



Old City of Berne

States parties: Switzerland
Date of Inscription: 1983

UNESCO - Statement of Outstanding Universal Value



Founded in the 12th century on a hill site surrounded by the Aare River, Berne developed over the centuries in line with an exceptionally coherent planning concept. The buildings in the Old City, dating from a variety of periods, include 15th-century arcades and 16th-century fountains. Most of the medieval town was restored in the 18th century but it has retained its original character.

Brief synthesis

The Old City of Berne, federal city of Switzerland and capital of the canton of Berne, is located on the Swiss plateau between the Jura and the Alps. Founded in the 12th century according to an innovative foundation plan, and located on a hill surrounded by the River Aar, Berne has experienced an expansion in several stages since its foundation. This development remains visible in its urban structure, mainly tributary to the medieval establishment and its clearly defined elements: well-defined wide streets, used for the market, a regular division of built sections, subdivided into narrow and deep parcels, an advanced infrastructure for water transportation, impressive buildings for the most part dating from the 18th century mainly built from sandy limestone, with their system of arcades and the facades of the houses supported by arches. Public buildings for secular and religious authorities were always located at the periphery, a principle also respected in the 19th century during the construction of the large public monuments confirming the function of Berne as the federal city from 1848.

Berne developed along the lines of exceptionally coherent planning principles. The medieval establishment of Berne, reflecting the slow conquest of the site by urban extensions from the 12th to the 14th century, makes Berne an impressive example of the High Middle Ages with regard to the foundation

of a city, figuring in the European arena among the most significant of urban planning creations. The features of Berne were modified to reflect the modern era: in the 16th century, picturesque fountains were introduced to the city and restoration work was carried out on the towers and walls and the cathedral was completed. In the 17th century, many patrician houses were built of sandy limestone, and towards the end of the 18th century, a large part of the constructed zones underwent transformation. However, this continual modernization, right through to the present day, was carried out observing the need to conserve the medieval urban structure of the city. The Old City of Berne is a unique example demonstrating a constant renewal of the built substance while respecting the original urban planning concept, and presenting a variation of the late Baroque on a theme of High Middle Ages.

Criterion (iii): The Old City of Berne is a positive example of a city that has conserved its medieval urban structure whilst responding, over time, to the increasingly complex functions of a capital city of a modern State.

Integrity

The property comprises all the urban historical structures, with all the stages of its development from the 12th century to the 14th century, including the developments of the 19th century such as the well-preserved bridges and large public monuments. It therefore retains all the requisite elements to express its Outstanding Universal Value.

Authenticity

Although during the first decades of the 20th century, the safeguarding of the Old City was specifically concentrated on the appearance of the buildings (facades, roofs), the large majority of the historic buildings representing diverse periods have retained their interior structures, and the overall medieval plan has remained intact. The city today demonstrates a good state of conservation of the buildings and a very dynamic and contemporary urban activity.

Protection and management requirements

The property benefits from special legislation since 1908, which has been amended several times since then, and which clearly details the safeguarding of the urban landscape, strictly regulating any possible interventions. Development pressure involving potentially inappropriate transformations is controlled by this legal mechanism.

The management of the property is ensured by an administrative system that involves the authorities at all State levels according to their legal competences. The specialised service of the city for historic monuments is responsible for the conservation of the built heritage, in the strict sense, while other city and cantonal services ensure the more extensive urban management (planning and land use, public and private transportation regulations, security, arrangements and structures for risk management, notably as regards natural and environmental catastrophes, etc.). As a living urban centre, the site has the capacity to welcome a large number of visitors. There are two visitor information centres as well as numerous specialised offers. In accordance with sovereign democratic rights, the local population is called upon to vote on eventual changes to legal texts, as well as on investment and major urban projects. The non-governmental organizations have a right to challenge administrative decisions.

The long-term challenges include the maximum conservation of the original substance whilst taking into account the living character as an inhabited centre, place of work and commerce, as well as the strict control of the immediate boundaries, notably the slopes towards the Aar.

(source : <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/267/>)