

Fertő-Neusiedler Lake (Austria/Hungary)

No 772rev

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Natural Site and Cultural Landscape of Fertő-Neusiedler Lake
<i>Location</i>	Burgenland, Austria Győr-Moson-Sopron County, Hungary
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Austria and Republic of Hungary
<i>Date</i>	7 June 2000

Justification by State Party

The Fertő-Neusiedler Lake and its surroundings are an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement and land-use representative of a culture. The present character of the landscape is the result of millennia-old land-use forms based on stock-raising and viticulture to an extent not found in other European lake areas. The historic centre of the medieval free town of Rust constitutes an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement representative of the area. The town exhibits the special building mode of a society and culture within which the lifestyles of townspeople and farmers form a united whole.

Criterion v

Notes

- i. Other elements under criterion v were advanced by the States Parties but are excluded here because they lie outside the nominated area.
- ii. This property is nominated as a *mixed* site; the natural significance has been assessed by IUCN, whose recommendation that it should not be inscribed under the natural criteria was accepted by the Bureau at its 25th Session in June 2001 .

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*. Under paragraph 39 of the *Operational Guidelines for*

the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, it is also a *cultural landscape*.

History and Description

History

Two broad periods can be discerned: from *c* 6000 BC until the establishment of the Hungarian state in the 11th century AD and from the 11th century until the present. The nomination lies in a region that was Hungarian territory from the 10th century until World War I.

The landscape began to be developed from at least the 6th millennium BC. Then, early Neolithic communities lived in large permanent villages: a row of such settlements follows the southern shore of the Lake. Cultural and trading connections with neighbouring areas are characteristics of a later Neolithic phase. Distinct cultural attributes distinguish a phase at the beginning of the 4th millennium when settlements were on different sites and cattle-raising was the basis of the economy. Metallurgy was introduced around 2000 BC, and thereafter this area shared in what appears to be a general European prosperity in the 2nd millennium BC. One of its manifestations was the dispersal of amber: the Amber Route connecting the Baltic and the Adriatic passed near the Lake.

From the 7th century BC onwards the shore of the Lake was densely populated, initially by people of the Early Iron Age Hallstatt culture and on through late prehistoric and Roman times. In the fields of almost every village around the Lake there are remains of Roman villas. Two in Fertőrákos are accompanied by a 3rd century AD Mithraic temple which is open to visitors. The Roman hegemony was ended in the late 4th century AD, however, by the first of numerous invasions, beginning a phase of continual change and bewildering replacement of one people by another until the Avar Empire in the 9th century. Hungarians occupied the Carpathian Basin and became the overlords of the Lake area around AD 900.

A new state and public administration system was established in the 11th century. Sopron, a place with prehistoric and Roman origins, became the seat of the bailiff and centre of the county named after it. The basis of the current network of towns and villages was formed in the 12th and 13th centuries, their markets flourishing from 1277 onwards, when they were effectively relieved of many fiscal duties. A migration of German settlers started in the 13th century and continued throughout the Middle Ages. The mid-13th century Tatar invasion left this area unharmed, and it enjoyed uninterrupted development throughout medieval times until the Turkish conquest in the late 16th century. The economic basis throughout was the export of animals and wine.

Rust in particular prospered on the wine trade. Its refortification in the early 16th century as a response to the then emerging Ottoman threat marked the beginning of a phase of construction in the area, first with fortifications and then, during the 17th–19th centuries, with the erection and adaptation of domestic buildings. The liberation of the peasants after 1848 and the political situation after 1867 promoted development and building activity was renewed. The most important events locally in the second half of the 19th century were the construction of railways and the completion of the water management facilities.

In the 20th century, the Austro-Hungarian frontier created after World War I divided the area into two, but true isolation started only with the establishment of the Iron Curtain between the Communist world and the rest of Europe after World War II. It was at Fertőrákos, "the place where the first brick was knocked out of the Berlin wall," that participants at a Pan-European Picnic tore down the barbed wire and re-opened the frontier which still crosses the Lake.

Description

The site lies between the Alps, 70km distant, and the lowlands in the territory of two states, Austria and Hungary. The Lake itself is in an advanced state of sedimentation, with extensive reed stands. It has existed for 500 years within an active water management regime. In the 19th century canalization of Hanság shut the Lake off from its freshwater marshland. Since 1912 completion of a circular dam ending at Hegykő to the south has prevented flooding.

The Lake is surrounded by an inner ring of sixteen settlements and an outer ring of twenty other settlements. However, only three – Podersdorf, Illmitz, and Apetion – are entirely within the nominated area, with parts of Rust and Fertőrákos also included. The Palace of the township of Nagycenk is included as a detached part of the core zone; Fertőd Palace is also included, though in a detached area of core zone outside the buffer zone.

Among the three dozen or so settlements within the buffer zone, several are picked out by the nomination as being particularly noteworthy: Rust above all, but also Mörbisch, with its typical narrow lanes, Donnerkirchen, with its homogeneous settlement structure, walled Purbach, Breitenbrunn with its peel tower, and Fertőrákos, formerly a lakeside settlement but now left high and dry as the Lake has shrunk. It must be stressed, however, that, except for parts of the first and last in that list, none are within the nominated area, and so they are not further described here.

Two palaces are both within detached portions of core area. Széchenyi Palace, Nagycenk, lies at the southern end of the Lake, associated above all with one of the greatest personalities in modern Hungarian history, Earl Széchenyi István (1791–1860). The settlement itself was created by merging several smaller medieval villages. The Palace is a detached ensemble of buildings in the centre of a large park, initially built in the mid-18th century on the site of a former manor house. It acquired some of its present form and appearance around 1800. An addition in the 1830s, based on English models, was accompanied by sanitary novelties, while on the east were the stables for some twenty stallions and sixty mares bought by Earl Széchenyi in England as a basis for renewed horse-breeding in Hungary. The Baroque Palace garden originated in the 17th century. Its main avenue runs for 2.6km to the lake-shore. In the late 18th century an English-style landscape garden was laid out. Following fashion, major trees were added in the 1860s. They and other plants survived World War II but the building was much damaged.

Between 1769 and 1790 Josef Haydn's compositions were first heard in the Fertőd Esterházy Palace. It was the most important 18th century palace of Hungary, built after the model of Versailles. The plan of the palace, garden, and park was on geometrical lines which extended to the new village of Esterháza. There, outside the palace settlement, were public buildings, industrial premises, and residential

quarters. The Palace itself is laid out around a square with rounded internal corners. To the south is an enormous French Baroque garden; the main avenue is more than 1km long. The garden itself has been changed several times, the present layout being essentially that of 1762. The garden was reconstructed in 1904 after a long period of disuse and the Baroque composition, though many of its elements require restoration, remains almost intact.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Ownership is complex: in the Austrian part of the nomination less than 1% lies with the State, the bulk of the 41,590ha belonging to private owners and communities. In the Hungarian part, within the Fertő-Hanság National Park the State owns 10,790ha (86%), with other owners there and elsewhere in the nominated areas being local government, the Church, and private individuals.

Cultural property, including outstanding monuments, groups of buildings, and objects, is protected by the Austrian Monument Protection Act 1923, subsequently amended several times. The entire historic centre of the free town of Rust is under a preservation order. In Hungary, the legal situation continues to evolve. The Fertő-Hanság National Park was created in 1994, and now the nationalization of National Park land formerly owned by co-operatives should soon be completed. New laws replacing the object-and-monument-centred approach are in train. Law No 65 of 1990 made the protection of the built environment a task of both the communities and county-level local government. Law No 54 of 1997 endeavours to promote the interests of monument preservation within a holistic concept of protecting the built environment with due consideration to numerous other factors, including the promotion of public awareness of the cultural heritage. The Széchenyi Palace, Nagycenk, and the whole assembly of historic monuments come under this Law; the same applies to the Fertőd Esterházy Palace as well as the former Bishop's Palace and its garden in the protected area of Fertőrákos. Law No 78 of 1997 defines as an objective the protection of village-scapes and landscapes.

The Hungarian part of the nomination is covered by the National Land Use Plan, which recognizes the Fertő-Hanság National Park as a priority area and extremely sensitive in terms of cultural heritage. The Park has recently been successful in attracting significant foreign funding for infrastructural development. Overall, the objective is to preserve the entire heritage as a single entity.

Management

For conserving the existing cultural properties on both sides of the frontier, responsibilities are distributed between Federal, provincial, and local levels. In Austria the combined effects of the Monument Protection Act and village renewal regulation within a tourist context encourage sustainable tourism. In practice, work and resources are in the hands of the cultural office of the provincial government, the Burgenland tourist association, provincial museums, and village renewal advisory boards. The last produce binding village renewal plans which provide the framework for management and development.

Management is designed to supervise and monitor the state of preservation. A complete inventory of monuments and sites compiled at State level is available for conservation and management. Arrangements are similar on the Hungarian side.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The whole area has been a nature and landscape protection area since 1965, and the protection area has been classified as a reserve under the Ramsar Convention since 1983. The Fertő-Neusiedler Lake is a MAB Biosphere Reserve. In Austria, Neusiedler See-Seewinkel National Park (1993) is within the Ramsar area. The southern (Hungarian) end of the proposed site has been a landscape protection area since 1977 and the Fertő-Hanság National Park since 1992.

The traditional architectural monuments within the property and buffer zone are well preserved as regards the original fabric, appearance, and artistic effect. The continuing preservation and maintenance of the historic building material is guaranteed. Rust was declared a "model town" as a fully preserved vintners' town by the Council of Europe in 1975.

The provincial government of Burgenland recognizes the principle of sustainable tourism and the special needs of a region characterized by comprehensive landscape, nature, and monument conservation programmes. Since 1976 it has tried to reduce mass tourism in favour of individual travellers. Policies and programmes designed to present and promote the area are in place in a number of towns and villages and throughout the National Park. Nevertheless, especially in the Austrian part of the buffer zone, changes to the fabric of several settlements and in the appearance of numerous buildings, both as a result of unsympathetic modernization over the last decades of the 20th century, have cumulatively detracted from the historicity of an important element in the landscape. Tourism grew during the same period and the authorities nevertheless recognize that properly preserved houses and townscapes are among the area's main tourist attractions. The Hungarian National Park maintains a separate department responsible for "soft" or sustainable tourism in an area visited by *c* 500,000 people per year.

Authenticity and integrity

- Authenticity

The landscape overall and the scale as well as the internal structure and characteristically rural architecture of the towns and villages bear witness to an agricultural land-use and way of life uninterrupted since medieval times. The nomination dossier claims that "Both the area proposed for inscription and the buffer zone are characterized by a continuing settlement history dating back to the Middle Ages"; the settlement pattern, and indeed the occupation, of several present-day village sites actually go back to Roman times and earlier. Buildings, walls, and vistas have been preserved in such places as Donnerskirchen and Purbach, both nevertheless carefully excluded from the core zone of the nomination.

A varied ownership pattern is exemplified by the remarkable rural architecture of the very small villages situated in the buffer zone and by the Fertőd Esterhazy and Nagycenk

Széchenyi Palaces, outstanding examples of the nobility's architecture of the 18th and 19th centuries.

- Integrity

The landscape of the Fertő-Neusiedler Lake area has advantageous natural and climatic conditions which have made it suitable for agricultural cultivation and stock-raising for thousands of years. The water, the reed-beds with their labyrinth of channels, the saline fields once flooded by salt water, the row of hills enclosing the lake from the west with forests and vineyards on top represent not only the natural-geographical component features but also hundreds of years of identical land-use, making the area a unique example of humans living in harmony with nature. The Leitha limestone, west of the Lake and quarried from Roman times until the mid-20th century, provided building stone to Sopron and Vienna as well as local settlements.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

A joint ICOMOS-IUCN expert mission visited the site in March 2001

Qualities

The area in general is of considerable cultural interest, though much of the landscape containing and expressing that interest lies in the buffer zone. The nominated area is primarily concerned with the Lake itself and its shores, and does not of itself constitute a cultural landscape. The Lake is changing and affecting its environs, yet much of the cultural value of the area lies in its genuinely unchanging qualities of way of life and landscape based upon a traditional and sustainable exploitation of a limited range of resources – particular habitats for reed-production, cattle-raising, fishing, and viticulture. Though tourism is both a change and a bringer of change, as a phenomenon it was recognized early and has been quite successfully controlled and modified to suit the area. As a result, and largely concerning the buffer zone, the insertion of the intrusively modern has been largely confined to some of the main settlements and is not generally apparent in either the wider landscape or individual farms. Much of the vernacular architecture is well preserved and is considered by many to be outstandingly attractive. One of the great palaces of Europe, with a smaller one of great national interest, stand in the core zone at the Lake's southern edge, both related, like everything else here, to the Lake itself.

Comparative analysis

The area is characterized by a long tradition of viticulture – strong red wines on the low-level lime-based rock and light white wines on the eastern river bank since Roman times. A similar viticultural area occurs on the Balaton hills, Hungary, but they are on slopes and open straight on to the water without the intervention of reed beds. The cattle-raised beside the Lake, on the Aföld meadows, were driven to the Austrian and German markets. That they were raised here at all, however, results from the creation by natural forces of excellent pastures, which has permitted a particular type of economic activity otherwise more characteristic of Eastern Europe and Asian grassy biospheres, unknown to the west of Fertő-Neusiedler Lake.

Under "Comparative analysis" the nomination dossier asserts that "The geographical position of the Lake has

contributed to an uninterrupted evolutionary process involving diverse civilizations across two thousand years. Such an organic evolution, interaction and close association between the Lake and the local population cannot be found in any of the comparable lakes." However, no further comparative analysis of cultural matters is offered there, though elsewhere it is stated that "The organic, historical and diverse associations of humans with the ecological environment in the Fertő-Neusiedler Lake area is unique among the salty, saline lakes of the world." However, the comparative analysis of cultural matters offered by the States Parties is weak: two assertions do not constitute a compelling argument. On a comparative basis, the nominated area of the Fertő-Neusiedler Lake and its immediate surroundings are not presented as at all exceptional in terms of cultural quality or history.

In fact, lakeside settlement by humans involving fishing and stock-raising is common throughout Europe and has been since the advent of people with domesticated animals c 6000 BC. It flourished in particular around, for example, Swiss lakes in the 2nd millennium BC, the Somerset marshes in England in the 1st millennium BC, and Scottish and Irish lakes in the 1st millennium AD. A combination of stock-raising and fishing with viticulture beside a lake, as distinct from other crops and watersides, is, however, less common and obviously confined to the wine-growing zone. Analogues should therefore probably be sought in the Mediterranean region or, for example, in the Rhône or Rhine/Moselle drainage basins. A further qualification is added in this case, however, because the Lake is saline, which makes the combination of qualities rare. This is perhaps emphasized by the obviously comparable saline lakes in, for example, Israel whose shores support neither viticulture nor cattle-breeding. IUCN has prepared from the point of view of natural interest a comparative analysis of saline lakes in the world for its report.

In comparable terms, a strong argument for a rare combination of factors occurring at Fertő-Neusiedler Lake can probably be advanced, including interactions between people and nature. However, more thought needs to be given to the expression of that cultural and cultural/natural dimension in the landscape, both on the ground in terms of what exactly needs to be nominated, and why, and on paper to develop whatever line of argument proves most appropriate for World Heritage cultural landscape purposes..

ICOMOS comments and recommendations for future action

i The documentation specifies only one *cultural criterion* (v) to justify this nomination. The whole area does indeed clearly constitute an "example of a traditional human settlement and land-use," and one criterion may well be sufficient; but most of the human settlement is excluded from the nominated area and discussion of land-use is conducted by simplistic reiteration. ICOMOS strongly advises that it is essential to demonstrate by the production of good cultural evidence (for example from documentary research) and by cogent argument, that an area is a cultural landscape in World Heritage terms.

ii ICOMOS notes in particular that the nomination is over-reliant on its reiteration throughout of the importance of the string of lake-side settlements which are – judging by the care with which the boundary of the core zone avoids them – nevertheless deliberately excluded from the nominated area. This discordance between perception and text/graphics is nowhere explained. Furthermore, not one settlement is

illustrated with a plan, nor are either of the two palaces which are within the nomination. The section on "Cultural property," which is mainly about the villages excluded from the core zone, is therefore in a sense largely irrelevant, unnecessarily long, and difficult to follow.

iii The absence of plans is a serious impediment to understanding the detail and nuances of this nomination. It also suggests an absence of realization that settlement-form and settlement pattern are "cultural." There is no serious spatial/historical analysis of the settlements, though clearly this could contribute much to the interest of the nomination, especially if at least some settlements, carefully selected by clearly stated criteria, were included in the nomination. They are an integral part of the cultural landscape physically and should also be integral both conceptually and, in practice, in the way the nomination is defined and presented. ICOMOS advises that it regards this matter as central to a successful nomination in this case and would encourage the nominees to address it.

iv In addition to the major query about the line of the boundary of the core zone, there are several queries about detail of boundaries as they stand at present.

v ICOMOS notes that this property is nominated as a mixed site, the cultural aspect being defined as a cultural landscape. It recommends that, if the Fertő-Neusiedler Lake area is to be considered as such, the nomination requires significant reconsideration of the boundaries of the core area and of the concepts within which they are redefined. In particular, the States Parties should be invited to clarify their thinking about and presentation of the lakeside villages and about fields and field systems, preferably in conjunction with their villages.

These recommendations were accepted by the Bureau, which referred the nomination back to the two States Parties, requesting them to revise it as proposed by ICOMOS.

Supplementary documentation was prepared jointly by the Bundesdenkmalamt (Vienna) and VÁTI KHT (Budapest) and submitted to UNESCO. This was reviewed by ICOMOS, which considers that the States Parties have given serious consideration to its comments and complied with its recommendations. It therefore recommends that the property should be inscribed without further delay on the World Heritage List. It suggests, however, that the States Parties should within two years of inscription provide a revised management plan for the enlarged area resulting from the revision of the boundaries of the cultural landscape.

Statement of Significance

The Fertő-Neusiedler Lake area is the meeting place of peoples arriving as migrants or conquerors. The dynamism of the Lake itself has presented people with both challenges to face and a resource to exploit since their arrival here some eight thousand years ago. The diverse cultural landscape of which it is the core has been created by an organic process of evolution, by the work of man living in symbiosis with the natural environment.

ICOMOS Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criterion v*:

Criterion v The Fertő-Neusiedler Lake has been the meeting place of different cultures for eight millennia, and this is graphically demonstrated by its varied landscape, the result of an evolutionary and symbiotic process of human interaction with the physical environment.

The States Parties should within two years of inscription provide a revised management plan for the enlarged area resulting from the revision of the boundaries of the cultural landscape.

Bureau Recommendation

That this nomination be *referred back* to the two States Parties, requesting them to revise it as proposed in the ICOMOS recommendations.

ICOMOS, November 2001