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Expert Report on the Heritage Significance of Berlin's Gas Lamps & Lanterns as and for WorldHeritage

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Summary of what this Report is about:

This Report:

1. Assesses and advocates recognition of the gas street lighting system of Berlin, not as some kind of historical relic, but as a living, breathing and above all *working system* which is intimately linked to the successive phases of the history of Berlin as a world-class city from the beginning of the 19th century to the present day.
2. Without attempting to be exhaustive, comparisons are made with other European cities where gas lighting has survived to one extent or another, or where it is being revived, just as trams are being revived or revitalized in many cities.
3. It is argued that advances in technology and good practice (as in Malvern, UK) enable gas street lighting to continue as a valid alternative or complement to electrical lighting. It is a remarkable fact that Berlin has had both gas and electric systems to light its streets, squares and bridges since 1882.
4. It is argued that there are many factors – the unique survival rate, the special history of Berlin, environmental responsibility, social responsibility, the expressed will of local communities, economic considerations, high quality of design, the aesthetically beautiful quality of light emitted by gas lighting, longevity leading to responsible stewardship of the earth's resources etc. – which invite comparison with other *working systems* which are already UNESCO World Heritage Sites, among them a canal and four railways, world-wide, and other working systems which are under consideration.
5. It is contended that the working system of *Berlin Gas Lamps & Lanterns* has a strong valid claim to being considered as a candidate for being inscribed on the World Heritage List, to which Germany as a whole and Berlin in particular have made notable contributions already. Criteria for selection for the World Heritage List are explained in the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. There are ten of them. Sites must be of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and meet at least one out of the ten selection criteria. Appendix 1 to this Report shows how the Outstanding Universal Value may be defined: this definition is put forward for the purposes of consultation and debate. At least two of the selection criteria are clearly met by the working system of *Berlin Gas Lamps & Lanterns*. Moreover, 'The criteria are regularly revised by the World Heritage Committee to reflect the evolution of the World Heritage concept itself'¹. In other words the concepts of what constitutes 'world heritage' and what constitutes 'outstanding universal value' are dynamic, not static, and are constantly moving forwards as understanding deepens.

¹ Reference: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria>.

6. Moreover, it is argued that the working system of *Berlin Gas Lamps & Lanterns* has notable characteristics which make it also worthy of protection and cherishing under the *UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)*. These characteristics include the special aesthetic appeal of the light emitted by gas lamps and lanterns (which not even LED can equal), the distinctive contribution which gas lamps and lanterns make to the urban character of countless streets and public places in Berlin, the attraction which gas lighting has to photographers, artists, musicians, poets and other writers, and above all the place it holds in the affections of local communities and moreover visitors to Berlin who place gas lighting alongside the working systems of trams, U-Bahn and S-Bahn and the ubiquity of the bicycle as being among those visual, design and social factors which define the 'Berlin-ness' of Berlin.
7. It is recommended that the draft Statement of Outstanding Universal Value, on the basis of which the Berlin Gas Lighting Working System could be put forward as a candidate for inscription on the World Heritage List, should form the central topic of a two-day seminar to be organised and held in Berlin as soon as feasible. One day would be devoted to a study of the system and the second day would be devoted to World Heritage criteria and come to some conclusions.
8. John Ruskin wrote 150 years ago that 'The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to *see* something, and to tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can *see*.' It is one of the challenges of gas lamps and lanterns that people take them for granted, as we go about our busy lives. But once the special beauty of gas lighting is pointed out to them, the response is immediate, warm, enthusiastic, committed. The challenge is to develop this awareness before it is too late.