

**Report of the International World Heritage site visit to Auschwitz
Concentration Camp and Surroundings (Poland) from 30 November to 2
December 2006**

**REPORT OF THE EXPERT CONSULTATION GROUP ON AUSCHWITZ CONCENTRATION
CAMP**

30 November to 2 December 2006

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Expert Group expressed its gratitude to the Polish authorities for all arrangements made and for the generous hospitality. The experts appreciated all presentations made in particular by the national and regional authorities and the management planning team.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The group of experts met on 30 November and 2 December 2006 at the Centre for Jewish Culture in Krakow and carried out a field visit to examine special issues at the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau and its surroundings on 1 December 2006. The report was based on extensive newly compiled documentation, previous expert meetings and missions, the presentations on the background material for the draft management plan and the on-site assessment. While the internal activities of the Museum are promising, the experts expressed their deep concern for the lack of affirmative action by the authorities in the management of the site surroundings and in developing the updated statements of justification to its Outstanding Universal Values (OUV) and the revised boundaries and components needed to convey the meaning to future generations including its authenticity and integrity as identified in the European Periodic Reporting for the World Heritage Site.

While recognizing the impasse between the state and local authorities, the experts emphasized that the object of the management plan is not to supersede any legal development plan mechanisms but to allow for a dialogue between all the stakeholders where each can achieve added value from the World Heritage Site.

The report, based on the above and written representation by the local communities and the ruling development plan for Brzezinka, identifies actions and recommendations that might be adopted by the Polish Government to show their leadership in the management of the site.

BACKGROUND TO THE EXPERT CONSULTATION

Inscription history, criteria and outstanding universal value

The property was included on the World Heritage List in 1979 under cultural criterion (vi), recognizing that

the fortified walls, barbed wire, platforms, barracks, gallows, gas chambers and cremation ovens show the conditions within which the Nazi genocide took place in the former concentration and extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest in the Third Reich. According to historical investigations, 1.5 million people, among them a great number of Jews were systematically starved, tortured and murdered in this camp, the symbol of humanity's cruelty to its fellow human beings in the 20th century.

(from World Heritage – brief descriptions)

The Committee decided “to restrict the inscription of other sites of similar nature.” Like in the case of other early inscriptions, the Committee did not adopt a statement of significance and no such

statement or statement of Outstanding Universal Value has been adopted by the Committee until today. Furthermore, not all components relevant for the site have been included in the inscription, however most of these sites were protected within the silence and protection zones, the map of which, although never implemented, formed an integral part of the nomination dossier submitted by the authorities and approved by the World Heritage Committee for inscription.

Examination of the state of conservation by the World Heritage Committee

The World Heritage Committee (and until 2001 its Bureau) reviewed regularly the state of conservation of the property (World Heritage Committee decisions: 22 COM, 23 COM, 24 COM, 25 COM, 26 COM, 27 COM, 28 COM, 29 COM and 30 COM). A detailed report was provided in 2001 following the international mission to the property led by the Chairperson of the World Heritage Committee, (see Appendix III). The expert group specifically reviewed a number of issues indicated in this report. The subsequent state of conservation reports and decisions by the World Heritage Committee focused specifically on the lack of a management plan, included in 30 COM 7B77.

The name change of the property as requested by the Polish authorities and deferred by the Committee at its 30th session (30 COM 8B.12) did not form part of the terms of reference for the group of experts although many of the comments are relevant to the discussion needed for its evaluation.

In 2006 the Committee reviewed all Periodic Reports from the European region including the reports on Auschwitz Concentration Camp (30 COM 11A.1).

Justification of the Expert Group

The Polish Ministry for Culture and National Heritage invited the expert group which consisted of Dr Eleonora Bergman (Expert, Director Jewish Historical Institute, Poland), Mr. Max Polonovski (Expert, Chief Curator of Jewish Heritage, Ministry for Culture, France), Mr. Giora Solar (ICOMOS Expert, Israel), Prof. Michael Turner (Expert, Bezalel Academy, Israel) and Dr. Mechtild Rossler (Chief Europe, UNESCO World Heritage Centre), following the Decision of the 30th session of the World Heritage Committee (30 COM 7B.77) and the preparations for the Draft Management Plan by Dr Marek Rawecki and Ms Jadwiga Rawecka (Management Planning Team). The full agenda and list of participants are included in Annex I and II of this report.

IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF ISSUES

The mission looked essentially at the detailed background information as a critical preparatory phase of the management plan as presented by the team and in consultation with the national and regional authorities. The experts also met with the new Director of the State Museum Auschwitz Birkenau during the site visit and received written statements from Zasole District Council of Oswiecim and Brzezinka Council. The mission looked also at the different site components and other issues which might have an impact on the management plan.

1. Narrative and justification of the Auschwitz Concentration Camp World Heritage site

Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest concentration and extermination camp of the Third Reich is the only site on the World Heritage List in representing the Nazi genocide. The experts noted that we are at a turning point in the history of the site moving from the personal to the collective memories. This critical time needs in-depth reflection in opening a new chapter.

The experts recognized that there is no official statement of significance of the World Heritage site available and that this is difficult, in particular, for the development of the management plan and long-term vision. The experts noted the results of the management planning team study, including

the great number of sites relevant for the understanding of the property which are located outside of the inscribed area of the Museum. Due to the lack of the statement of significance these were difficult to consider, clearly identify, and prioritize for further steps.

Concerning boundaries, the experts specifically clarified that in the nomination two zones outside the core were indicated, 'silence zone' and 'protection zone' which however were not implemented. The mission of 2001 already had pointed out major difficulties including the arbitrary nature of the definition of zones and the imposition of zones without consultation. The experts noted that no change to these boundaries has ever been submitted by the Polish authorities to the World Heritage Committee

In the expert opinion the site narrative has to be based on the complete story of the Nazi extermination machinery including the setting up of the camp, all elements of the life, work and death of the inmates, the organization, logistics, transportation and communication of the system as well as the extension of the Nazi planning for the region.

The coherence of inventorying, mapping, documentation and recording of all elements is therefore crucial for the understanding of the significance of the property.

Recommendation:

The experts recommended the completion of a statement of significance for the property.

As in the 2001 recommendations, and in light of the European Periodic Reporting exercise, the experts recommended clarifying the boundaries as approved by the Committee in 1979. The boundaries should be defined on the basis of the justification and narrative as indicated specifically in the *Operational Guidelines* Paragraphs 103 to 107. Therefore regulations within the accepted World Heritage legal practices have to be implemented for the bufferzones.

2. Identification and management of sites outside of the World Heritage core area

Based on the extensive research and inventory, as presented by the management planning team, the narrative and justification will necessarily be based on a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships of the sites.

While the management planning team identified the enormous scale of the whole area (Interessengebiet des Konzentrationslagers Auschwitz and 48 KL Auschwitz sub-camps), the experts referred specifically to the following maps as a basis for the scope of the management plan: Map of site integrity and authenticity - landscape (see Annex IV) Map of site integrity and authenticity - structures (see Annex V).

The experts noted the two levels of legal site designation: the listing of places (identification level) and the registration of monuments (protection level). None of the identified sites outside the World Heritage core area had been designated except for a part of the Judenrampe which had been registered without the railway siding and noting, therefore, that there was no consistency in the protection approaches.

Recommendation:

Until the prioritized inventory is in place urgent conservation measures have to be taken for sites under threat and immediate danger of collapse, vandalism and other impacts. The experts specifically drew the attention to the former SS -Kueche (Kitchen/cantine) in Oswiecim, the former water pumping station and potato and cabbage cellars for KL Birkenau in Brzezinka.

The experts recommended that the management plan boundaries and priorities be determined based on the survey material and the inventory prepared by the management planning team with specific reference to the maps in Annex IV and V. This plan should be integrated in the local development plans in consultation with the local communities.

All identified components of the inventory should be professionally documented and recorded. A timetable and work programme for analyzing, prioritizing, listing and registering the sites should be defined. The experts recommended that coherent approaches to listing and registration need to be adopted based on the prioritized inventory.

For the relic landscape in Appendix IV the priority would be for investigation and research; in the area of priority significance in Appendix V, all works have to be accompanied by archaeological and conservation control and environmental impact assessment.

3. Policy issues for the preservation and management

No substantive efforts have been presented for solving the impasse identified by the mission of 2001 (page 6 of the Report of the International World Heritage Site Visit to Auschwitz Concentration Camp and Surroundings, 1-2 July 2001). The government agencies should be committed to building confidence among the stakeholders, as the consideration of community needs is an integral part of the management.

Recommendation:

The experts welcome the high level quality of research done and note that this was the first step of a process. The next steps should include, *inter alia*, statement of significance, prioritization of the inventory preparation of action plan, detailed of conservation plans and implementation; identify all sites, which have government or other agency control to register sites under their ownership; develop a policy for supporting the needs of the local community by the use of these buildings and land.

The first option to be considered should always be the possible adaptive re-use of existing buildings with appropriate functions before any new buildings. The experts recommended that in this process of prioritization the opinion of the local communities be taken into account.

Proper management structures involving all stakeholders need to be put into place.

4. Threats and emergency measures

All threats have to be addressed with solutions integrated in the management plan and based on the prioritization of sites, feasibility studies, needs assessment and accepted conservation practices.

The experts recognized that financial limitations, lack of legal protection, lack of community acceptance and awareness, lack of planning, ownership problems, neglect, vandalism, urban / development pressure, tourism increase management and among the natural risks, flooding and fire are to be particularly noted.

Recommendation

The State authorities have to take the responsibility in addressing the threats and implementing emergency measures (see also point 2);

5. Local communities

Under the circumstances the experts feel that the issues of the communities and stakeholders need to be addressed specifically, although some items are included in other sections.

The experts were encouraged by receiving written comments from the two communities – Brzezinka Council and the Zasole District Council of Oswiecim. (See Annex V and VI) and appraised the comments in the light of the management planning team's survey material.

Brzezinka District Council: The experts evaluated the Brzezinka development plan in view of the proposed prioritized landscape and structure maps. The experts noted specifically the wishes of the Brzezinka community to adopt the plan 'as-is' and see possible points of conflict to be the access to the sidings of the Judenrampe and the main expressway. In each case, viable solutions are recommended.

Zasole District of Oswiecim: Concerning the Zasole District of Oswiecim the experts noted the absence of any approved plan for the city of Oswiecim. The Zasole community, living around the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau was identified as a key stakeholder in the city and representing some 25 percent of the total population. The experts evaluated the written presentation and acknowledged the detailed requests by the community for the communication roads, transportation, a community centre and manufacturing plants for increased employment and other specific projects as indicated.

The experts highlighted the urgent need to address the community issues to overcome the impasse already noted in 2001 and to which no affirmative action on the part of the authorities has been directed. The issue of the parking was identified as an act of 'good will'.

While education and awareness raising is a broad subject, the experts considered that a specific programme of action should be addressed to the local community including the representation of their histories and further noted that the State Museum is a major employer in the city and can contribute accordingly.

Recommendation

Concerning the local communities, the experts recommended that their planning and development requests be integrated in the Management Plan as part of the commitment of cooperation. For each community the experts recommended adopting the following points:

Brzezinka District Council:

- In principle, the State authorities should support the Brzezinka development plan.
- The connection between the two camp sites of Auschwitz and Birkenau needs to be indicated in the public open space. The experts recognized the open space as part of an important component that will have to be detailed in the next stage.
- In implementing the plan, detailing should take place in consultation with the community to include: road hierarchy, design guidelines for the main parking, footpaths and signage.

Zasole District of Oswiecim:

- the support for the Zasole community centre together with a Government grant;

- that the police station and logistic base to be located in an existing building and integrated into the management plan, possibly on the site of the current bus station (PKSiS S.A. at Wiezniow Oswiecimia Street);
- the support for visual monitoring;
- that the Gardens of Europe design guidelines need to be taken into account specifically concerning visual and functional integrity;
- that all proposals need to be reviewed and integrated within the framework of the Management Plan.

Concerning the Memory and Reconciliation Mount, the Experts understood that the project in the proposed location was not approved by the Local Board of Appeal.

Concerning the manufacturing plant no further information was available and no specific recommendation was made. In general the Polish authorities need to review the use of production plants in the area for employment potential.

The experts urge all concerned parties to finalize and approve the Oswiecim development plan to answer the identified needs.

To generate the 'good will' indicated by the community, the authorities might consider that the Museum parking should be managed on a concession basis by the local community. This will need to be accompanied by a supplementary budget to the Museum. The details of the trial-period should be prepared with all the concerned parties.

The experts recommended education and awareness-raising programmes for local communities to be included as a preliminary phase in the implementation of the management plan and specifically on European and World Heritage. The authorities might adapt the World Heritage Education Kit for local use. The communities have to be considered as partners and guardians in site management including recording and transmission of their stories.

6. New issues

The experts noted a number of new or emerging issues including the competition for the Gardens of Europe, the Memory and Reconciliation Mount, the S-1 expressway in the vicinity of the field of ashes, and the reuse of the current military barracks, as the military is scheduled to evacuate the area in the coming years.

Recommendation

The experts recommended that a mechanism needs to be found within the management structure to address new and emerging issues.

The experts also noted that all development has to be considered in the context of the authenticity and integrity of the site and its protection and recalled paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines and the obligation of the authorities to notify the World Heritage Centre of major developments affecting the property.

7. The State Museum, visitor management and circulation

The experts welcomed the new Director of the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau and noted that new projects for the exhibition presentations are being developed. The experts highlighted that the presentation is related to the overall narrative of the site and its context as identified by the management planning team and that any new developments have to take into account the

authenticity and integrity of the OUV. The experts expected that any new proposals be presented under State Party reporting on the state of conservation of the property in accordance with established procedures under the World Heritage Convention.

The experts noted that the number of visitors are rising constantly (currently at 1,2 million) presenting new challenges which need to be addressed through revised planning, suitability of structures, circulation in and around the site, and the provision of different functions and facilities.

The experts further noted major problems of tourism management and the circulation of coaches in particular by the Birkenau entrance (lack of parking at the main visitor entrance) and that a solution may be found with the proposed new parking and entrances. The road network concerns the authorities of Brzezinka and Oswiecim and coordinated comprehensive solutions should be evaluated through an Environmental Impact Statement also identifying the site integrity.

While the need for improved access was recognized by the experts, they noted that the routing of the S1 expressway would be close to the field of ashes in Birkenau and at an elevation above the flood and drainage dams.

Recommendation

The experts requested that the new developments and tourism challenges be taken into account (a) in a revised comprehensive plan for the Museum and (b) in the proposed management plan. Furthermore, the tourism management component needs to be analyzed, monitored and reviewed regularly. The interrelationship between the presentation of the collections of the museum and the surroundings as part of the narrative implies that the content of the scientific project, its naming and the scenography be integrated in the two plans.

The experts noted that the State Museum may need to be involved in the management of the sites outside of the current Museum boundaries based on the revised nomination and this be taken into account in an overall management structure linking City and Museum interests.

Transparency should be ensured through improved communications including an accepted format of internet based information.

The museum signage is of high standard, but greater use should be made of the World Heritage Emblem in showing the Outstanding Universal Value of the property and its status as a UNESCO site together with encouraging the presentation of the site within the framework of European history. This might allow the visitors and residents alike to realize that the site represents a chapter of world history.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The experts have accompanied the management and strategic planning since 1998. While we have heard verbal commitments concerning the responsibilities of the authorities to the Museum and surroundings, an impasse with the local community is in effect and buildings and sites are falling into disrepair. The obligation of preparing the Management Plan gives the national, regional and local authorities a chance to coordinate a coherent plan for the communities involved. The experts noted that during this period, comprehensive planning was not addressed. The authorities have to take the initiative in breaking the impasse proposing credibility and developing a comprehensive management plan for the protection of the World Heritage site in this new phase. Without these actions further deterioration and major threats will result in loss of significance for the site and its context. The way forward must be based on the high quality of professional material prepared and continues to be developed to achieve the conservation of the site and its context and a management plan to ensure its sustainability.

The experts suggested that progress must be evident in time for the 31st session of the World Heritage Committee (New Zealand, June 2007) to prove the commitment of the authorities and avoid the inclusion of the property in the List of World Heritage in Danger. A clear timetable for action should be outlined and submitted by the 1 February 2007 deadline.

The experts requested that the report together with the response and feedback of the Polish authorities be translated and conveyed to all the stakeholders including the communities and the International Auschwitz Council, to initiate and maintain a dialogue.

The experts concluded that this World Heritage property, remnant of the Holocaust, is a key site for the memory of all humanity and that both the State Party and the international community should strengthen their commitment appropriate for its conservation and the transmission of its meaning and significance to future generations.