annex has been made. We are committed to finding an appropriate solution to ensure that the Outstanding Universal Value of the property is fully preserved. We will keep you informed of any further developments.

Please find enclosed a detailed overview explaining the background and the current situation, along with visualisation of the property and proposed sketches for future as presented in the summary of the joint committee's work in October 2023.

Yours sincerely,



Märt Volmer
Deputy Secretary General for Cultural Heritage
Ministry of Culture



Madle Lippus
Deputy Mayor
Tallinn City Government

Enclosures:

1. Detailed overview of the ongoing debate concerning possible annex to Estonia theatre
2. Extras (maps, visualisation of the property, sketches)

Copy to:

- b.de-sancristobal@unesco.org
- wh-info@unesco.org
- info@opera.ee
- info@keskkonnaamet.ee
- info@muinsuskaitseamet.ee
- lvpost@tallinnlv.ee
- dl.estonia@unesco-delegations.org
- secretariat@icomos.org
- Estonia@icomos.org
- unesco@kul.ee