

Theme 1: Lessons learned and new challenges in the practical implementation of the Valletta Principles

7. *GAZPROM: UNDECLARED WAR ON VALLETTA PRINCIPLES IN ST. PETERSBURG*

Sergey Gorbatenko, Art historian, Vice-President of the Scientific Committee for cultural Landscape of ICOMOS national Committee, Russia

The St. Petersburg World Heritage Site is a cultural landscape, “combined works of nature and of man”, a vast site with various types of components. The center of the composition is the urban landscape of the historical center of St. Petersburg. The need for special protection of such sites is reflected in numerous heritage protection acts, including The Washington Charter, The Valletta Principles and many others.

Gazprom, since 2006, when it acquired the territory of the Okhtinsky Cape and announced plans to build a skyscraper here, defiantly and aggressively neglects recognized international acts, the outstanding universal value of a world heritage site. The procedure for the protection of world heritage sites is not provided for by Russian legislation, international acts are not applied in practice. Public participation plays an important role in protecting the city. In the 2000s her active position led to the refusal by the authorities to build a skyscraper on the Okhtinsky cape, today it is manifested in the protection of its archaeological heritage.

Our participation consists in promoting the principles of Valletta and other international acts for the protection of heritage, in an attempt to reveal to the public, the specifics of the St. Petersburg WH object, to determine the motives for Gazprom's actions, and the position of UNESCO in this problem. For this, a database was created based on publications in the literature, the media, in open sources on the Internet, etc. Historical and natural studies were carried out with subsequent analysis of the information received.

In 2011, we wrote and published a book (Gorbatenko, 2011), in 2020 a website dedicated to the St. Petersburg WH object facility was created (<http://whl.spb.ru/>). At the same time, in the 2010s, Gazprom, which was actively involved in the building business, began promoting the ideas of the architectural “modernization” of St. Petersburg, including through the construction of skyscrapers. It is traditionally supported by the city administration, which manages heritage sites. Above everything stands the figure of President V. Putin, who, without directly expressing his attitude to the problem of skyscrapers, actively supports Gazprom, whose headquarters was moved from Moscow to St. Petersburg. The close connection between V. Putin and this mega-company is highlighted by D. Brook in his book (Brook, 2013).

We have already spoken at CIVVIH meetings with alarming reports of Gazprom's aggressive plans to build a skyscraper in Lakhta (Vyshegrad, 2013, Chesky Krumlov, 2016) and to destroy the archaeological heritage of the Okhtinsky Cape (Nim, 2018). However, the resolutions adopted by the CIVVIH were ignored. One of the skyscrapers (Lakhta Center 1) has already been erected, the other two (Lakhta 2 and 3) were announced in 2021. Gazprom designed a business center on the Okhtinsky Cape without taking into account the value of the territory as a unique historical place (Sorokin, 2001).

To promote its ideas, Gazprom uses not only financial and administrative resources, but also public propaganda methods, which are examples of anti-scientific populist demagogy. UNESCO remains silent about Gazprom's plans, although according to the results of the WHC-ICOMOS 2019 monitoring mission, experts pointed out the value of the Okhtinsky Cape and the negative impact of the Lakhta-1 skyscraper on the landscape of the historical center of St. Petersburg.

We intend to continue to resist the destructive ideas of Gazprom through publications on our websites (<http://heritage-expert.ru/>, <http://whl.spb.ru/>), on Facebook CIVVIH, to initiate a discussion of these issues within the framework of Russian ICOMOS and ICOMOS SPb, etc. Letters will be open: most often the authorities actually ignore them, limiting by unsubscribes. This was the case with the letter addressed to Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lavrov, in which we for the first time called the activities of Gazprom a war declared on St. Petersburg.

1. Sergey Gorbatenko. World Heritage - the Historical Landscape of the Saint Petersburg Agglomeration. SPb., 2011.

2. Daniel Brook A history of future sites. W.W. Norton & Co. 2013.

3. Petr Sorokin. Landskrona, Nebskoe ustie, Nienskanz. SPb., 2001.