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Article

# From Reconstruction to Urban Preservation: Negotiating Built Heritage After the Second World War

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## Abstract

Designating parts of the city's protected areas that are worthy of preservation has been part of urban-planning practice in Europe since at least the 1970s. Such efforts drew on post-war reconstruction planning, which had already addressed questions of which parts of historic city centers were worth preserving or rebuilding. However, the influence of reconstruction planning on the will to preserve historical city centers has so far been under-researched. The central concern of this article is to understand the reconstruction process not only as a moment of planning but also as an instance of inheritance and preservation. Close consideration of Vienna shows that the reconstruction period offered new opportunities, including some for the preservation movement. By designating buildings and entire *Altstadt-Inseln* ("old town islands") as worth preserving, an attempt was made to influence the planning process. A review of historic maps and written documents shows how early cartographic and written heritage records guided not only the reconstruction process but also the longer-term development of the city. By exploring the discourse on preservation and repair that was carried out as part of reconstruction planning in Vienna, this article illustrates the consequences of this negotiation process and the ascription of value to monuments and ensembles, which formed the basis for the preservation of "Old Vienna" in the 1960s and 1970s and can still be traced today.

## Keywords

heritage negotiation; monument values; protection zones; reconstruction planning; townscape protection; urban preservation; Vienna

## Issue

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## 1. Introduction

In many European cities, the introduction of ensemble and townscape protection has been an ongoing aspect of urban planning practice since at least the 1970s. It has been frequently observed (see, e.g., Schnell, 2015, p. 63) that in the 1960s interest in heritage conservation increasingly shifted from the preservation of individual monuments to the protection of townscapes and ensembles. The first Old Town Preservation Act in Austria was passed in 1967, for the historic city center of Salzburg, in the same year as the Civic Amenities Act for the "preservation of character of areas of special architectural or historic interest" (Larkham, 2003, p. 296) in the United

Kingdom. The 1975 European Year of Monuments and Sites, inaugurated by the Council of Europe with the titular agenda of ensuring "a future for our past," marked the peak of this intensified interest in the preservation of historic urban areas. The idea of a transnational campaign had been proposed by the Council of Europe as early as 1962. Thirteen years later, this initiative—ultimately supported by 23 European countries—was finally implemented (Falser & Lipp, 2015, p. 18).

Such urban preservation initiatives had important precursors throughout the first half of the 20th century. Conservation efforts increased from the turn of the century in response to several incisive experiences of loss, including the effects of rapid structural development,

the destruction of war, armed conflict, and political and social upheavals. Misguided urban-planning decisions during post-war reconstruction also led to the loss of monuments of historical value and historic urban areas, and this gave further impetus to efforts to preserve historic city centers (Klaar, 1980, p. 6.). The importance of historic urban areas for identity, cityscape, and tourism became increasingly apparent.

The quite crucial moment in this paradigm shift was the period of reconstruction planning after the Second World War: In the aftermath of the war's destruction (Figure 1) there was also an opportunity—indeed a necessity—to discuss aspects of urban preservation. The experience of loss during the war years led many cities to create inventories of surviving structures and record their state of preservation, sharpening a sense of what was worth preserving and recording it in maps and lists (see especially Larkham, 2003). In Vienna, concrete urban preservation efforts were first formulated and discussed in 1945–1946—and not only by conservationists. As early as 1946, the Bundesdenkmalamt (Federal Monuments Authority Austria) explicitly demanded the preservation of *Altstadt-Inseln* (Hoppe, 1946, p. 115) and *Denkmalschutzgebiete* (monument protection areas; Demus, 1946b, p. 1)—almost three decades before

the introduction of *Ensembleschutz* (protection of ensembles). Reconstruction was therefore understood as an “opportunity” not only for redesign but also for preservation, and in this discussion and planning process, the Federal Monuments Authority played an important role.

### 1.1. Research Focus

This article builds primarily on Pendlebury's (2003, p. 371) recognition that thinking about the design and conservation of the historic city and single buildings as part of reconstruction planning influenced the systematic designation of conservation areas in England from the late 1960s onwards. Larkham (2003, p. 295) also emphasizes that “the bomb damage had given substantial impetus to the concept of urban conservation,” evoking efforts to record damage and document built heritage. He further notes that urban conservation plans were preconceived during reconstruction and that a number had already been developed in the early 1940s, especially by Thomas Sharp and Patrick Abercrombie (Larkham, 2003, pp. 316–317). Most recently, Larkham related reconstruction after the Second World War to the radical “non-plan” strategy of the 1960s, which he sees as a reaction to the failed modernist concepts of the



**Figure 1.** Hoher Markt 8–10, taken on 14th July 1945. Source: Reiffenstein (1945).

1940s (Larkham, 2020, p. 30). However, Larkham does not trace how conservation strategies from the 1940s to the 1970s were consolidated in the establishment of townscape conservation.

This study, therefore, pursues the hitherto missing analysis of the genesis of these conservation areas and the accompanying discourses. It aims to show that, in Austria, considerations for the designation of protected areas were already mature in the early post-war years and that reconstruction planning already took account not only of the preservation of individual buildings but also of the large-scale urban area and the preservation of the historic city. This long-term analysis makes clear that reconstruction planning was not only a crucial phase of thinking about, discussing, and negotiating built heritage but that it also decisively influenced the further development of urban planning and urban preservation strategies in the 1970s.

Vienna lends itself as a fitting example for a case study not only because of the rich source material (e.g., the archives of the Federal Monuments Authority and city archives) but also because of the legislation that introduced what are known as *Schutzzonen* (protection zones) as early as 1972. The thesis can be formulated that the ascription of value, selection procedures, and definitions of protected areas made soon after the end of the war had a lasting impact on the preservation of historic buildings and ensembles in Vienna.

### 1.2. State of Research and Research Gap

Various studies on the reconstruction of English, German, and Polish cities have already shown the impact of preservation and heritage issues on reconstruction planning—for English cities see especially Larkham (2003) and Pendlebury (2003); for Germany see, e.g., Enss (2016) on Munich; and, on Warsaw, see the detailed study by Popiołek-Roßkamp (2021). Debates over conservation issues and the heritage process during these years, which involved recording, evaluating, and determining which buildings and structures were worth preserving, have recently also been studied for German cities (see e.g., Enss & Knauer, 2023). The discourse on the preservation of historic city centers in the course of reconstruction planning in Austria has hardly been explored. A first in-depth study by Brückler (2004) showed a promising field of research but was primarily concerned with the restoration of outstanding monuments and less with questions of urban conservation. A short essay by Brandt (2012) on the reconstruction of Salzburg highlighted the changes made to the city's layout and townscape in the course of reconstruction, focusing on the design of individual reconstructed buildings. The links between the discourses in the immediate post-war period and the passing of Austria's first Old Town Preservation Act in Salzburg in 1967 are not explained in detail here.

The long-term consequences of reconstruction planning and its connections with the development of strate-

gies for urban conservation and townscape protection are therefore under-researched. To fill this research gap, this article traces the path from reconstruction planning to the introduction of the *Schutzzonen* up to 1972. The question arises as to what extent reconstruction planning and discourse on urban conservation paved the way for the ensemble and townscape protection enshrined in Viennese building regulations in the early 1970s. When and why did streets, squares, and architectural ensembles actually begin to be considered “worth preserving” and “worth protecting”? Which areas and ensembles were finally declared *Schutzzonen* in the 1970s, and were earlier ascriptions of value adopted?

### 1.3. Methodology and Structure

The connections between reconstruction planning and heritage discourses in the 1970s can be analyzed over the long term. This reveals not only the increasing importance of questions of ensemble and site protection in Austria between 1900 and 1970 but also the key role of the discourse of reconstruction. Evidence for the analysis is found in written statements of the Federal Monuments Authority, in journals, and in lists of architecturally or historically valuable buildings and structures contained in archives. Historical maps and contemporary publications and documentation on built heritage also provide information on earlier assessment patterns. Summarizing and comparing various sources from several decades allow an analysis of the development of debates on conservation and the identification of complex, long-term development strands. Within the framework of this analysis, it is essential to consider the authorship of the sources and the biographies, professional affiliations, and political orientations of these authors.

To understand the influence of reconstruction planning on the development of urban conservation strategies, it is necessary to briefly outline the historical development of townscape preservation in Austria in the first half of the 20th century. The article then turns to the discourse on urban conservation in the context of reconstruction planning. Finally, it specifically addresses two case studies, tracing the development of two present-day *Schutzzonen*: the Ringstraße and the former Viennese suburb of Spittelberg.

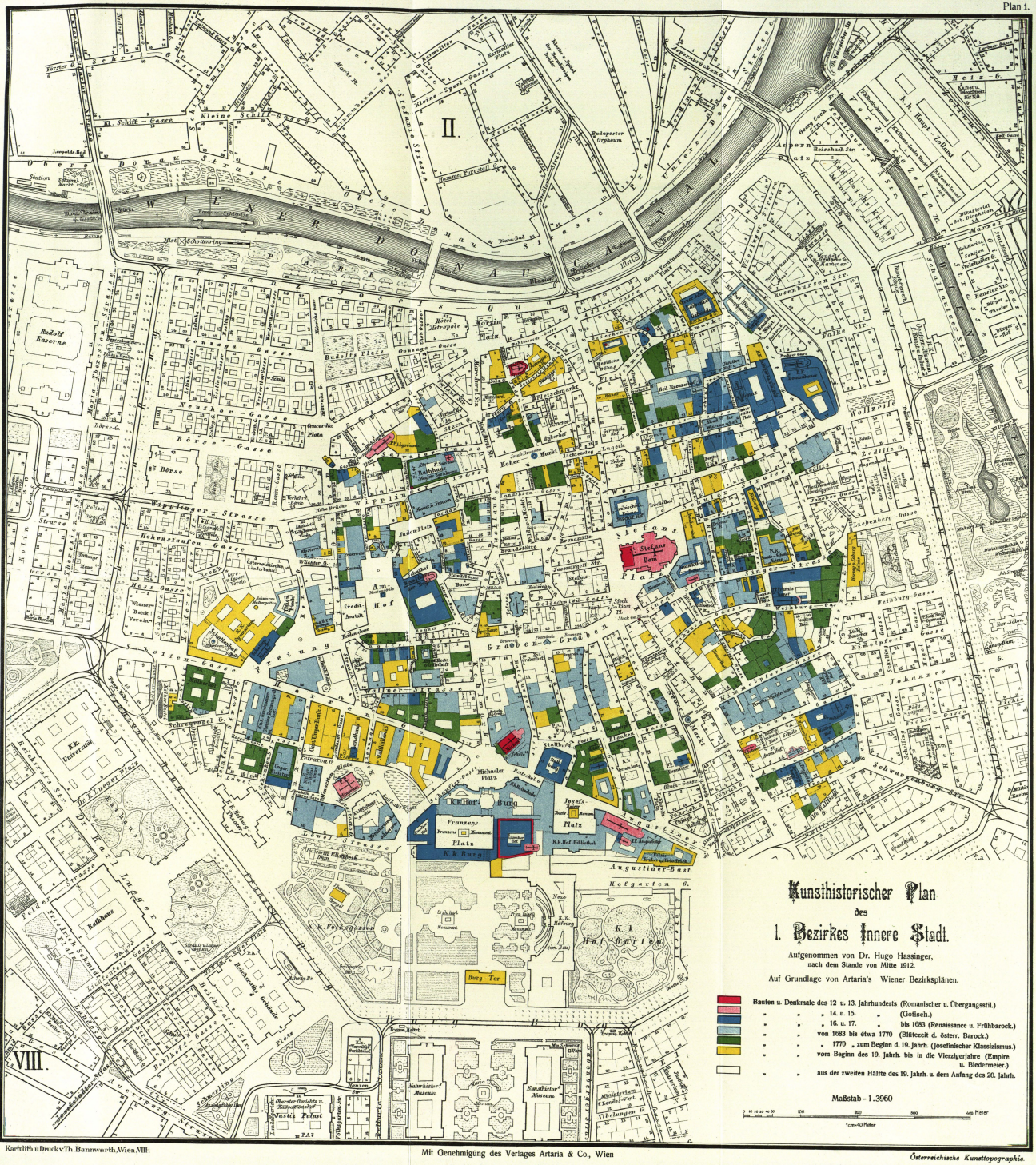
## 2. Mapping Heritage as a Basis for (Urban) Preservation

In Vienna, the question of how to preserve the cityscape and historical urban ensembles was raised very early on. There were several triggers for the formation of the will to preserve urban heritage in the 20th century. A major driving force behind the growing interest in the historic city was certainly the urban redevelopment of the late 19th century. Perceptions of the city changed at the turn of the 20th century, and the desire for preservation germinated, spawning heritage

movements and old-town preservation societies. Early evidence of the desire to preserve the historic city can be seen, for example, in Hugo Hassinger’s art-historical maps (Figure 2), which the cultural geographer drew up for Vienna starting in 1912 and which were published in 1916 in the 15th volume of the art-historical inventory *Österreichische Kunsttopographie*. They visualized in a hitherto unknown way all buildings considered

historical—from the Middle Ages to the 1840s—within the layout of the city. These buildings were ipso facto deemed worthy of preservation, and not only were historic buildings clearly marked but also historic ensembles and “old town islands” (Knauer, 2023).

The First World War was followed by the *Assanierung* (urban renewal) of the interwar period, which for many cities—including Vienna—again saw drastic structural



**Figure 2.** Hugo Hassinger’s “Kunsthistorischer Plan des 1. Bezirkes Innere Stadt”: The map shows the area in 1912 and was published in 1916. Source: K. K. Zentral-Kommission für Kunst- und Historische Denkmale (1916).

changes and the demolition of numerous historical buildings. From 1934 to 1938, progressive urban renewal in Vienna was motivated by state and municipal subsidies. But this was increasingly criticized by preservationists and by the public, who called for the establishment of conservation zones (Knauer, 2022, pp. 104–105). After the “Anschluss” to National Socialist Germany in 1938, the institutional preservation movement became sharply critical of the urban redevelopment of the foregoing decades. Using scheduled protection procedures, numerous buildings were listed, and special attention was clearly paid in this to architectural ensembles (Knauer, 2022, p. 195).

### 3. Reconstruction as an “Opportunity” for Redesign and Preservation

Between September 1944 and April 1945, Vienna was bombed 52 times. Roughly 21% of buildings were heavily damaged or worse, and 86,875 apartments were no longer deemed suitable for habitation (Ziak, 1965, p. 13). The political situation in Austria immediately after the Second World War was extremely unusual, as the country as a whole, as well as the city of Vienna itself, was divided into four occupation zones. As the records of the Federal Monuments Authority show, the occupying powers also became involved in questions concerning the reconstruction of individual buildings, and the organization and transport of materials needed for restoration.

As a result of the destruction of the war, and as the reconstruction process began, the issue of preservation took on renewed and decisive importance. An expert commission was convened in July 1945, the *Enquête zum Wiederaufbau der Stadt Wien*, to solve key questions of reconstruction planning. This group of 170 experts, whose task was to deal with issues of urban planning, building regulations, traffic planning, as well as the preservation of the townscape, included representatives of the Federal Monuments Authority (Maetz, 1946a, pp. 17–18). The desire to preserve the historic street pattern and to rebuild the war-damaged city center prevailed—a decision that was not self-evident at that time. Austria’s adoption of the role of victim after the war made it easier to think about historical reconstruction without a guilty conscience (Mahringer, 2013, p. 64).

The *Fachkomitee für Architektur und Stadtbild* (Expert Committee for Architecture and Townscape), which included leading architects and employees of the Federal Monuments Authority (Magistrat der Stadt Wien, 1946, pp. 84–91), called for certain parts of the city center to be designated as *Historische Schutzgebiete* (historic protection areas; Maetz, 1946b, p. 132). In 1946, the Expert Committee’s calls for the “preservation or rehabilitation of the old town centers and old townscapes” (Stadtbauamt Wien, 1946, p. 276; this and all additional citations from German-language sources have been translated by the author) also found its way into the reconstruction program.

The Monuments Authority attempted to influence the planning process by identifying significant streets, squares, and ensembles worthy of preservation. An initial list of buildings, streets, and entire “old town islands” was presented as early as January 1946 (Hoppe, 1946, pp. 114–117). The Monuments Authority listed all areas where they “wished to exert a decisive influence” (Hainisch, 1945, p. 39). For these areas, certain additional guidelines were to be established, based on the collection of photographs and plans the authority had compiled in previous years: For example, the design of façades was to be carried out “with respect for the old surroundings and in line with their character” (Hoppe, 1946, pp. 115–117), while roofs and roof coverings were to be restored in their original form and materials. According to Demus (1946a), the list included city districts worthy of preservation, which the office intended to “deal with in particular, and partly work out building proposals itself.”

Thus, the Monument Authority was not only concerned with protection but was also seeking to actively shape reconstruction. Dagobert Frey, who is a problematic figure in the history of Austrian heritage conservation, among other things because of his approving statements regarding the German occupation of Poland during the National Socialist era (Brückler & Nimeth, 2001, p. 73), emphasized the possibility—indeed, the necessity—of changing, improving, and embellishing the townscape during reconstruction: “One would have to demand not only preservation, but also the elimination of later changes that disturb the original, and even an artistically sensitive redesign” (Frey, 1947, p. 17). In his view, a “far-sighted preservation movement” should not only deal with the preservation of the artistically and historically significant architectural monuments but had to “always keep in mind the historic townscape as a whole in its special character and its structure, which had grown organically.” According to Frey (1947, p. 7), “the city as a whole is [a] ‘monument.’” Frey (1947, p. 10) thus called for the preservation of the characteristic urban structure and the historic street pattern and—as far as was possible and could be justified—the protection of historic ensembles as a whole.

The growing interest in the preservation of ensembles and townscapes also becomes clear in historic maps of that period. In the post-war years, the Federal Monuments Authority tried to visualize heritage worth preserving in maps—analogue to Hassinger’s art-historical maps. During the Second World War, the idea of documenting Austria’s historic city centers had already arisen due to the destruction caused by bombing and concern about the loss of valuable historic building fabric. But it was only after the war that this idea was taken up again, in response to the perception that urban developments of the post-war period were similarly threatening to the urban heritage (Klaar, 1980, p. 6). Between 1946 and 1957, detailed and informative building age plans (Figure 3) were drawn up for



Figure 3. Adalbert Klaar’s building age plan for Vienna’s Inner City (1948), with details and legends. Source: Klaar (1948).

190 historic towns and villages (Klaar, 1959, pp. 55–61) under the direction of Adalbert Klaar. These maps not only show the ages of the buildings but also make a statement regarding the desirability of protecting them. These “Klaar plans” were thus simultaneously monument maps that assessed the value of the buildings and visualizations of entire heritage areas. In some cases, Klaar also recorded *beachtbare Blickpunkte* (interesting views) in his plans, which were intended to serve as aids for future urban planning (Klaar, 1980, p. 6); his consideration of important views also shows growing interest in urban conservation.

#### 4. From Conservation Discourse to Conservation Zones

But what effect did reconstruction actually have on the formulation of ensemble and townscape preservation in

Austria in the 1970s? What was the decisive influence of reconstruction planning on the perception of architectural heritage and its preservation? There are numerous statements from those involved in both heritage conservation and urban planning that provide information about the evaluations made of the historic city districts and ensembles. One can find them in the minutes of the *Enquête*, in journal articles, and in the archives of the Federal Monuments Authority. Taken together, they suitably illustrate the depth of discourse at that time.

As early as 1945, the selection of the “old town islands” was framed to take into account not only ensembles of particular historical architectural interest found in the inner districts but also those in the former suburbs (Hainisch, 1945, p. 40). The latter were important mainly because of their historical and cultural value, as well as their significance for the history of forms of settlement

typical of the region. As early as 1947, Frey (1947, p. 17) tied the preservation of “urban spatial units with significant heritage values” to the creation of historic conservation areas. A look at a list of urban areas worthy of preservation (*denkmalwürdige Stadtgebiete*) compiled in 1946, which is kept in the archive of the Federal Monuments Authority, shows that features related to the history of human settlement in the area were already receiving significant attention 20 years before the introduction of the *Schutzzonen*. It was not only areas of art-historical interest that were to be designated conservation zones at that time, but also all forms of settlement from previous centuries that were characteristic of the townscape, including the core settlements of the outer districts:

It is a cultural demand of our will to rebuild, to restore to the city its venerable, time-tested structure that accords with the form of the landscape, to renew it in keeping with the times, but not to fundamentally change it. (“Vierjahresplan des Wiederaufbaus von Wien,” 1946, p. 1)

Discussions of reconstruction are therefore also to be understood as reflections on the preservation of Old Vienna. Not only individual buildings but ensembles and entire city districts deemed worthy of protection were recorded in lists of the Federal Monuments Authority to prevent excessive changes or even the destruction of the city’s characteristic townscape as a whole.

Comparing the lists of the post-war years with those of the 1970s reveals numerous similarities. Many street names and city areas can be found in lists from both periods, and the reasons given for an interest in the preservation of certain ensembles in the late 1940s resemble those later adduced for the designation of *Schutzzonen*. Furthermore, the buildings and ensembles of the second half of the 19th century were already understood as a legacy worth preserving by the Federal Monuments Authority. As statements in journals and archival documents of the early post-war years show, the value of the Ringstraße and the outstanding individual buildings of the *Gründerzeit*, such as the State Opera House or the Parliament, were already recognized at that time. In the opinion of Frey (1947, p. 20), the Ringstraße was “one of the greatest urban planning and architectural achievements of the [19th] century.”

### 5. Call for Laws and Plans for the Protection of Historic Areas in the 1970s

In the 1960s, preservationists became more ambitious and preliminary work on the designation of conservation zones was intensifying on several sides: Questions related to the cityscape were the responsibility of the Kulturamt (Department for Culture) of the City of Vienna. The Federal Monuments Authority was on good terms with the Kulturamt—they may even be considered to have been allies—and they had similar views on the con-

servations and configuration of the cityscape (Brückler, 2004, p. 397). In 1964, Walter Frodl, then president of the Federal Monuments Authority, called for a systematic examination of the city’s building stock, not only of single buildings but also of ensembles and the townscape as a whole (Frodl, 1964, pp. 121–131). Finally, starting in the late 1960s, preparations were made by the city administration to introduce an *Altstadterhaltungsgesetz* (Vienna Old Town Preservation Act). In 1968, a photographic archive and a map index were created (Foltinek, 1970, p. 3) and, a year later, a systematic inspection of all Viennese districts was carried out by the Federal Monuments Authority (Bundesdenkmalamt & Kulturamt der Stadt Wien, 1981, p. 11). Both the Federal Monuments Authority and the Kulturamt were reacting to a wave of demolitions that reached its peak at that time. The passing of the Salzburg Old Town Preservation Act, which had already taken place in 1967, probably acted as a catalyst for these efforts. Instead of a separate law, however, Vienna chose the path of amending and supplementing its existing building regulations (Bundesdenkmalamt & Kulturamt der Stadt Wien, 1981, p. 69).

Finally, the Federal Monuments Authority and the Kulturamt decided to merge the preliminary work each had performed. The Kulturamt proposed designating various areas of the city as *Schutzzonen* to prevent major alterations (Kapner, 1973, p. 162). However, the intention was to go beyond just regulating building activity by also covering, on a case-by-case basis, “*Entschandelung*” (literally “demutilation”; i.e., the removal of undesirable decoration and shop windows), as well as to consider street furniture (Foltinek, 1970, p. 3). This first version was based on the existing preliminary work described above, on the building age plans of Hugo Hassinger and Adalbert Klaar, on suggestions from the city museums, and on the documents and findings of the Federal Monuments Authority (Foltinek, 1970, p. 1; Kapner, 1973, p. 162). It can therefore be said that the planners and heritage conservationists working in the 1970s relied on the preliminary work of the immediate post-war period and probably also on the lists of street names and entire city areas that had been compiled by the Federal Monuments Authority since 1945–1946.

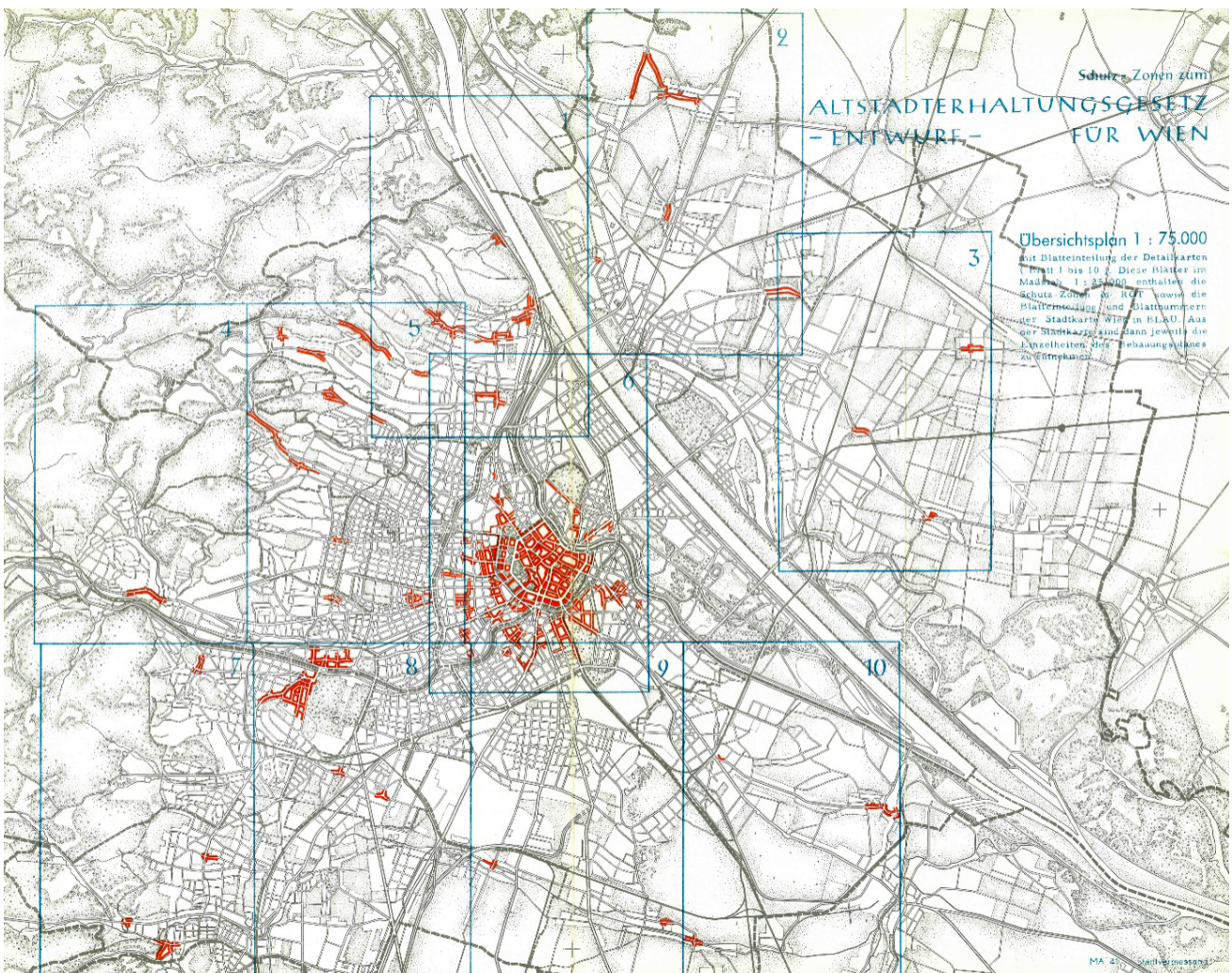
In June 1970, an initial list of possible *Schutzzonen* was presented to the public by the city administration (Foltinek, 1970, p. 1). According to the Kulturamt, the proposals of the Federal Monuments Authority mainly covered areas of art-historical interest, while the city administration added primarily “groups of buildings that determine the character of various districts,” as well as districts that had “maintained their original function,” i.e., had retained their economic and social use (Foltinek, 1970, p. 1). However, several lists made by the Monuments Authority show that not only ensembles of art-historical interest were intended as conservation zones, but also areas important in terms of the history of human settlement.



In October 1970, a second version of the list was presented (Magistratsabteilung 7, 1970), including several more zones added by the Federal Monuments Authority, especially of areas dating back to the 19th century (Bundesdenkmalamt & Kulturamt der Stadt Wien, 1981, p. 12). These included the Ringstraße and the areas of urban expansion around the *Innere Stadt* (city center, First District). The second version was also supplemented by a list of valuable views to be considered for protection (the term used is *Blickschutz*, “view protection”), as had already been indicated by Adalbert Klaar in his building age plans using small arrows. In May 1971, the third and final version was then submitted for decision to the City Council by the Vienna City Planning Office (Kapner, 1973, p. 162). For the first time, the catalogue included the “building stock significant for the townscape, namely the characteristic streets and squares with their buildings of artistic and cultural historical value, including buildings and groups of buildings of economic, technical and settlement historical value” (Bundesdenkmalamt & Kulturamt der Stadt Wien, 1981, p. 69).

With the amendment of the Viennese building regulations in 1972 (*Altstadterhaltungsnovelle*), the possibility of defining *Schutzzonen* was finally enshrined in law. It was now possible to protect “areas worthy of preservation because their external appearance contributes to the character of the cityscape” (Wiener Landtag, 2023, §7, para. 1), ensembles of uniform building types or stylistic forms, ensembles from earlier epochs consisting of characteristic buildings from different periods, or structural units resulting from a characteristic interplay of buildings and surrounding open spaces. With the introduction of the ensemble into the Austrian Monument Protection Act in 1978, finally, a nationwide legal instrument was also created (Lehne, 2014) and this long process, which this article has traced, reached a certain conclusion.

Numerous historic areas in Vienna’s inner districts as well as in the former suburbs were declared *Schutzzonen* from 1973 onwards (Figure 4). The Vienna City Council began to select zones from the list submitted by the Kulturamt (Kapner, 1973, p. 162). The first two protection



**Figure 4.** *Schutzzonen* (protection zones) in a draft map used in preparing the Old Town Preservation Act for Vienna. Source: Magistratsabteilung 7 (1970).

zones were established in 1973: The ensemble in the area known as Spittelberg and the core settlement of Altmannsdorf, which is located in an outer district. The main reason for the choice of these two urban areas was the acute threat posed to the cityscape by alterations and demolition (Bundesdenkmalamt & Kulturamt der Stadt Wien, 1981, p. 69). Between 1973 and the present day, many core settlements in former suburbs, areas with characteristic development from one or more architectural epochs or larger complexes built in context (e.g., Steinhof, Werkbundsiedlung) have been declared protection zones. The zoning and development plan for Vienna provides information on the applicable boundaries of the zones, which have changed several times since the 1970s (City of Vienna, n.d.-a).

The number of *Schutzzone*n has increased over the years, and the system continues to evolve. Not only have new zones been added, but existing conservation zones are also being expanded and properties and open spaces have at times been excluded from the zones. In some cases, several zones have been merged into one. To make the connections even clearer, the relevance of the discussions of the reconstruction years for the formation of

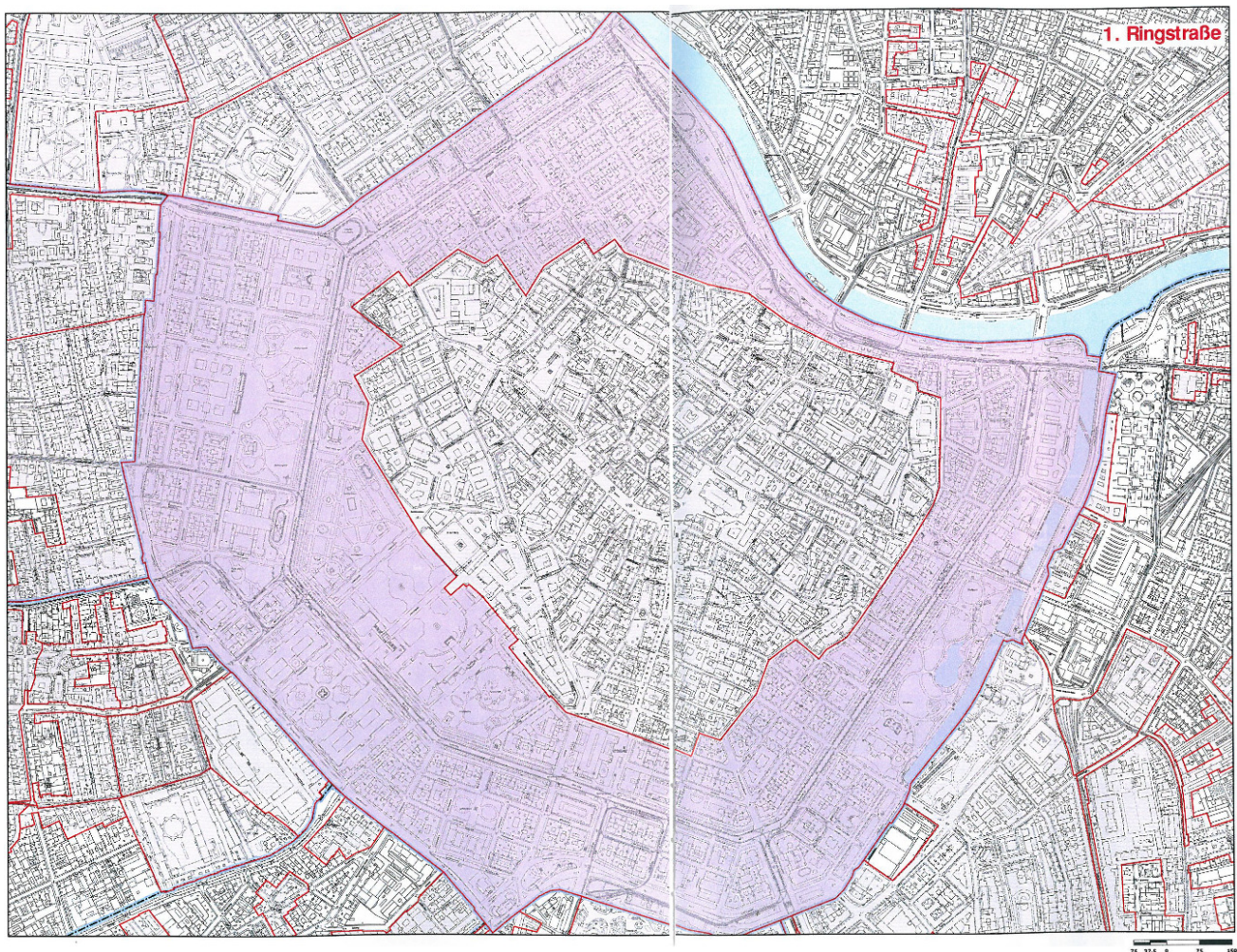
the protection zones will now be shown by means of two case studies.

## 6. Formation of *Schutzzone*n: Two Case Studies

### 6.1. *The Ringstraße: From Radical Urban Redevelopment to World Heritage Site*

After the demolition of the city walls and following an international design competition, the Ringstraße was laid out in 1857 on the former *Glacis* (green areas adjacent to the former walls) as a single urban development project. Today, the City of Vienna justifies the *Schutzzone* Ringstraße (Figure 5), in the following terms: “The Ringstraße has been preserved as a largely uniform ensemble despite some new buildings, mostly due to war damage, which in itself illustrates the development from Romantic Historicism to Art Nouveau” (City of Vienna, n.d.-b).

Many archival sources and publications make it surprisingly clear that the Federal Monuments Authority was already aware of the importance of the Ringstraße in the early 1940s and had called for the protection



**Figure 5.** *Schutzzone* Ringstraße: Map showing the situation in 2004. Source: Stadtplanung Wien (2005, pp. 12–13).

of this street, together with its plazas, monumental buildings, and the adjacent blocks of buildings, most of which were from the second half of the 19th century. The belief that the appreciation of historicism and corresponding art-historical research only began in the 1960s must therefore, to some extent, be laid to rest. Even under National Socialism (1938–1945), the Monuments Authority appreciated the Ringstraße as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, although historicist architecture was generally considered too pompous and obtrusive for the Viennese cityscape at that time. There is evidence of conservationists arguing as early as 1940, before the destruction of the war, that this monumental street should not be destroyed, but rather preserved as an architectural ensemble of great significance, as, for instance, Karl Ginhart did in 1940: For Ginhart, the recent “re-façading” of some buildings along the Ringstraße, which involved removing all decorative elements and fitting the windows with “rough frames,” would destroy this urban ensemble. Not only the “harmony of the building” would be considerably disturbed, but the overall effect and the “original uniformity...of the greatest and artistically most valuable urbanistic achievement of the 19th century” (Ginhart, 1940). In a letter to the local government of the Reichsgau, the Federal Monuments Authority expressed similar concerns about the “modern, sober [*sachlich*] design” that would increasingly alter the appearance and “artistic effect” of the Ringstraße and result in the monumental buildings being “stylistically out of harmony” with their surroundings (Seiberl, 1940).

Thus, in the early 1940s, the Federal Monuments Authority already recognized the great importance of the Ringstraße and its adjacent buildings as an ensemble worthy of protection. During reconstruction planning, this demand was made again. In a statement, the Ringstraße and its 19th-century squares are listed among the building complexes worthy of preservation, which also include Votivplatz and Schwarzenbergplatz (Hoppe, 1946, p. 111). In 1964, Frodl (1964, p. 130) again emphasized the importance of the Ringstraße as an “urban site of high rank,” as a “historical and artistic unit” that had to be preserved as completely as possible. The area of the Ringstraße was once more included in the official lists of streets worthy of protection, and in 1973 the entire *Innere Stadt*, and thus also the Ringstraße and its surrounding area, was declared a protection zone.

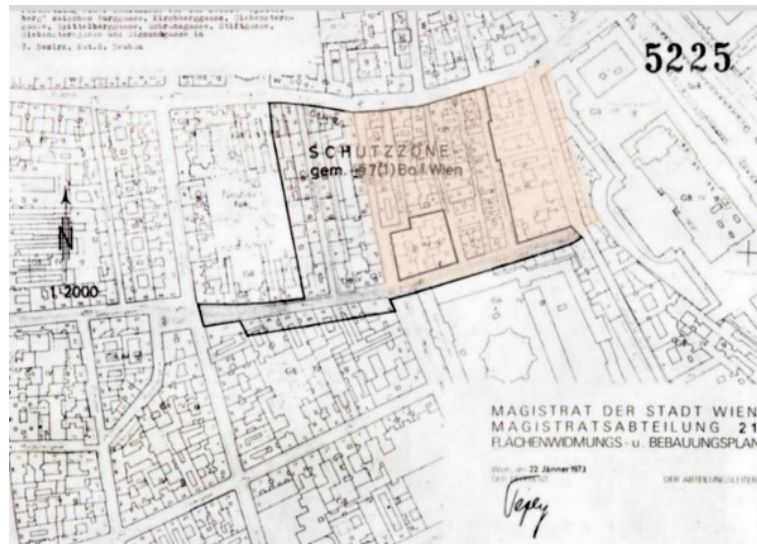
The importance of the Ringstraße is ultimately reflected in the “Historic Centre of Vienna” UNESCO World Heritage Site, this title being granted in 2001. The core zone includes not only the historic city center located within the ring but also the area of the Ringstraße since the urban expansion of this period is one of the justifications for inscribing Vienna’s historic center in the UNESCO World Heritage list. The good state of preservation of the Ringstraße in its urban setting, despite numerous new buildings erected after the Second World War, is certainly also due to the early recognition of its importance by the Federal Monuments Authority.

## 6.2. The Spittelberg: Revitalization of a Former Viennese Suburb

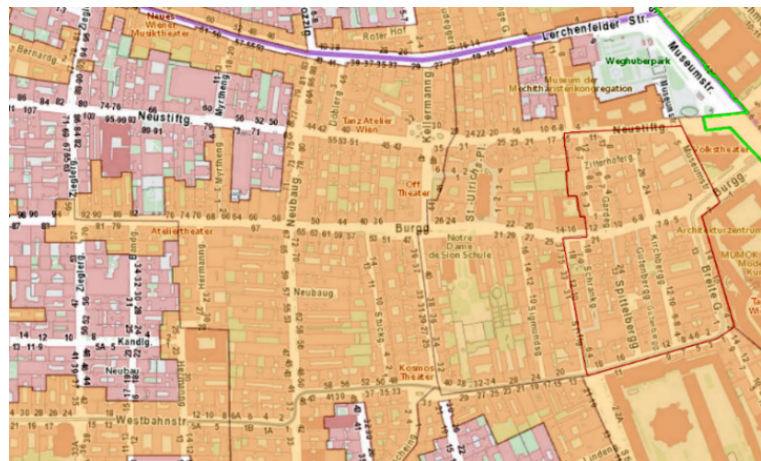
In the 1970s, the Spittelberg, with its baroque and Biedermeier building stock, was a completely neglected urban area, and therefore particularly endangered. With the establishment of the *Schutzzone* in 1973, the city government expressed its will to preserve and repair the buildings, most of which were owned by the city itself. As early as the 1940s, lists of urban areas worthy of preservation included Spittelberg as one of the most important historic areas. Vienna’s shrinking baroque building stock was preserved particularly well there, with many buildings exemplifying that style and period (Kapner, 1973, p. 162). At that time, the area worthy of protection was defined as a few blocks between Burggasse, Siebensterngasse, Breitegasse, and Stiftgasse (“Vierjahresplan des Wiederaufbaus von Wien,” 1946).

The perimeter of the protection zone changed several times following early considerations during reconstruction planning. In 1973, sections of other streets were additionally selected because they were considered particularly characteristic for this part of the city, and the area was also somewhat enlarged. The zone thus shifted by one block of houses, and the development along Breitegasse was not included for the time being (Figure 6). Between then and now, the boundaries have changed again. According to the current zoning plan, Breitegasse is within the protected zone, which now also extends over Burggasse, which once bordered it on one side (Figure 7). Other streets, however, have at times been assigned to adjacent protection zones.

The example of Spittelberg shows that the state of conservation had no influence on the selection of protected areas. It also demonstrates that the selection was not only based on their historical architectural relevance but in some cases also on the urgency and the threat posed to the ensembles by building measures and demolition plans. This also explains the decision to declare the core settlement of Altmannsdorf a protected zone as early as 1973 (Figure 8). Even the lists of the initial post-war years included suburban core settlements of that kind. The characteristic triangular Khleslplatz (Figure 9) with its two-story buildings is today located in the middle of an urban area that was growing rapidly in the early 1970s. Just as in the case of Spittelberg, the development of this square area would probably have fallen victim to even greater deformation or demolition had it not been declared a protection zone. As early as 1947, Dagobert Frey referred to the urgent need for action in the case of Khleslplatz. In his view, the implementation of the existing *Regulierungsplan* (development plan; Figure 10) and the planned widening of the streets would have “torn up the peaceful enclosed church square and made the modest little church in a senseless way the focal point of a long wide avenue” (Frey, 1947, p. 17). In this case, too, the preliminary work of the 1940s thus probably also played a role in implementation in the 1970s.



**Figure 6.** *Schutzzone* Spittelberg: Plan from 1973 overlaid by a colored layer marking the area classified as “characteristic” and to be protected by the Federal Monuments Authority in 1946. Source: Koller (1973, p. 157); colored layer by Birgit Knauer.



**Figure 7.** *Schutzzone* Spittelberg (red marking) and various other protected areas: Plan from 2022. Source: City of Vienna (n.d.-a).



**Figure 8.** *Schutzzone* Khlesplatz (1120 Wien): Core settlement Altmannsdorf, *Schutzzone* since 1973. Source: Koller (1973, p. 157).



Figure 9. Khleslplatz with the church of Altmansdorf: Postcard, 1909. Source: Ledermann (1909).

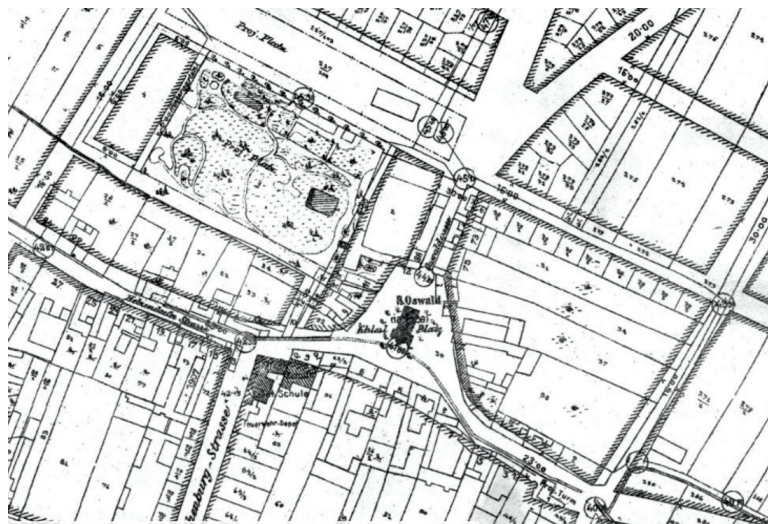


Figure 10. Development plan, 1912: Section Khleslplatz. Source: City of Vienna (n.d.-b).

## 7. Results

For the Federal Monuments Authority—as for numerous other experts—post-war reconstruction was seen as a chance to revise outdated development plans and an opportunity to ensure the long-term preservation of selected historic urban areas. The negotiation of built heritage in the course of reconstruction planning, which is reflected in numerous official and unofficial statements and lists of monuments and city areas worthy of preservation, formed the basis for the urban preservation that began in the 1960s and emerged to prominence in the 1970s. Most of the *Schutzzone*n designated later are already mentioned in the lists of the 1940s. In most cases, the lists already contain explanations of the characteristics of the urban areas and reasons for their significance, such as their importance for architectural or settlement history. Reconstruction planning and execution must therefore be considered a decisive period in the negotiation and discussion of architectural heritage,

one that has had a significant influence on the preservation of historic urban areas up to the present day.

When historic buildings are threatened by destruction and loss, examination of the built heritage intensifies, as observation of post-war reconstruction makes clear. The step from recognizing the importance of ensembles to actual protection and implementation in legislation turns out to be a multi-layered process that extends over several stages and a considerable length of time. In fact, some 60 years lay between the first professional discourse on the value of preserving historic ensembles at the beginning of the 20th century to the first Old Town Preservation Act and the effective protection of entire urban areas in the 1970s.

## 8. Conclusion

The findings presented here highlight the existing knowledge gap concerning reconstruction planning, which not only reacted to destruction but actively intervened in

issues of urban preservation. Later preservation goals were already shaped by the debates of the time, and a more detailed exploration of the discourses and strategies of reconstruction practice is still a major research desideratum. New findings in that area will also contribute to heritage studies and planning history.

The findings of this article also raise new questions, such as how current discourses may influence practice, and what we can learn from looking back at historical reconstruction processes for today's urban planning and—especially—heritage conservation practice. In England, regeneration areas themselves have already become subjects of urban conservation measures. Calls for the protection of Plymouth's town center, which was rebuilt based on a 1943 plan by Patrick Abercrombie and James Paton Watson, can be traced back about 10 years (Essex & Brayshay, 2013, p. 163). In 2019, the city center was designated a conservation area (Plymouth City Council, n.d.). The value of areas reconstructed after the war should be considered analogously in the case of Vienna, too. The basis for this will have to be a detailed analysis of the reconstruction process and its long-term consequences, which remains to be performed.

Reconstruction planning after the Second World War was not only a question of urban design but also of preserving historic city centers. This article has examined the discourse on urban preservation in the context of reconstruction in Vienna after the Second World War and has also analyzed the long-term consequences of the first explicit deliberations on the definition and delimitation of protected areas, which were only to find legal expression some 30 years later. Reconstruction planning and its long-term consequences for urban planning and preservation still need to be researched more thoroughly. Looking back at historical processes shows that heritage discussions certainly have a lasting effect, albeit with a time lag. In recording and selecting the old town areas to be protected, the Federal Monuments Authority fell back on the extensive and methodologically sound preliminary work of state monument preservation in Austria, whose institutional consolidation began around 1900. In discussions of reconstruction, the Federal Monuments Authority referred specifically to the preparatory work of the pre-war period, while in the 1970s, the maps and lists of the 1940s were consulted, in particular. Current surveys of maps, documentation, and research, which always represent contemporary values and specific authors' perspectives, will probably play a similar role in the future.

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### Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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