

## Noto (Italy)

No 1024rev

### Identification

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| <i>Nomination</i>  | The rebuilding of the Val di Noto in the Late Baroque Period (South-East Sicily) |
| <i>Location</i>    | Provinces of Catania, Ragusa, and Syracuse, Sicily                               |
| <i>State Party</i> | Italy  |
| <i>Date</i>        | First nomination received 22 June 2000, revised nomination 11 January 2002       |

### Justification by State Party

The historic centres and urban environments of the towns proposed for inscription are a masterpiece of the human creative genius of the late Baroque epoch.

#### Criterion i

The historic centres and urban environments of the towns proposed for inscription reveal a remarkable and unique exchange of human values accomplished in the collective effort to reconstruct the towns after the 1693 earthquake. The social classes of that period (clergy, aristocracy, and the new urban middle classes) together with the Spanish government, architects, and craftsmen, co-operated in the recreation of entire urban realities.

#### Criterion ii

The historic centres and urban sites proposed for inscription bear witness to cultural traditions that have disappeared elsewhere: eg the design abilities and the innovative approach typical of the post-1693 era, in which major and minor art forms intertwine into a peculiar unity, and the exceptional skills of workmen in using local stone.

#### Criterion iii

The historic centres and urban sites proposed for inscription are instances of great importance for the high concentration of monumental late Baroque buildings of outstanding architectural and decorative value: eg the plans and layouts of religious buildings and facades with bell-towers. Facades as urban monuments peak with San Domenico in Noto, San Giorgio in Ragusa Ibla, and San Giorgi' in Modica.

#### Criterion iv

The historic centres and urban sites proposed for inscription are vulnerable because of their location in an area of high seismic risk and because of the poor state of much of the stonework, especially the limestone. In addition, Catania is at risk from volcanic eruption.

#### Criterion v

### Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this nomination consists of eight separate *groups of buildings*.

### History and Description

#### History

Some of the nominated towns (Caltagirone, Mitello) were of pre-medieval origin, and all were in existence in medieval times, characteristically around a castle and with monastic foundations. Most seem to have been changing during the 16th and 17th centuries and then been affected differentially by the 1693 earthquake, which resulted in some 93,000 casualties. Catania, for example, was destroyed, as was Noto on top of Mount Alveria, whereas Mitello was partially destroyed and Ragusa seriously damaged. Reactions to the earthquake also differed, ranging from Catania's complete rebuild on the same site, through Mitello's partial abandonment and Ragusa's combination of new and old, to Noto's complete rebuild on a new site. All the towns saw considerable building activity through the 18th century, notably of churches, large public buildings, and *palazzi*. Another serious earthquake in 1990 affected some parts of some towns, Ragusa in particular. The nomination is almost entirely based on 18th century urban art and architecture and says nothing about urban economy or urban/rural relationships.

#### Description

The territory of south-eastern Sicily, once the territory of the ancient province of Val di Noto, contains an exceptional homogeneity and quality of urban centres within it. They are characterized by a large number of late Baroque buildings and monuments, all built after earthquakes on 9 and 11 January 1693, which seriously damaged about sixty towns in that territory. The seismic area, which had its epicentre in the Valley of Noto, stretched from Calabria to Malta to the northern African coast.

Most of the towns in south-eastern Sicily were rebuilt on the original site (eg Catania). Some, such as Noto, were rebuilt on new sites. Others, like Ragusa and Palazzolo Acreide, were "doubled up," with new urban centres created next to the ancient ones. Yet others either moved to adjoining areas that were already partially urbanized (eg Scicli and Modica) or were simply repaired (eg Caltagirone).

The rebuilding of the Val di Noto was a chance for an enormous artistic, architectural, and anti-seismic renewal of the cities, medieval in their styles until 1693. The architecture and "modern" town-planning of south-eastern Sicily became the first specific response to seismic disaster, carried out by a host of people ranging from famous architects like Rosario Gagliardi and Giovan Battista Vaccarini to many inspired artists and thousands of skilled but anonymous craftsmen. Strongly influenced by external Baroque fashions, the "Sicilian style," including not least its characteristic tower in facades, developed to become itself influential, its achievement possible because of a strong economic interplay of different social groups in the aftermath of disaster. Enormous state intervention and great

organizing ability seem to have been the two conditions that achieved such an original and impressive solution, seizing the chance to turn such a disaster into an opportunity. Two hundred years later, as a result of long-term degradation and further seismic activity, there are still a great many buildings and monumental complexes which require major restoration, consolidation, and maintenance interventions."

The eight separate inner cities and urban areas proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List should be considered as representative of a great, post-seismic rebuilding achievement in the decades following 1693:

**CALTAGIRONE:** the most westerly of the eight cities nominated, its inner city is significant for its multi-faceted town planning and architectural facades, and for its unusual link between the pre- and post-1693 periods. Its rich architecture exists inside an urban context resulting from the configuration of the site. The most important buildings include the Churches of Santa Maria del Monte, St James the Apostle, St Joseph, St Dominic, the Holy Saviour (and Monastery of the Benedictine Sisters), St Chiara and St Rita (and Monastery of Clarisses), Jesus (and former College of the Jesuits), St Stephen, and St Francis of Assisi and, among secular buildings, the Corte Capitanale, the Civic Museum, the former Pawnshop, and the San Francesco Bridge.

**MILITELLO VAL DI CATANIA** is significant for its wealth of architecture from the 14th century onwards, and for the outstanding 17th century, walled pre-earthquake town plan which was in the vanguard of Sicilian feudal towns and was then faithfully followed in the late Baroque reconstruction. Principal buildings include the Churches of San Nicolò and Santa Maria della Stella, the latter completed in 1741 on the site of St Anthony the Abbot, and the former in the San Leonardo area.

**CATANIA** acquired a particular quality of urban design when it was rebuilt on a comprehensive, geometric unitary plan among the rubble of the destroyed city. At its core are the outstanding Piazza del Duomo and the Via dei Crociferi, together with the nearby Badia de Sant'Agata, the Collegiata, Benedictine monastery, and Palazzo Biscari.

**MODICA** consists of two urban centres, the older perched on the rocky top of the southern Ibeli hill, the other rebuilt further downhill after the 1693 earthquake with imposing and conspicuous urban monuments such as the Cathedral of St George and the Church of St.Peter.

**NOTO**, outstanding among the towns that were totally rebuilt on a site close to the original town, is on two levels, an upper part on the plateau and a lower, newer part on the slope below. The latter accommodates the buildings of the nobility and the religious complexes of the 18th century, the topography, town-plan, and architecture combining to create a spectacular "Baroque stage set." It includes nine religious complexes and numerous *palazzi*.

**PALAZZOLO**, like Modica, has two centres, the medieval one on which a new town was reconstructed on the old site but along a new axis, and a post-1693 "new town" which was developed along a crescent up to

the earliest site of all, the Greek *Akra*. The two churches of St Sebastian and Sts Peter and Paul were largely rebuilt after 1693, the latter the centre of the old nobility, the former marking the quarter of the new urban classes.

**RAGUSA**, the ancient Ibla, is built over three hills separated by a deep valley. It, too, consists of two centres, one rebuilt on the old medieval layout and the other, Upper (present-day) Ragusa, newly built after 1693. It contains nine major churches and seven major *palazzi*, all Baroque. Upper Ragusa has been adversely affected by inappropriate modern development and the town overall is adversely affected by the proximity of chemical, industrial, and mining activities.

**SCICLI:** the Via Francesco Mormina Penna stretches to the nearby Beneventano palace, perhaps the only one in Sicily to display fantastic decoration, in an urban setting where churches rise alongside patrician buildings of late Baroque age. Three churches (St John the Evangelist, St Michael, and Saint Teresa) are from the 18th century.

The whole area is a Level 2 seismic risk area (the most recent earthquake was in 1990) with an expected intensity of *c* 4.5 on the Richter scale. Caltagirone and Noto could also be subject to post-seismic landslides and Catania could be affected by volcanic eruption from Mount Etna. All of the towns in the nomination have Civil Protection Plans identifying main evacuation routes in the event of disaster. About 120,000 inhabitants live in the eight towns, half of them in the historic centre of Catania.

## **Management and Protection**

### *Legal status*

The majority of the properties in all eight of the towns are in private ownership. The religious buildings open to worship are mostly owned by the Diocesan Curias; some are owned by the Italian State through its Ministry for Internal Affairs. Most of the monumental buildings of architectural value are owned by the Local Authorities. All such are public bodies, and the assets for which they are responsible are considered as public property.

### *Management*

The main protection and conservation measures are provided by the national and regional legislation for the protection of the artistic, monumental, landscape, naturalistic, seismic, hydro-geological and forestry heritage, in particular by Acts 1089/39, 1497/39, 64/74, 431/85, and Regional Acts 61/81 and 15/91. Within the bureaucratic infrastructure to implement these provisions, the various Sicilian sections of the *Soprintendenza ai Beni Architettonici e Ambientali* report directly to the Regional Department for Cultural Heritage. Because of the seismic factor, the Civil Engineer's Office plays an important role in monitoring the safety of buildings and therefore in the maintenance of fabric; it reports direct to the Regional Public Works Department.

The Regional Provinces of Catania, Ragusa, and Syracuse and the Municipalities of the eight towns in the nomination have the responsibility for looking after the urban and architectural heritage in their respective territories. In the case of religious buildings and their

artistic contents, responsibility rests with the four Diocesan Curias, any one of which may approach any one or more of five different agencies from state to municipal level in the event of works being required.

The eight towns in the nomination come under the various regional plans, exemplified by that for Regional Economic and Social Development, within which are "Implementation Projects" such as those for Tourism and Cultural Heritage. Regional Guidelines on Landscape Planning identify, *inter alia*, four "strategic intervention axes directly involving the protection and enhancement of the landscape and environment," which include conservation and qualification of the heritage of historic, archaeological, artistic, cultural, and documentary interest. The eight towns are identified in the respective town plans as Homogeneous Territorial Zones or Historic Centres, where the existing urban and architectural heritage can be submitted only to rehabilitation and maintenance works that fully respect the historic and cultural vocation of each town. Ragusa has its own Five-Year Plan.

Conservation is funded annually in the normal way as part of the regional, provincial, and municipal budgets. Ragusa and Ibla enjoy special Regional funding. Lit 2,849,000,000,000 was made available for public buildings of architectural importance immediately after the earthquake of 13 December 1990 and is still the main source of special funding. Lit 970,000,000,000 was additionally made available for privately owned historic buildings.

There was no management plan in the original nomination, though a document with that title was included. This was, however, concerned only with the future. It stressed the considerable difficulties involved in attaining agreement on any sort of management uniformity in eight different, quite widely spaced, and diverse municipalities over a large area involving different agencies in an administrative hierarchy. It nevertheless laid out the steps by which such a plan could be achieved, and listed thirteen goals concerning further research, database development, anti-seismic measures, monitoring, programme integration, private sector partnership, fund-raising including tapping European sources, local community regeneration, and improving access.

In view of the lack of a management plan, the Bureau at its 25th Ordinary Session in June 2001 decided on the recommendation of ICOMOS to defer further consideration of this nomination, "inviting the State Party to reconsider the nature, size, and structure of a renewed nomination, including a management plan." A revised nomination dossier was received by UNESCO on 11 January 2002 and transmitted to ICOMOS three days later.

This documentation included the text of an agreement between the Ministry of Cultural Assets and the Cultural Assets Council of the Sicilian Region, dated 11 October 2001, "On the method to be used in drawing up and implementing a management plan" for the proposed site. Article 2 of this agreement reads: "The main goal of this collaboration is to identify the most effective way, within the boundaries of the legislation currently in force, of making all the interested local councils work together and ensure their coordination so as to avoid any overlapping

and duplication of operations and wasting of resources, which could possibly be caused by the numerous entities in charge of managing the properties submitted for inscription, either singularly or in clusters. The parties should also jointly identify the method and, therefore, lay the groundwork and implement the management plan. The latter can be viewed as being a technical guide that can provide action guidelines to the numerous parties, a framework for preserving the heritage and increasing the cultural awareness and economic value of the site submitted for UNESCO's approval."

Also appended was a document entitled "Val di Noto Management Plan: Targets and Structure." On 8 November 2001 a meeting was held in Siracusa of representatives of all the municipalities involved in the eight nominated sites. A commission of experts was set up to draft the management plan as specified in the above agreement. This commission has produced detailed guidelines for the drafting of the management plan. Its main goal will be "to further integrate the conservation and the value-added functions pertaining to the management of the properties and the surrounding environment." To this end it will "help change the scope of the process of enhancing the properties' values and consequently increase both its broad and its specific objectives; [and] redefine the decision-making processes insofar as both the protected properties and the surrounding environment are concerned."

The property-enhancement process will include support of local development, in addition to the conventional goals of improving conservation and education. In the field of decision-making, the aim is to update existing management structures and operating and strategic functions.

Development and implementation of the plan will take place in three phases. During the first phase there will be a detailed analysis of all the activities and functions of the properties, such as how these came into being and their projected development. It will also try to establish the level of efficiency and effectiveness reached in the management of these assets in an objective way. In the second phase, more emphasis is placed on how to integrate the management of the properties and of the area (both from the physical environment as well as from the social point of view), paying particular attention to the quality of the environment, to the receptive capacity and accessibility of the area, etc. Finally, in the third phase, the analysis will concentrate on the integration of the promotional process of the properties and the local economic framework.

At the November meeting in Siracusa the following structure for the eventual management plan was approved:

1. Analysis of the present situation: area; resources; issues; participants; current systems.
2. Definition of the conservation and promotional strategies: strategic objectives; participants and responsibilities; actions to be taken by participants; current or potential sustainable activities; promotional activities; funding.
3. Conservation-sensitive maintenance, restoration, and recovery: Assessment of the current state; definition of the scope of action; organization of

the information and consultation systems; programming of events; monitoring and testing.

4. Risk prevention: documentation; definition of strategies and priorities; maintenance and consolidation projects and plans; emergency plans; monitoring.
5. Expected economic impacts (adding value to tourism and other economic activities): definition of an integrated programme; definition of plan for adding value to tourism; utilization of cultural sites for tourism; definition of visitor profiles, etc; evaluation of capacity potential; promotion and image building the image; transport and access; education; identification of other resources and local tangible and intangible culture outputs; regional marketing plan; identification of sources of finance.
6. Programming and implementation of the Plan: coordinating committee; annual intervention programmes; relationship of annual programmes with long- and medium-term plans; assessment of financing resources.
7. Monitoring: parameter assessment and scheduling; programming of actions and reporting; testing of the management plan.

The detailed guidelines for the management plan have been studied by ICOMOS, which consider it to conform fully with the requirements of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

The conservation history of all eight nominated towns is simply summarized as long-term maintenance battling with long-term degradation and punctuated by earthquake disasters (plus volcanic eruptions in the case of Catania) in a permanent regime of seismic potential.

### *Authenticity and integrity*

In artistic, architectural, and aesthetic terms, authenticity and integrity are high, both in original quality and survival. Additional quality and interest, again in both authenticity and integrity, are provided by the almost complete survival, with little inappropriate intrusion, of town plans expressing a variety of reactions to a single, disastrous event in 1693.

## **Evaluation**

### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS mission visited the nominated towns in January 2001. It also received comments from its International Scientific Committee on Historic Towns and Villages (CIVVIH).

## *Qualities*

The towns offer a plethora of late Baroque art and architecture of high quality and of a remarkable homogeneity as a result of the circumstances of time, place, and social context in which they were created. Their current contexts vary between considerable urban extents in basically untouched 18th century streetscapes to the largest place, Catania, where the geometry of the 1690s town plan and the grandeur of the buildings exist in the bustle and traffic of a busy modern city. Overall is the evidence of slow decay in the stonework and, inevitably in a well recorded earthquake zone, an awareness of further potential disaster. Catania could also be affected by volcanic eruption.

## *Comparative analysis*

For the Baroque age in Europe, there is no other urban and architectural phenomenon of comparable interest. Its context in post-earthquake reconstruction adds to that interest.

A similar reconstruction effort was simultaneously carried out in Malta, though the 1693 earthquake there was less destructive. The ancient centre of Mdina was rebuilt, like Catania, on the same site, whereas Valletta, of more modern construction, was less affected. Overall, Malta confirms certain Sicilian traits as representing a Mediterranean reaction to earthquake disaster in the Baroque period, but the Maltese reconstruction phenomenon is much smaller and produced fewer and more easily managed monuments.

The 1755 Lisbon earthquake destroyed that city, with 30,000 casualties. Its main relevance to Sicily is not so much in architecture as art as in architecture as structural engineering. Pioneer research into anti-seismic construction was undertaken in Sicily after 1693 and the first anti-seismic regulations were built into the Sicilian reconstruction, notably at Catania. It was this aspect which was taken forward in a systematic by the Portuguese in the second half of the 18th century.

## *ICOMOS comments and recommendations for future action*

In its original evaluation ICOMOS noted that the eight nominated towns were a careful selection from many more towns affected by the 1693 earthquake. Nevertheless, it wondered whether even greater selectivity might be possible.

In the revised nomination dossier the State Party made a cogent case for each of the eight towns as well as for the group. ICOMOS accepts this revised evaluation and interpretation, and expresses its gratitude to the State Party for the skill and erudition with which the information has been presented.

## **Brief description**

The eight nominated towns in south-east Sicily were all rebuilt after 1693 on or beside towns in existence at the time of the earthquake in that year. They represent a considerable collective undertaking, successfully carried out at a high level of architectural and artistic achievement, broadly within the late Baroque style of the day but with distinctive innovations in town planning and urban building.

### **Statement of Significance**

The catastrophic earthquake in south-eastern Sicily in 1693 laid waste a number of towns in the region. The restoration and reconstruction of these communities resulted in the creation of an exceptional group of towns, all reflecting the late Baroque architecture prevailing at the end of the 17th century in all its forms and applications.

### **Recommendation**

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i, ii, iv, and v*:

*Criterion i* This group of towns in south-eastern Sicily provides outstanding testimony to the exuberant genius of late Baroque art and architecture.

*Criterion ii* The towns of the Val di Noto represent the culmination and final flowering of Baroque art in Europe.

*Criterion iv* The exceptional quality of the late Baroque art and architecture in the Val di Noto lies in its geographical and chronological homogeneity, as well as its quantity, the result of the 1693 earthquake in this region.

*Criterion v* The eight towns of south-eastern Sicily that make up this nomination, which are characteristic of the settlement pattern and urban form of this region, are permanently at risk from earthquakes and eruptions of Mount Etna.

Whilst ICOMOS appreciates the reason for the change of title of the nominated property, it suggests that the State Party consider a further modification, so as to bring it more into line with the titles of other World Heritage properties: "The Late Baroque towns of the Val di Noto (South-eastern Sicily)."

ICOMOS, January 2002