

PRESS RELEASE (08. Dec. 2008)

Chief Burgomaster Schramma acknowledges the obligations of the town of Cologne for a “dignified Cathedral environment”:

“Roncalli-Square must be protected”

“We will have to increase the value of the square and we will have to protect it. I will take the issue to the town board and integrate all sides affected.” With these words Cologne’s Chief Burgomaster Fritz Schramma acknowledged the obligations of the town Cologne to provide for a dignified surrounding area of Cologne Cathedral on December 5th, during a press conference of Central Cologne Cathedral Building Society (ZDV). That this obligation exists in actual fact, is the most important result of the first documentation regarding the clearance of Cologne Cathedral at the end of the 19th century.*

As contractee the ZDV had introduced the scientific treatise of historian Dr. Carolin Wirtz from Bonn at the Excelsior Hotel Ernst.

“I am glad, that the result gives me backing,” the Chief Burgomaster stressed his support for the ZDV’s concern, to finally terminate noisiness and disturbances by skater, rickshaws and other “traffic” on Cologne Cathedral’s paving slab and to make restitution of a “worthy formation” of Cologne Cathedral’s surrounding area, which had been promised permanently by the town during Cologne Cathedral’s clearance. “In other towns is the environment of a church like this, of an architecture like this protected”, Schramma said. “And that is, what we have to reach again, too.”

Being resident at Roncalli-square Cathedral master-builder Prof. Barbara Schock-Werner is a victim of that situation herself: “Obviously not all members of the town council seem to realise is, that the utilisation of the square drags deep into the night. On warm summer evenings it lasts until two or two-thirty am. Amongst which are sounds like noise of battle. I know so many people, who say: We don’t cross this square, we are afraid. Others are telling when sitting down somewhere there, skater would come and say: Would you please get up, I want to skate here. Clearly, something has to happen.”

Cologne Cathedral provost Dr. Norbert Feldhoff agreed with ZDV-president Michael H. G. Hoffmann: “I think, that the majority of the citizens of Cologne want a calming of the square. And I hope, that by this paper a very task-orientated discussion will emerge, of how to put this square in a shape more dignified, which has undoubtedly an extraordinarily meaning for Cologne and especially for its visitors. We will contend for how to arrive at this dignified appearance.”

The Cathedral master-builder added: “By Mrs. Wirtz’s book it becomes clear, that this matter is not a concern of worldly innocent people but rather a legal basis existing now, by which all people have to abide, if they don’t want to break contracts deliberately. That is the distinction of before and after this book.”

Host of the press conference, ZDV-president Michael H. G. Hoffmann clarified why the society had commissioned this documentation: “We wish for the city council to discuss this issue and to decide clearly to be still committed to these requirements and shape a dignified surrounding area for Cologne Cathedral. With the “we” I am not referring to the Central Cologne Cathedral Building Society, but both the citizens, who have enforced this right to an enduring dignified surrounding area of Cologne Cathedral back then, and all the citizens, who want to use that right again today.” The ZDV will critically observe the process of events – “and if necessary, remind the town of Cologne of the fulfilment of the obligations it had committed to,” said ZDV’s president.

The documentation* of Cologne Cathedral’s clearance:

To never permit development of open-spaces and to provide for a “dignified surrounding area of Cologne Cathedral”, which invites “to linger”: That is what the town of Cologne guaranteed between 1885 and 1902 to the ZDV without ifs, ands or buts by signing the realty contracts. ZDV had made the restrictions a condition, upon which the society financed the buying up of houses and realty for the clearance, while the town of Cologne was the official buyer in the contracts.

The authoress of the documentation, historian Dr. Carolin Wirtz, researched in the archives of the Cologne Cathedral building administration and the archbishopric of Cologne old correspondence, reports, minutes of meetings – and thereby discovered also the original contracts regarding the acquisition of property.

A short while after the completing construction work had begun in 1842 already, the ZDV’s founders reflected upon the clearance. Once Cologne Cathedral was finished, it should have a worthily environment and should be well visible in the townscape. Very specific considerations regarding the clearance are recorded first in the minutes of the society’s management board briefly before the completion of the Cathedral (1880).

How is the clearance of Cologne Cathedral’s environment to be imagined?

The Cologne of medieval times was characterised by narrow alleys and closely developed, and Cologne Cathedral was belted by many buildings, which in part were immediately attached to its walls. That contradicted at the time the ideal of a modern townscape with representative constructions and open spaces.

In the year 1863 the Köln-Mindener railroad-company and the fire insurance company Colonia donated their properties by Cologne Cathedral to the town of Cologne for the clearance – therewith ground was broken. Already those donations were effective only upon certain conditions, which are stipulated in the contract

between diocesan chapter and the town of Cologne. These terms became decisive for the whole project: Cologne committed "to providing and preserving a dignified surrounding area" for Cologne Cathedral, which was supposed to be a public place for "coming in and going out and lingering thereat" like a generously assessed "ambulatory" around Cologne Cathedral for the citizens. Riding and driving were assertively forbidden.

1882 the Prussian government assigned ZDV the realisation of the clearance. The negotiations of ZDV with the owners of further mostly developed properties around Cologne Cathedral lasted years. In the end 24 purchasing agreements were achieved. The money for it was generated by lotteries entrusted for this specific purpose. The fact that in the purchasing agreements not the ZDV but the town of Cologne appeared as the official contracting partner, had two reasons: first – if the worst comes to worst only the town could dispossess property from the owners (which happened as a matter of fact a few times). The second reason is to be found in the regulations of the ZDV: the purpose of the association is explicitly restricted to completion and continuing preservation of Cologne Cathedral. Was a participation in the clearance compatible therewith? Over that the members were split. The town council itself finally suggested to utilise the town of Cologne as juristic contracting party. The corresponding notarial addenda in the agreements not only attest, that the properties had been purchased with money of Central Cologne Cathedral Building Society, but also lay down the conditions for this contract set-up: the properties were permitted only to be utilised exclusively for the enhancement of the open space around Cologne Cathedral and must not be developed again after demolition of constructions.

Bottom line: The town of Cologne is de facto bound until today and for all time to provide for a "dignified" arrangement of Cologne Cathedral's surrounding area, which invites for "lingering" and will not be developed.

**Forschungen zum Kölner Dom, Band 2*

(Research to Cologne Cathedral, volume 2)

Carolin Wirtz: »So that the whole surrounding area of Cologne Cathedral receives a dignified environment.«

Central Cologne Cathedral Building Society and the clearance of Cologne Cathedral (1882 – 1902)

Hardcover, 108 pages, ISBN 978-3-922442-64-6, 23,90 €

www.verlag-koelner-dom.de

► Press Inquiries: Michael Thivessen, zdv@zdv.de, + 49 - 221 / 13 53 00 ◀