

In the middle of the 19th century, Vienna had more than half a million inhabitants and was the largest city in the German-speaking part of Europe. Yet, it did not look anything like a modern capital city. The city centre, which has not been expanded since the Middle Ages, was the seat of the Imperial Court and all major state and church institutions. Grand administrative buildings, palaces of the nobility and homes of well-off citizens were clustered within a relatively small area. Although living conditions were hardly bearable, Vienna's city centre had a population of 54,000 in 1850, more than three times the number of today's inhabitants.

Demands for urban expansion grew louder and louder. Having long lost its military function, the fortification belt had become a barrier which constricted the city rather than protected it. Between the city and its suburbs was the glacis – an area of open ground stretching far away into the distance. Originally created to ensure a clear

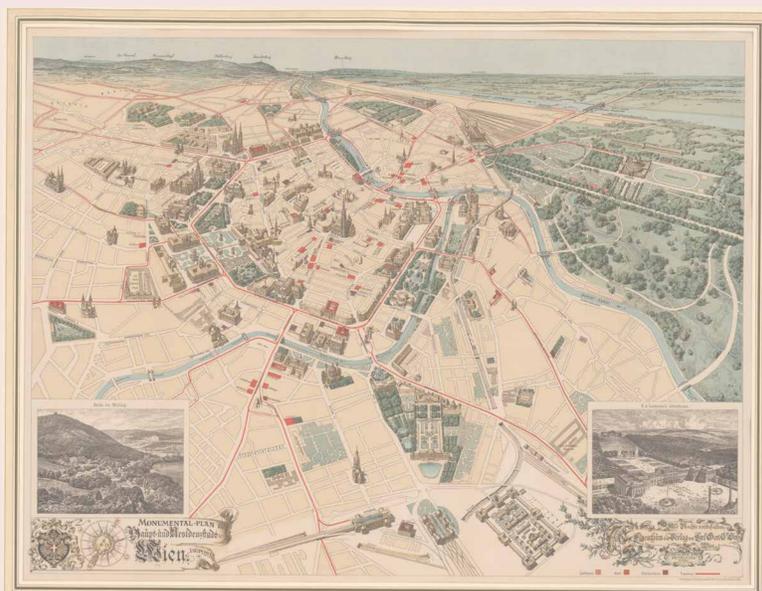
field of fire after the first Turkish siege of Vienna in 1529, its tree-lined walkways and green meadows had become a popular area of recreation.

The densely built-up city centre stood in extreme contrast with the vast open space surrounding it. While the city centre could not be further expanded, the glacis provided an ideal projection screen for all kinds of urban development plans. The city walls were torn down and a new boulevard was built in their place. The ample green space offered sufficient room for new magnificent buildings in historicist style. However, they were not built before the Ringstrasse boulevard was officially opened in 1865.

The major public buildings were designed in different historical styles: Vienna boasted a Neo-Classical Parliament Building, a Neo-Gothic City Hall and a university building in Neo-Renaissance style. By the eve of the First World War, the Ringstrasse boulevard had been completed.

150 YEARS

VIENNA



The Ringstrasse was officially opened by Emperor Franz Joseph on May 1, 1865



Monumental plan of the imperial capital Vienna, the period 1887



The Historicism of the Ringstrasse was a welcome contrast to the clean modernity of the 20th century. In the interwar period, Social Democratic Vienna kept its distance from the “bourgeois” Ringstrasse. The destructions of the Second World War cleared the path for the first new buildings along the boulevard. Even in the 1970s, several of the buildings on the Ringstrasse were facing demolition and it was not before the beginning of the post-modern era that the 19th century city and its architecture were seen under a different light. In 1973, the Ringstrasse was designated as a “protected area”.



RINGSTRASSE



Today, Vienna's Ringstrasse is still a major traffic route. But its three traffic lanes flanked by tram rails on either side of the road leave enough room for cycle paths in both directions and wide tree-shaded pedestrian paths which make walking a pleasant experience. The Ringstrasse also provides a perfect stage for parades and other socio-political events.



4 km long
57 meters wide
double avenues



www.wien.gv.at
www.ringstrasse2015.info

