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Management of Mixed Cultural and Natural World Heritage Sites in East-Central Europe: Visegrád – A Case-Study

Managing inscribed and potential UNESCO World Heritage sites has recently become a topical issue. For decades after its foundation (1972), the World Heritage Convention was engaged in establishing and then balancing the list of sites, while, although the possibility of deletion from the list existed, what happened to the actual sites was of little concern in the overall mechanism of the Convention. Changes in this general attitude started in the 1980s, but it was as late as 1997 that the States Parties agreed that they would provide Periodic Reports on the conditions of their sites and on the application of the World Heritage Convention.

The compulsory Periodic Reports brought the question of management plans to the centre of attention. It has become clear that only those sites will be able to successfully keep up their standards that have well-designed management plans. The World Heritage Committee soon admitted that this problem needed consideration. It also realised two important factors. Firstly, that the earlier unregulated practice led to many World Heritage Sites not having a management plan at all. In fact, even the very simple question whether a management plan was necessary before a property could be inscribed on the List was undecided. Secondly, that the problem of management plans was a policy issue that required decision by the World Heritage Committee. In effect, changes will have to be made in the Operational Guidelines of the World Heritage Convention. At the moment – after the March 2002 Drafting Group had proposed a new, revised version of the Operational Guidelines, which was further elaborated at the 6th Extraordinary Session of the Committee in March 2003 – the revised Guidelines are awaiting the next Committee regular session, where they are to be adopted.

The new policy of the World Heritage Convention (Operational Guidelines II. C. 23) is that *all sites* nominated for inclusion on the List *must* have management plans. In

the exceptional other cases, a date must be supplied when the management plan will be available. This will apply also to those sites that are already on the List but lack management plans or traditional management. The Committee also recognised that there should exist examples and models of management plans of different sites to help the preparation of plans for other older and newer sites. The next session of the WH Committee (2004) will discuss a proposal for the preparation of guidance documents for the protection of WH properties that would supplement the Operational Guidelines. These could include management of certain types of properties and case-studies of best practices.

It is in this light that the present proposal for *preparing a management plan for the tentative WH listed site of the Medieval Royal Seat and Parkland in Visegrád* has to be interpreted.

In 2002, a World Heritage nomination was prepared for Visegrád, although the Hungarian State, after all, withdrew this application before actually handing it in. Nonetheless, the WH experts' reports on the document are available. Visegrád was put on the Hungarian tentative list of WH Sites, and at present negotiations are held, in which the Hungarian WH Secretariat expressed its will to hand in a new version of Visegrád's application in 2005.

The Medieval Royal Seat and Parkland in Visegrád is a typical example of a mixed cultural and natural site. It is cultural in the sense that it preserves the complex architectural remains of a medieval royal centre, while the surrounding landscape is part of the natural heritage. The two kinds of heritages, however, are closely linked together. The royal parkland was preserved because of its special legal status but this status also influenced its development. Cultural landscapes used to be considered parts of the cultural heritage, however, more recently, the WH Committee have argued that cultural and natural properties are often impossible to distinguish, and, in fact, the previous "cultural vs. natural" distinction in the nomination criteria of sites will be missing from the renewed Operational Guidelines. At present, Visegrád is governed by a number of – often competing – authorities. It is within a national park but the territory belongs to a commercial forestry enterprise. Some historical monuments are the properties of the local museum but others belong to the above

forestry enterprise. At the same time, large parts of the area fall within a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. In other words, there is no lack of management in the territory. The most challenging part in preparing an overall management plan will be to reconcile all parties involved. This aspect has broad policy implications. Many sites, especially in Europe, are similar to Visegrád in having many governmental and non-governmental organisations responsible for them. Some of these sites have well-functioning management plans. I plan to study the policies implemented at such sites.

As part of my research, I will compare Visegrád with similar cultural landscape sites in East-Central Europe. The two most famous examples are the Kroměříž castle and gardens in the Czech Republic and the Białowieża Forest in Poland/Ukraine, both on the WH List. These sites do not necessarily have good management plans, they will rather serve to establish the characteristics of the situation in the ECE region in light of the broader policy context described above.

The final outcome of my work will be a complete management plan for Visegrád (prepared in accordance with the requirements of an official WH document as laid out in the nomination procedure – <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/nominfrm.pdf>) and an accompanying study to highlight the most problematic issues and the special circumstances that apply to the site with implications relevant to a broader perspective. These results will serve two purposes. On the one hand, as it is now compulsory that new nominations contain a management plan, the plan to be prepared during the fellowship period will be attached to the nomination of Visegrád in 2005. On the other hand, it will serve as an example for similar sites in the region that will be nominated in the future. In an ideal case, it may find its way to a major policy document, that is, it may be included in the attachment to the World Heritage Convention Operational Guidelines.