

SWEDEN

Hanseatic Town of Visby

Brief description

A former Viking site on the island of Gotland, Visby was the main centre of the Hanseatic League in the Baltic from the 12th to the 14th century. Its 13th-century ramparts and more than 200 warehouses and wealthy merchants' dwellings from the same period make it the best-preserved fortified commercial city in northern Europe.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription 1995

Agency responsible for site management

- County Administrative Board of Gotland
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2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria C (iv), (v)

Justification provided by the State Party

The Hanseatic town of Visby, region of Gotland, as a historical urban reservation being nominated for the inclusion in the World Heritage List, fulfils the criteria of UNESCO Regulations, according to Art. 29 [i] and Art. 21 [iv] and [v].

i. Reasons for which the property is considered to meet one or more of the World Heritage criteria with, where appropriate, a comparative evaluation of the property in relation to properties of a similar type.

According to Art. 29 [i] of UNESCO Regulations, the medieval town of Visby represents a unique, well-preserved, and complete town of the early Hanseatic time in the period 1240-1360 with preserved City Wall, street pattern, church ruins, and remains of more than 200 warehouses from the period.

ii. Evaluation of the property's present state of presentation as compared with similar properties elsewhere.

The Council of Europe has made a comparative study of the 220 Hanseatic towns. Among these, Visby is among the few highly recommended towns

because the town plan still has its medieval street pattern, medieval buildings, and well-preserved City Wall, all from the very early time of the Hansa. Visby was the leading town of the Hanseatic League when trade started with the east in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The protected status of 200 medieval buildings guarantees the necessary preservation for the Hanseatic town of Visby.

iii. Indications as to the authenticity of the property

As a result of the economic stagnation of the town during the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the town did not undergo any alterations. When Gotland once again began to flourish in the eighteenth century, a new Swedish law ruled that houses were to be built of stone in return for tax exemption. This meant that people in Visby took pains to reuse the medieval houses, which had partly fallen into ruin. The new housing that was needed could be obtained by utilizing land which had been used in the Middle Ages for cabbage gardens, as well as the land where Visborg Castle had stood.

The cultural value of Visby was discovered early in the nineteenth century. The town received special protection for its architecture, as a result of which it has been possible to preserve it.

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

Qualities: Visby is the best preserved and most complete of the earlier Hansa towns. The town wall with its gates, towers, and turrets dating mainly from the 13th century is practically intact. The ruins of a dozen Romanesque churches constitute a powerful testimony to its past, as do the well reserved medieval street plan and remains of more than two hundred warehouses and merchants' houses from the Romanesque period.

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

Visby is an outstanding example of a north European medieval walled trading town which preserves with remarkable completeness a townscape and assemblage of high-quality ancient buildings that illustrate graphically the form and function of this type of significant human settlement.

Committee Decision

Bureau (July 1995): the Bureau recommended that the Committee inscribe the nominated property on the List on the basis of criteria (iv) and (v), considering that the site is of outstanding universal value as an unique example of a north European

mediaeval walled trading town which preserves with remarkable completeness a townscape and assemblage of high-quality ancient buildings that illustrate graphically the form and function of this type of significant human settlement.

Session (1995): the Committee decided to inscribe this site on the basis of criteria (iv) and (v) considering its outstanding universal value, representing a unique example of a north European mediaeval walled town which preserves with remarkable completeness a townscape and assemblage of high-quality ancient buildings. It also congratulated the Swedish authorities for the conservation programme undertaken over the past few years safeguarding the outer walls and preserving the authenticity of the property.

- The Statement of Significance does adequately reflect the outstanding universal value of the site

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: not adequate
- Buffer zone: buffer zone has been defined
- A new boundary and buffer zone is being defined

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained
- There are constant ongoing small changes which can be a threat seen over time if there is a lack of follow up program

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- The medieval buildings and also a great number of buildings from the 17-18th centuries are protected by the Heritage Conservation Act (state law), totally 257 buildings
- The protection arrangements are considered not sufficiently effective

Actions proposed:

- Protection by the Planning and building act
- Timeframe: no time limit fixed
- Action to be taken at regional and local level

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Urban centre

Management/Administrative Body

- Steering group: Local Heritage Committee of Visby - coordinate work between the three main responsible bodies at the site

- Formally constituted
- Management under protective legislation; Consensual management
- No site manager
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: regional, local, voluntary groups
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

5. Management Plan

- Management plan is being implemented
- Implementation commenced: December 2003
- Adequate
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: Local World Heritage Committee

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- The County Administrative Board and the Municipality of Gotland
- Extra funding has been drawn from World Heritage status
- Resources from EU-programs; a national fundraising campaign in order to save the ring-wall
- Funding available for the adequate management of the site: insufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: 0

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Good: conservation, interpretation, education
- Average: management, promotion, visitor management

8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- There are many different kinds of experts from a variety of fields covering most of what is necessary for the heritage work in Visby. The specialized expertise and services are practical as well as theoretical, for instance within the fields of conservation, restoration, inventory technique, documentation, exhibition and education and scientific research. These experts are working in museums, universities or

institutions on Gotland, some of them are national experts

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: not provided
- Visitor facilities: tourist center with exhibitions about the site; historic museum; local historic sites as the church ruins; historic buildings and the ring-wall
- No tourism/visitor management plan

10. Scientific Studies

- Risk assessment, studies related to the value of the site, impact of World Heritage designation, independent studies done by students from the University of Gotland
- These studies have led to interesting discussions among involved partners

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- Many signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: local communities, businesses; local authorities;
- More and better information is needed. One approach is therefore a new World Heritage information centre that will be established during 2005. This information centre will be opened all year around
- World Heritage day each year
- National Conference on education issues and international work-shops on archaeological management
- No web site available
- No local participation

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

Conservation interventions

- Extensive restoration works on buildings. A lot of excavations are executed continuously. Some streets are rehabilitated with new street-cobbles as a mean of traffic management improvement. (Pedestrianisation). Some towers in the City wall and some of the church ruins are been opened to the public.

- Present state of conservation: needs more resources

Threats and Risks to site

- Small changes continuously applied can cause irreversible changes to the heritage

Actions taken

- Planning for changes of attitudes through more participation and more awareness. Develop planning recommendations and regulations

13. Monitoring

- No monitoring programme
- Measures taken/planned: planning to discuss this issue in the local World Heritage Committee

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation, marketing
- Strength: the awareness in general has been improved, for example the awareness for protection and conservation as well as for the interest in the history of the city of Visby
- Weaknesses of management: there is no site manager at the moment. Better coordination and cooperation is needed between responsible authorities

Future actions:

- Site manager
- Timeframe: 2006
- Activity does not require funding from World Heritage Fund