

THE SIGNIFICANCE AND PRESERVATION OF THE BUILDING TYPE “CASINO” IN THE VIENNESE BIEDERMEIER PERIOD EXEMPLIFIED ON THE STILL PRESERVED “CASINO ZÖGERNITZ”

Judith Mayr

E251 - Institute of History of Art, Building Archaeology and Restoration

INTRODUCTION

In the year 1837 Ferdinand Zögernitz opened a Casino, built in the Biedermeier-style, in Vienna's former suburb Oberdöbling, today 19th district, with a performance by Johann Strauß Father. Thanks to the horse-drawn railway, which had its last stop at the Casino and the countless performances by well-known bandleaders, it developed into one of the most popular entertainment destinations of the Viennese. The building changed owners often and was subject of numerous renovations over time, but in contrast to the other dance and concert venues of the area, it still remains today. To preserve this jewel, it was put under monumental protection in 2008.

The content of the research is the firstly taken detailed analyzation of the building's history and historical use. Thanks to newly found records, it was possible to define and evaluate the numerous renovations of the object and enlarge the current knowledge regarding its history and also its connection to important historical individuals, buildings and events.

In addition, it was integrated in the building type „Casino”; it's importance for the city of Vienna was expressed for the first time and examined for its structural characteristics. Due to the lack of references regarding this field, similar examples were studied and analyzed.

A proposal for a preservation and revitalization concept that allows further use of the building in its original purpose, was worked out based on the analysis of the existing structure. Since structural alteration works have already begun before work on this research commenced, the occurred and future demolition works will be analyzed and evaluated in their accordance with the lawful treatment of protected historic monuments.

CONTEXT

Due to hunting trips of the emperor Karl VI. and his daughter Maria Theresia, the small and rural village of Oberdöbling established in the beginning of the 19th century, to one of the most popular places for weekend and summer holidays for the Viennese bourgeoisie. The ever-increasing influx affirmed the economic conditions and thus also the development of the popular inns, which led in a further step also to the establishment of the Casino Zögernitz.

From a temporal point of view, the year of construction of the Casino Zögernitz can be put in order in the Biedermeier era, where such venues reached their high point. This can be explained by the prevalent political situation and therefore increased entertainment culture. After the Congress of Vienna, emperor Franz I. and his foreign minister Prince Metternich used control, censorship and surveillance to regain the old regulations and therefore the population concentrated on nature, their families and homes and tried to distract themselves by celebrating. Restaurants were converted to dance-locations and more venues were newly built. An especially high increasement of such buildings, called “Casinos” or “Etablissements”, can be found in the suburban villages, due to their proximity to nature and with it connected the romanticizing of the country life, which is characteristic for the philosophy of the era.

In general Casinos were normally used for enjoyment purposes and describe a combination of a restaurant, café and dance hall. They can be traced back to the Italian renaissance, where such buildings were also used for gambling games, besides the normal usage for social meetings. The “Casino Pio” in the Vatican Gardens can be regarded as the first example of this building type. Casinos reached Vienna first at the end of the 18th century where different kind of entertainments were offered to small prices, which increased the importance of such buildings for the social life.

THE CASINO ZÖGERNITZ - HISTORY

The Casino Zögernitz in particular got newly built in the years 1836 and 1837, by request of the already successful restaurant owner Ferdinand Zögernitz and his wife Theresia, who bought the plot of land in 1835 and opened it on 21st June 1837. The building at that time contained a Restaurant, a banquet hall, a café, dining rooms in the upper floor and generous gardens. It soon developed to one of the most popular venues of the Viennese. The constant changing requests of the audience and the zeitgeist required a lot of alterations at the building: Dining rooms were added and floors expanded. These circumstances increased, when the newly build horse-drawn railway in the 1870 brought the guests directly to the Casino.

Over the years Casinos lost their importance and plans were made to sell the Zögernitz. In 1903 the owners of the popular “Ottakringer Brauerei” bought the house and, together with their tenants Alfred and Maria Stegbauer, awoke the sleeping beauty with numerous renovations and extensions. 1919 the Stegbauers took over the building and brought the house in everyone’s mind by using the garden for the construction of the first open-air cinema in Vienna. During the second world war the house was used for storage and afterwards converted to the “Manhattan’s Casino” by the US-Army. 1947 the family Stegbauer regained possession of the building and converted it into a Hotel, and the dance hall was mainly used as a recording studio.

2008 the building was put under monumental protection and bought by a private investor. He initiated the break-down of all of the over the years added building-parts, and plans are made to renovate the remaining structure. In addition, two apartment buildings are built in the garden at the moment, which led to demonstrations by the residents of Oberdöbling.

PRESERVATION AND REVITALIZATION CONCEPT

Here the questions on how to deal with an example of this building-type and how to preserve its characteristics raise themselves. Is it possible to maintain the object in its initial type of use in this modern day of age, and how can it be combined with the monumental protection? To prove it’s potential, a proposal for a preservation and revitalization concept was worked out, which can be also used as an introductory guide for other remaining examples of this building type. The concept founds itself on the definition of the building type, which clarifies the Casino as a social center for the surrounding inhabitants.

Nonetheless the way of entertainment changed over the years, the building could regain its importance as a cultural center and be open for the population for events but also for private purposes. Open and wide spaces with flexible room partitions could allow a flexible way of usage of the house with multiple options. The goal is to preserve the characteristics of this building type and to preserve it for later generations.