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**Culture Sector**  
World Heritage Centre

H. E. Mr Laszlo Turoczy  
Ambassador  
Permanent Delegate of Hungary to  
UNESCO  
UNESCO House

Ref.: CLT/WHC/EUR/21/13331

1 June 2021

Subject: **State of conservation of the transboundary World Heritage property 'Fertő/Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape' (Austria/Hungary)**

Dear Ambassador,

I wish to inform you that ICOMOS has reviewed the report on the state of conservation for the Hungarian component of the transboundary World Heritage property 'Fertő/Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape', submitted on 27 November 2020.

ICOMOS International concludes that the project "Sopron Fertő Lake Resort" in its presented size and form would harm the authenticity and integrity of the transboundary World Heritage property 'Fertő / Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape'. In addition, the Outstanding Universal Value of the property would be impacted significantly.

Therefore, it is advised by ICOMOS International to cancel the plan for this project and to halt its implementation immediately. Furthermore, ICOMOS International advises that the installations on the site shall be restored, at most adding some additional modest elements. If the recommendation to abandon the project "Sopron Fertő Lake Resort" is not followed, the property may face a threat that could have effects on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

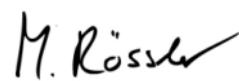
We would appreciate it if you would share the enclosed ICOMOS Technical Review (see Annex) with your relevant authorities for their consideration and keep the World Heritage Centre informed of ways by which these recommendations are being taken into account.

Finally, I would like to invite the State Party to share any relevant updates on the state of conservation of the transboundary World Heritage property 'Fertő/Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape', in accordance with paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*.

.../...

Thanking you for your support and cooperation in the implementation of the *World Heritage Convention*, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Rössler' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mechtild Rössler  
Director

Enc.

cc: Permanent Delegation of Austria to UNESCO  
Austrian National Commission for UNESCO  
Hungarian National Commission for UNESCO  
National Focal Points for World Heritage  
ICOMOS International  
IUCN  
RAMSAR

## **Annex**

**ICOMOS Technical Review of the report on the state of conservation for the Hungarian component of the transboundary World Heritage property 'Fertő/Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape', submitted by the State Party of Hungary on 27 November 2020**

## ICOMOS TECHNICAL REVIEW

<b>Property</b>	<b>Fertő / Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape</b>
<b>State Party</b>	<b>Austria/Hungary</b>
<b>Property ID</b>	<b>772rev</b>
<b>Date of Inscription</b>	<b>2001</b>
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>(v)</b>
<b>Project</b>	<b>Sopron Fertő Lake Resort</b>

### 1. Background

On the southern part of Lake Fertő, a major investment called the “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort” (*Sopron Fertő-vizitelep*) is planned. The first phase of the project consists of the construction of a lido with various associated functions, including, among others, two motels, a boat harbour, camping-spaces and a parking area. In a second phase, a hotel, a holiday resort with single apartments, and an ECO centre, as well as an additional harbour and more parking areas, are foreseen. The new expressway M85 is under construction between Fertőrákos und Sopron; it will attract tourists to visit the new facilities.

Already in summer 2019, RAMSAR, the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands, expressed its concerns about possible changes to the ecological character of Lake Fertő due to the construction of the “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort”. However, the Hungarian Deputy Secretary of State for Nature Conservation expressed the opinion that “*the project [had] no significant impact on the natural environment...*”<sup>1</sup>

Later that year, several third party letters expressing concerns about the development were sent to the World Heritage Centre and transmitted to the State Party, in line with Paragraph 174 of the Operational Guidelines.

In 2020, the World Heritage Centre continued to receive complaints from third parties concerning the state of conservation of the World Heritage property. Among them were a joint letter undersigned by 30 specialised civil society organisations and a notification from 73 Hungarian civil society organisations that launched a joint statement for the protection of the great Hungarian lakes, including the Fertő / Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape.

The multitude of complaints led the World Heritage Centre to request the States Parties to submit a report on the state of conservation of the property “Fertő / Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape” (Austria/Hungary) to the World Heritage Centre.

With his letter dated 27<sup>th</sup> November 2020, Mr Zsolt Füleký, Deputy State Secretary for Architecture, Construction and Heritage Protection in the Prime Minister’s Office, submitted the requested state of conservation report to the World Heritage Centre. The report was received by ICOMOS on 14 December 2020. Two documents were submitted by the State Party of Austria to the World Heritage Centre as an update to the state of conservation report, and were received by ICOMOS on 15 February 2021.

The Advisory Body provides its analysis of the project below.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr Bertalan Balczo to the Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention, 3 September 2019.

## 1.1 Documentation received for review

- Letter from Mr Tobias Salathé, senior advisor of RAMSAR, the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands to Mr Andras Schmidt, Ministry of Agriculture in Budapest, dated 4 July 2019, and letter of reply from Mr Bertalan Balczo, Deputy Secretary of State for Nature Conservation to Mrs Martha Rojas-Urrego, Secretary General of the RAMSAR Convention, dated 3 September 2019;
- Third party information submitted by Zoltan Kun, Wilderness Advocate, dated 17 January 2020 and transmitted on 20 January 2020 from the World Heritage Centre to H. E. Mr Laszlo Turoczy, Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Hungary to UNESCO and H. E. Mrs Claudia Reinprecht Ambassador, Alternate Permanent Delegate of Austria to UNESCO with the request to submit a state of conservation report of the property 'Fertő / Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape' (Austria/Hungary) to the World Heritage Centre, by 1 February 2021.
- Third party information submitted by Meteor-Nachrichten, number 3/2020 entitled "Kulturlandschaft Ferto - Neusiedler See – ein grenzüberschreitendes UNESCO- Welterbe in Gefahr", transmitted on 5 August 2020 from the World Heritage Centre to H. E. Mr LaszloTuroczy, Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Hungary to UNESCO;
- Third party information undersigned by 30 specialised civil society organisations, dated 7 August 2020 and transmitted on 18 August 2020 from the World Heritage Centre to H. E. Mr LaszloTuroczy, Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Hungary to UNESCO;
- Third party information without consignor, dated 14 September 2020, and transmitted on 16 September 2020 from the World Heritage Centre to H. E. Mr Laszlo Turoczy, Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Hungary to UNESCO;
- Third party information submitted by 73 Hungarian civil society organisations launching a joint statement for the protection of the great Hungarian lakes, including the Fertő lake / Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape World Heritage property, dated 26 September 2020 and transmitted on 15 October 2020 from the World Heritage Centre to H. E. Mr Laszlo Turoczy, Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Hungary to UNESCO;
- Third party information submitted by "Alliance for Nature", dated 22 September 2020, and transmitted on 1 December 2020 from the World Heritage Centre to H. E. Mrs Claudia Reinprecht Ambassador, Alternate Permanent Delegate of Austria to UNESCO;
- Third party information without consignor and without date, transmitted on 18 December 2020 from the World Heritage Centre to Mr Zsolt Füleký, Deputy State Secretary for Architecture and Construction Prime Minister's Office, Budapest;
- The state of conservation report, dated November 2020, submitted in response to the World Heritage Centre's request by Zsolt Füleký, Deputy State Secretary for Architecture, Construction and Heritage Protection in the Prime Minister's Office, with a letter dated 27 November 2020;
- Letter from Mr Béla Imre Kárpáti, Sopron-Fertő Turisztikai Fejlesztő Nonprofit Zrt, dated 11 January 2021, concerning the state of conservation of the transboundary World Heritage property "Fertő / Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape";
- Letter from the Federal Ministry Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport of the Republic of Austria to the World Heritage Centre, dated 5 February 2021, concerning the report on the national park by the Court of Auditors / Alliance for Nature.

## 2. The World Heritage Property

The "Fertő / Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape" was inscribed in the World Heritage List in 2001 on the basis of criteria (ii), (iii) and (vi). It is a transboundary property situated in Hungary (County of Győr-Moson-Sopron) and Austria (Federal State of Burgenland). The area has been the meeting place of

different cultures over the past eight millennia. This is demonstrated by its partly human-made, partly natural landscape, and its settlements with traditional architecture, the result of an evolutionary symbiosis between human activity and the physical environment.

The special quality of the property lies in the intense relationship between nature and human activities. These are expressed through the near-natural use of the lake and shore, the agricultural use of the surrounding landscape, e.g. with vineyards, and not least through the built environment with the remarkable rural architecture of the villages surrounding the lake and several 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century palaces.

As its determining element, the property incorporates Lake Fertő, the westernmost steppe lake in Eurasia. The area has outstanding natural values and landscape diversity, created and sustained by the encounter of different landscape types. The landscape is a valuable biosphere reserve and gene bank, is home to a rich diversity of flora and fauna, and has been shaped by different human groups and ethnically diverse populations. The present character of the landscape is the result of millennia-old water- and land-use forms. This interaction is also manifested by the continuity of its urban and architectural traditions.

Lake Fertő comprises a total surface area of 315 km<sup>2</sup>. The Fertő Basin has a moderately cool and dry climate. Most of the Hungarian section is covered by reeds, making it a major bird habitat in the Fertő region. The vegetation in the basin of Lake Fertő includes marsh and fen associations, with sporadic parklands and forest steppes on the peripheries. Lake Fertő is fed by two minor creeks on its western shore, the Wulka in Austria and the Rákos in Hungary; it has no outflow.

The importance of the Hungarian section of Lake Fertő is reflected not only by its inscription on the World Heritage List, but also by the fact that the most of the area:

- is part of Fertő-Hanság National Park;
- is a NATURA 2000 site;
- has a RAMSAR site status.

### **3. Present situation**

In the documents submitted by the Hungarian State Party, reference is repeatedly made to the different development of the built-up area in the immediate vicinity of the lakeshore of Lake Fertő. It is argued that the tourist enhancement of the lake on the Austrian side was enormously promoted after the Second World War, and intensively continued and increased after the inscription of the lake as a World Heritage property.

On the Hungarian side, on the other hand, development was not possible during the decades of communist rule. The infrastructure of the only freely accessible lakeshore near Fertőrákos – the location of the project “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort” – was modest, partly characterized by provisional arrangements. Over time, its condition worsened. A careful renovation of these facilities combined with a moderate expansion was initially planned and included in the “Integrated Settlement Development Strategy” of Sopron, adopted in 2014. However, the national authorities considered that the plans did not have sufficient tourist potential. The project now presented for a large-scale expansion is intended to trigger a tourist boom that will attract both Hungarian and Austrian guests in equal measure.

#### **3.1 Current situation on the Austrian part of the shore of Neusiedlersee**

Since the 1950s, on the Austrian part of the shore of Neusiedlersee, an intense development of

touristic infrastructure has taken place. In many locations, the natural environment has been transformed into a situation dominated by buildings constructed and used for economic purposes. Many boat harbours, bathing facilities, hotels, restaurants and an open-air theatre, etc., have been installed. All of these touristic places include large car parking facilities. The inscription of the “Fertö / Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape” on the World Heritage List in 2001 did not reduce the speed or the extent of the building up on the Austrian shore sections of Neusiedlersee. If a single building, in many cases, can perhaps be considered compatible with World Heritage status, in their totality the tourist facilities on the Austrian side are highly problematic. It is important to remember that negative impacts on a World Heritage property have a cumulative effect.

The touristic development around the Austrian part of Neusiedlersee has not concluded. Further investments are planned; for example, a significant enlargement of the lake stage in Mörbisch am See, a new marina with a restaurant and homes in Seebad Breitenbrunn, and a hotel and some 20 new houses on the lakeshore in Neusiedl am See.

Although this Technical Review focuses on the areas in direct contact with the lake, the entire perimeter of the World Heritage property must be taken into account. This includes not only the reed belt and the lake meadows (*Seewiesen*) as particularly vulnerable areas, but also the villages around the lake that are located within the property boundaries. Furthermore, the state of the open landscape and the small lakes in the region of Illmitz need to be considered. Several projects are being pursued in these areas.

### **3.2 Excursus: Nature protection in Austria**

The World Heritage property of Fertö / Neusiedlersee belongs under the category of Cultural Landscapes. According to the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, “*Cultural landscapes [...] represent the “combined works of nature and of man” designated in Article 1 of the Convention. They are illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal.*”<sup>2</sup> For any Cultural Landscape, protection of the natural environment is essential.

It is clear that nature conservation concerns have not been fully addressed on the Austrian side of Neusiedlersee. In September 2020, the Austrian Court of Audit (*Rechnungshof Österreich*), the independent auditing body of the National Council (*Nationalrat*), prepared a report on the Neusiedlersee – Seewinkel National Park.<sup>3</sup> The report criticised the fact that the National Park Society has not drawn up a Management Plan for the National Park since its existence – i.e. since 1993 – although this is a statutory task under national law. It noted that the salt marshes of the Seewinkel are highly endangered by interventions that have an impact on the natural balance – such as drainage, agricultural use or building development – and that thousands of field wells, adding to the lowering of groundwater levels and desertification, have been constructed over the years without official permission or adequate monitoring. The Committee of the National Park Region has never been constituted; the Austro-Hungarian Neusiedlersee / Fertö National Park Commission last met more than ten years ago; and the National Park Forum has met only once after its constitution in 1994.

These official internal Austrian criticisms are clear and serious. There is no information as to how comprehensively the protection of nature is ensured on the Hungarian side of the lake.

It is not the purpose of this Technical Review to examine in detail the area of nature conservation within the perimeter of the World Heritage property as a whole. However, it must be clearly stated

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<sup>2</sup> Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, 10 July 2019. Paragraph 47.

<sup>3</sup> Reihe BURGENLAND 2020/6.

that comprehensive and rigorously-enforced nature conservation is of fundamental importance for the World Heritage property.

### **3.3 Current situation on the Hungarian part of the shore of Lake Fertő**

On the Hungarian part of the shore of Lake Fertő, little development has taken place since World War II. The resort of Fertőrákos is linked with the village via a road of 1.8 km in length. In the southern half of the area, there is an extensive bathing beach, a camping site, a parking area, some boat moorings and a few small houses, which, in summer, are supplemented by temporary sales stalls. The northern part is characterized by about twenty small pile dwellings, which, placed in a row, are connected by a footbridge. The site is picturesque, while the different houses are all single-storey and have gable roofs covered with reeds.

### **3.4 Overall assessment of the present situation**

On the Austrian side of the lake, massive building activity has been taking place around Neusiedlersee, which has a negative impact on the natural and cultural heritage. On the one hand, islands are being built directly in the reed belt (extending to the open lake area), on which houses and villas have been or are being erected. On the other hand, hotels and restaurants are built directly on the lakeshore to enable the tourist marketing of Neusiedlersee throughout the year. In summary, this building boom has risen to a level that endangers the World Heritage property.

It is not the task of this Technical Review to assess the state of conservation of the World Heritage property as a whole. However, the larger context must be taken into account.

## **4. Management Plan**

The Management Plan for the World Heritage property “Fertő / Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape” dates from 2003.<sup>4</sup> The implementation of the Management Plan is based on its consensual adoption by the relevant Austrian and Hungarian government bodies. The World Heritage Associations in Austria and Hungary (its members represent the political and administrative bodies concerned), linked together by the common Management Forum, fulfil the task of coordinating any divergent interests.

The Management Plan provides recommendations. It plays a guiding and influencing role, but is not generally binding. Based on findings of the current status of the property, it formulates goals, but does not include efficient controls or even measures that could prevent planned impairments in any way.

The lack of cooperation between the States Parties in the management of the property is also shown in the way that the World Heritage Centre’s request for a state of conservation report was addressed: “[...] *the Austrian part of the World Heritage Management as well as the State Party representatives were informed about the SOC report [...] but [did not receive] the documents annexed to it. Hungary did not enclose these documents to the advance information and neither the World Heritage Management for the Austrian part of the property nor the authorities in charge for its safeguarding or the National Coordination for UNESCO World Heritage had notice of the further information concerning the projected development of the “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort”. Therefore, they were not able to estimate a potential impact on the World Heritage property. Furthermore, the authorities of the Federal Province of Burgenland or the State Party representatives never officially commented on the project, most notably not in its context with World Heritage.*”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> REPUBLIK ÖSTERREICH – MAGYAR KÖZTÁRSASÁG: Managementplan Welterbe Kulturlandschaft Fertő / Neusiedlersee. Wien, Budapest, Eisenstadt, Fertod, im November 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from the Federal Ministry Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport to Director Mechthild Rössler, World Heritage Center, 5 February 2021.



It is therefore clear that the currently valid management plan is inadequate. A comprehensive revision is underway and a new version is planned for the beginning of 2022. It would be important for this new version to be submitted to the World Heritage Centre for review and for details of management and coordination mechanisms to be provided.

## **5. The Project “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort”**

### **5.1 Preliminary notes**

Surprisingly, the dossier submitted by the State Party does not include any precise and reliable plans for the project as a whole, neither a site plan nor plans for the individual buildings. No technical plans on a precise scale and with measures have been submitted. ICOMOS has had to gather information from the various reports it has viewed.

For the presentation of the project, only renderings were made available. They show a high level of skill in mediation; however, for a professional assessment, it is necessary to present technical plans.

The overall project is divided into two phases. However, the planned project timeline is unclear.

Furthermore, the letters from third parties mention more elements that could become part of the project;<sup>6</sup> they do not currently appear in the available documents. The present Technical Review therefore does not address such possible later project elements.

### **5.2 Location**

The location of the new project on the shore of the lake is about three kilometres east of the village of Fertőrákos. Currently, on the south side, the land and the shore have stayed reasonably natural. Bathing installations that used to exist have partly disappeared and a few small houses remain. On the north side, a row of some 20 houses on stilts, connected by a footbridge, is located parallel to the shore. These houses are single-storey and have thatched roofs. They stand on leased land and are to be demolished in the course of Phase II of the new project. The area is accessed by a road leading from Fertőrákos along the existing canal to a car park, and a smaller road running along the shore. The area is open to the entire population and in summertime is actively used as a bathing beach.

### **5.3 Phase I**

The first phase of the project occupies an area of nearly 800 metres along the shore and 400 metres deep on land. This area includes a canal that separates the new facility from the mainland and turns it into an artificial island. This island is divided into a land area and a harbour.

The harbour is separated from the lake by a breakwater; it is designed for a great number of units (yachts, smaller sailing boats and paddling boats).

The land part of the island is criss-crossed lengthwise by an open car park. As far as can be seen from the rudimentary documents provided, it offers space for a great number of passenger cars and buses. Behind this strip of parking spaces, towards the north, there is an area for camping with the necessary buildings, planned for motorhomes and tents, as well as a housing estate with bungalows. Towards the south, behind the harbour, the strip is occupied by open-air sports facilities, but also some indoor sports halls.

On the other side of the car park, facing the lake, is the park-like lido with the beach. It is enclosed in

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<sup>6</sup> A football pitch and an indoor sports hall are mentioned as possible facilities of a further phase.

a U-shaped strip of nearly continuous buildings for commercial use (two motels, restaurants, a visitor centre, sports facilities). Beyond the confluence of the canal with the lake lies the harbour for ferries, with the associated buildings and the reception area (“central square”). Some functions are located in buildings constructed over the water.

In total, the planned buildings will cover a surface area of 17,803 m<sup>2</sup> and a paved surface of 118,102 m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>7</sup> Overnight accommodation will be offered by 2 motel buildings, 37 bungalows, 25 motorhomes and 45 places for tents. The car park will have 880 spaces, the bus parking area 10 spaces, and the harbour 818 spaces.

#### **5.4 Phase II**

For the second phase, another artificial island will be separated from the mainland by a channel. The island is approximately the same length as that of Phase I, but slightly less wide. Towards the north it also contains a boat harbour; it is about half as extensive as the southern harbour of Phase I.

The landward part of the island is occupied by a man-made ecological site. At the southern end of the island, the "Fertő Hanság National Park Visitor Center" is located; its high building comprises a large area (1,800 m<sup>2</sup>). A bird monitor lookout tower is part of the main building. The surrounding land is occupied by an ecological park.

Two large buildings are planned facing the lake. One of them is the “Holiday Resort”, a one-storey building with a length of about 500 metres, situated directly on the waterfront of the lake. North of this building, a four-star hotel, including a restaurant and wellness-area, occupies the northern tip of the island. It is an oblong (length of some 140 metres), three-storey building with a slight curve towards the water on its waterfront side. A car-park is located behind the hotel.

In total, in Phase II, the planned buildings will cover a surface area of 9,971 m<sup>2</sup> and a paved surface of 21,195 m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>8</sup> Overnight accommodation will be offered in the Holiday Resort, with 25 units for 4–6 persons, and in the hotel, with 100 rooms. The car park will have 200 spaces, and the harbour will be able to host 430 boats.

The aim of the project is to create a world class entertainment and holiday facility, capable of attracting domestic and foreign visitors. With its extended offer of functions and services, the development is expected to essentially raise the number of visitors to the lake and to expand its current seasonal turnover to all four seasons. The new lake resort is a quantum leap. The motivation for the project is the promotion of tourism with its associated effects, “*visitor attractiveness of the project site [...], a revenue-increasing effect*”<sup>9</sup> and “*round-the-year services increasing capacity to retain labour; promotion of the region*”.<sup>10</sup> “*Its implementation expands sports opportunities, encourages a healthy lifestyle, creates new jobs, and increases the competitiveness of the region.*”<sup>11</sup>

## **6. The state of conservation report**

The state of conservation report, submitted by the State Party of Hungary in November 2020, is an extremely comprehensive document – it includes no less than 641 pages. Repetitional statements are frequent. Most of the chapters are divided into reports for the first and the second phases, which leads

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<sup>7</sup> There are no indications about the built volume.

<sup>8</sup> There are no indications about the built volume.

<sup>9</sup> State of conservation report, November 2020, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> State of conservation report, November 2020, p. 64.

<sup>11</sup> State of conservation report, November 2020, p. 253.

to additional repetition.

It is noted that the investor is a non-profit company that is owned by the Hungarian state.

### **6.1 Heritage Impact Assessment<sup>12</sup>**

The HIA demonstrates the relationship between the values of the “Fertő/Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape” as a World Heritage property and the “Sopron- Fertő Lake Resort”, along with the impacts and interactions between the cultural and natural landscape and the lake resort. In addition, the study evaluates the impacts of the project on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the World Heritage property.

However, the HIA has been elaborated from an uncritical stance. Elements that would clearly be considered a negative influence are presented and introduced in such a way that they appear as positive points. This does not allow the report and the assessment as a whole to be used as the basis for an evaluation.

For example, in a landscape characterised by its natural state, it seems implausible that a neutral impact would result from the intervention of “*increased size of area with buildings*” and to conclude that “*the degree is not significant*”.<sup>13</sup> Such a classification is all the more incomprehensible because the mentioned increase in the area with buildings goes together with the buildings’ enormous tri-dimensional volume. These changes represent a clearly negative intervention that bears no relation to the current density. The building mass does not increase modestly, but by a huge proportion.

Another questionable aspect of the HIA is the fact that crucially important aspects are placed side by side with secondary issues. Without differentiation, the above-mentioned enormous new building development is mentioned next to the fact that the cycle routes are to be widened.

Given the scale of the project and its impact on the property, the HIA’s conclusion that “*as the above table[s] suggest, the overall impact of the planned intervention is seen as positive*” is unconvincing.<sup>14</sup> This statement may be true for the investors – but for the World Heritage property, it is questionable, and should be reconsidered with a neutral eye.

### **6.2 Environmental Impact Assessment documentation<sup>15</sup>**

The documentation has been carried out for both phases separately. Unfortunately, an overall view and a summary are missing.

The assessment starts with the declaration that there is a clear public interest goal in the development project “*to shape and develop the tourism standard and the range of offers of the area to such an extent that it is possible to build multi-seasonal and high-quality service options*”.<sup>16</sup> The socio-economic benefits, on the basis of cost-benefit analysis, are considered to be high.

Environmental issues are addressed with care. The various issues are being considered in such a way that the least possible damage can be expected.

Nevertheless, given the sheer size of the project, impairments are unavoidable. The EIA shows that the impacts are concentrated during the construction phase. Afterwards, during operation and in the long

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<sup>12</sup> Öko System 2007 Kft. Project Manager: Project manager: Tamás Nagy.

<sup>13</sup> State of conservation report, November 2020, p. 62.

<sup>14</sup> HIA, page 65.

<sup>15</sup> Öko System 2007 Kft. Project Manager: Attila Tiszavölgyi

<sup>16</sup> EIA, phase I, page 19

term, the impacts are considered to be moderate.

An issue that goes beyond the present plans is the water management of Lake Fertő. Although a significant change in the water management of Lake Fertő was implemented a century ago (the Wulka stream and the Rákos stream, drainage through the Hanság main canal, and construction of the Mekszikópuszta lock), the water balance of the lake remains very delicate. The drought period of recent years raises new questions about the water management and water level regulation of Lake Fertő. It is clear that this problem should be resolved as a priority.

The EIA states that, currently, no architectural value of major importance is present. However, the row of holiday houses, with their timber-framed, thatched-roofed construction on reinforced concrete piles, are “monumental and defining architectural elements that deserve attention”.<sup>17</sup>

### **6.3 Landscape Protection<sup>18</sup>**

The documentation has been carried out for both phases separately. Unfortunately, an overall view, a summary and a clear position are missing.

The entire development area is part of Fertő-Hanság National Park, a protected natural site.

The report lists a number of difficulties in the area concerned. While some of these concern the whole of Lake Fertő, some are directly applicable to the project:

- inadequate delineation of protected areas;
- the demand of several towns to have their own port;
- the conflict between the interests of tourism and nature conservation;
- conflicts arising from the appearance of structures or buildings;
- the lack of a complex landscape management model;
- the poor regional ownership approach.<sup>19</sup>

In Lake Fertő, sand is being driven in the direction of the new resort in large quantities by the wind. It will be necessary to carry out dredging at relatively short intervals. This will lead to continuous interventions in nature.

### **6.4 Nature Conservation<sup>20</sup>**

The entire development area is to be located within a part of the Fertő-Hanság National Park, a protected natural area. The national park covers 23,371 ha in Hungary and another 10,500 ha in Austria. It is surprising to read in a report on Nature Conservation that “*the fundamental problem of the entire area is the lack of development. The built environment has not been improved for long, in fact, it has been stagnating or deteriorating [...] The built environment of the beach is far below expectations or the quality on the Austrian side. The service buildings are outdated, they give a negative overall impression.*”<sup>21</sup>

The vegetation is mainly characterised by reeds, accounting for 86%, or 65 km<sup>2</sup>, of the lake part, which play an important role in the life of the lake. The concerned part of the lake-shore is not overgrown with reeds nor with other protected plants. There is no vegetation that is worth protecting. The report

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<sup>17</sup> EIA, phase I, page 70.

<sup>18</sup> Chapter on Landscape Protection. Dr. Sándor Szabó, Qualified Forestry Engineer wildlife and landscape protection expert.

<sup>19</sup> Landscape Protection, phase I, pages 11f.

<sup>20</sup> Chapter on Nature Protection. Dr. Sándor Szabó, Qualified Forestry Engineer wildlife and landscape protection expert, November 2020. Established 02 October 2017

<sup>21</sup> State of conservation report. Fertő / Neusiedlersee Nature Conservation, November 2020, p. 31

also states that the fauna in the area concerned is not particularly rich. This concerns butterflies, spiders and birds (including water birds) as well as mammals, fish and amphibians.

In the area directly concerned by Phase I of the project, from a conservational perspective and in terms of wildlife protection, the most significant intervention of the development project is the construction of ports and the dredging of channels and lagoons. The construction of the access road to the new Fertő lake resort and also the construction of entirely new surface textures within the holiday complex are major interventions.

In the indirect impact area, the author considers that land usage can be excluded, the likelihood of mechanical damage and contamination is minimal, and disturbance to wildlife is not expected to increase significantly.

The report makes various suggestions regarding how to minimise damage to nature during the construction of the development and its operation. Without explicitly stating this, the author seems to be of the opinion that the impact of the construction and operation of Phase I on nature will be low and will not lead to significant damage.

The report on Phase II, in most respects, simply repeats the report on the first phase. This is followed by a description of the project and information concerning how the content of the planned eco-centre should be designed. Although these considerations may be interesting, they are irrelevant in the context of nature conservation of the lake and its shores. The conclusions for this phase do not differ from those for the first phase.

#### **6.5 NATURA 2000 Impact Assessment Documentation<sup>22</sup>**

In essence, this report once again repeats the statements of the previous texts. It expands on them in some individual points, but does not permit any significant new insights.

The documentation recalls that the project area is the only part on the Hungarian side of Lake Fertő that is connected to an open water surface. Its typical features include the connection of water and reed beds, the intensively-used grasslands in the area with raised terrain, and the spontaneously forested, unused areas.

In terms of the expected environmental impacts, the documentation assumes that, when the resort is in operation, the restructuring of the currently used area will have a neutral impact. On the other hand, the implementation period may involve some disturbance and pressure but no permanent change to the state of environment.

#### **6.6 ICOMOS comment**

Compared with the HIA, the ecologically-oriented parts of the state of conservation report have a background that is easier to set out scientifically and its conclusions seem plausible.

Overall, the state of conservation report comes to the following conclusion: *“As presented in detail in this State of Conservation Report [...] the impacts of the complex development of Sopron Fertő Lake Resort on the Outstanding Universal Value of the Site are neutral, while at the same time it makes a paramount contribution to the maintenance and promotion of landscape and natural values.”*<sup>23</sup> As far as the direct impact of the project on nature in the immediate vicinity is concerned, this statement seems to be correct. However, other important aspects are omitted; they are explained below.

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<sup>22</sup> Development of the Sopron-Fertő Lake Resort. Dr. Sándor Szabó, Qualified Forestry Engineer wildlife and landscape protection expert. Sopron 2017.

<sup>23</sup> State of Conservation Report. Fertő / Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape, November 2020, p. 3.

## 7. Assessment of the Project “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort”

### 7.1 Preliminary remarks

In 2001, the year of the inscription of the property on the World Heritage List, the areas that were intensively developed for tourism purposes on the Austrian side already existed. They have been further developed in the last two decades, but in principle their relationship to the lake has not changed. Nevertheless, the impact has become greater: new buildings and installations have been constructed, road traffic has become much more intensive and, no less important, the number of ships and boats on the lake has greatly increased. Nature suffers from this increasingly intensive use of the lake.

The project of “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort” does not involve the expansion of an existing facility, but the construction of an entirely new facility of very large dimensions. Fertöràkos-beach is currently hardly developed, has remained largely without infrastructure and is generally accessible, and is partly occupied by a few modest individual houses. Its transformation into a most intensively built area means a massive change in the general context of the lake. In the overall context of the World Heritage property, it is irrelevant whether this completely new and very large facility is to be built in its Austrian or in its Hungarian part.

#### *Existing buildings*

The project is based on a *tabula rasa* method. All existing buildings will be demolished. The landscape, and in particular the lakeshore, will be completely redesigned over a length of almost 1.5 km.

The loss of the existing buildings and facilities is not problematic. This statement also applies to the stilt houses described above. Thanks to their overall layout in a long row, the elevation above the lake and the steep reed-covered roofs, they radiate a cosy, even somewhat exotic atmosphere. However, they are not of particular value, neither historically nor architecturally, and, in an overarching view, there is no reason to classify them as worthy of protection.

#### *Protection of Nature*

In ICOMOS’ understanding, the explanations given in the various reports on Landscape Protection and Nature Conservation are appropriate. It seems to be proven that the natural conditions regarding terrain and water, vegetation and fauna will not be significantly affected. This applies to the period of construction as well as to the subsequent period of operation.

However, this statement is not sufficient to prove that the project as a whole would be harmless. There are other factors to be considered, factors that are almost completely ignored in the state of conservation report. They ultimately determine whether the OUV of the World Heritage property will be affected or not.

#### *The architectural expression*

The third party submissions received criticise the fact that the architecture of the new project is not traditional. They refer to the statement that the intense interaction of nature and man is “manifested in the several-century-long continuity of its urban and architectural traditions.”<sup>24</sup>

However, ICOMOS considers that the real problem is the scale of the development and the level of artificialisation, with an artificial canal and the creation of an island and the introduction of a layout of the development which does not enter into a dialogue with the place, its heritage features, its sense of place or its values. What is important is that new architecture has a direct and close relationship to the given site, and that it reflects it. A calm, site-specific expression should be sought. The present

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<sup>24</sup> Outstanding Universal Value. Brief synthesis.

project does not meet this requirement. It presents an arbitrary, presently common, architecture that could be placed anywhere. For this sensitive site, a design would have to be found that meets the high standards required in one of the most sensitive parts of a World Heritage property.

It is unfortunate that an opportunity was missed to provide clear parameters for the development in order to avoid or minimize negative impacts.

## **7.2 Assessment**

As no distinction in the fundamental orientation of the planning between Phase I and II can be recognised, the project “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort” has to be assessed as a whole.

In a first approach, the project seems to essentially take up the current functions of beach, lido, camping and ship harbour. ICOMOS considers that the current dilapidated installations can be replaced and modestly supplemented to meet today's needs, as it was foreseen in the “Integrated Settlement Development Strategy” of Sopron.

However, the planned facilities are by no means comparable with the current situation, but most significantly enlarged. Furthermore, they are expanded by additional facilities built alongside the usual infrastructure. Phase I includes the construction of two motels and an important number of bungalows, while in Phase II the very long contiguous row of the Holiday Resort and the three-storey-high hotel are to be created. In addition, a large and high ECO centre building with outdoor spaces is planned. A modest and natural bathing beach is to be transformed into a massive facility where bathing becomes a minor purpose. In fact, many of the planned facilities are not dependent on the immediate vicinity of the lake and could also be built on solid land.

The major problems are the size of the facilities, the importance of the building mass, and the visual impact.

The buildings have very important dimensions. They cover no less than a ground surface of 18,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The documents do not specify the volume of construction, but it could be approximately 90,000 m<sup>3</sup>. In addition to the huge volume of the buildings, their layout is also problematic. Because of their great length, they produce an effect of bars, even where they are interrupted by small gaps.<sup>25</sup> Thus, they form a visual barrier in the view from the lake, and respectively towards the lake. Moreover, in several cases they stand directly on or in the water and occupy the bank. This arrangement is inappropriate because the shoreline and the visual relationship is interrupted over a long distance.

Many of the planned buildings that, as shown, are much too long, partially too high and built in a problematic relationship to the lake and its shores, do not necessarily have to be located in the chosen most delicate area. Reduced in size, they could be set back from the shore and placed landward.

A parking area with 1,080 spaces and a marina with more than 1,250 spaces – in its size and capacity exceeding the other harbours around the lake – would lead to a significant increase in traffic, both on land and in the water. Many thousands of people are to be expected, not only on peak days, which will inevitably lead to a disturbance of the natural environment. With about 900 beds, the capacity of overnight stays is very important as well.<sup>26</sup> This enormous scale is not compatible with the given conditions of the area. The newly paved area of 139,000 m<sup>2</sup> is enormous.

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<sup>25</sup> The small interruptions of the development are only perceptible in their axis.

<sup>26</sup> The figures given for motorhomes, tents, bungalows, motels, “Holiday Resort” and hotel have been totalled.

### 7.3 Authenticity and integrity

It is a requirement for every World Heritage property that its *form and design* be authentic.<sup>27</sup> The project “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort” in no way fulfils this important requirement. It introduces a completely new scale, partly in terms of the height of the buildings (heights of three storeys or equivalent), but above all in the length of the buildings, which in no way corresponds to the situation. The massing of buildings also fundamentally contradicts the requirement for authenticity. In addition, there are the two very large harbour facilities, which make the discrepancy in scale even clearer.

Another requirement for authenticity is the *use and function*. The project “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort” goes far beyond an appropriate use at this location. The exceedingly high density of use contradicts the given situation and leads to a significantly adverse impact. While some elements are adequate for the intended function, others, such as the large overnight accommodation planned directly on the lakeshore, interfere with the authenticity of the property.

Furthermore, the *location and setting* are included in the requirements for authenticity. The project “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort” proposes buildings and facilities that go far beyond what is compatible in this area. The size of the complex, the layout of the buildings and their massing leads to a massive impairment to the surroundings.

The term integrity designates the wholeness and intactness of the natural and/or cultural heritage and its attributes.<sup>28</sup> As shown before, the conclusions of the studies that declare that the natural conditions are not expected to be essentially harmed by the project seem plausible.

In terms of the cultural dimension, however, the project “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort” would result in an important adverse impact on the integrity. The very long buildings arranged parallel to the lakeshore interrupt the visual relationship from the land to the lake as well as from the lake to the land. They look like an almost continuous wall. The intactness of the World Heritage property would thus be markedly damaged.

Overall, ICOMOS concludes that both the authenticity and the integrity of the World Heritage property could be severely compromised by the project “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort”.

### 7.4 Conclusions

A large part of the features of the project “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort” go beyond what is compatible with the authenticity and integrity of the World Heritage property. The project would have a strongly adverse impact on the OUV of the property and should not proceed.

Restoration of the existing installations and addition of some modest additional installations in the area are possible. However, they must fully consider the surrounding conditions in order not to interfere with the authenticity and integrity of the World Heritage property.

A new project would have to be completely redesigned. First of all, a most significant reduction of capacity and size (buildings and harbour) would be essential. Only those uses that are absolutely dependent on the immediate proximity to the lake (bathing beach, harbour and similar facilities) should be located near the shore. Furthermore, no building should be higher than two storeys (or six metres), long buildings and the impression of continuous rows should be excluded, and the shoreline and the area behind it should be left free.

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<sup>27</sup> Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, 10 July 2019. Paragraph 82.

<sup>28</sup> Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, 10 July 2019. Paragraph 88.



## **8. Conclusions**

On the basis of its analysis as set out above, ICOMOS provides the following advice:

The project “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort” in its presented volumetry and form would constitute a significant impairment to the authenticity and the integrity of the World Heritage property “Fertő / Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape”. The OUV of the property would be impacted significantly. It is advised that the planning for this project be cancelled immediately and that its implementation does not go ahead.

It is advised that the installations on the site be restored, at most adding some additional modest elements.

It is further advised that the revised Management Plan for the property be submitted to the World Heritage Centre for review, and that details of the management and coordination mechanisms are provided.

The project “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort” is not the only threat to the area. Several projects implemented over the last twenty years and some current projects affect or may affect the property’s OUV.

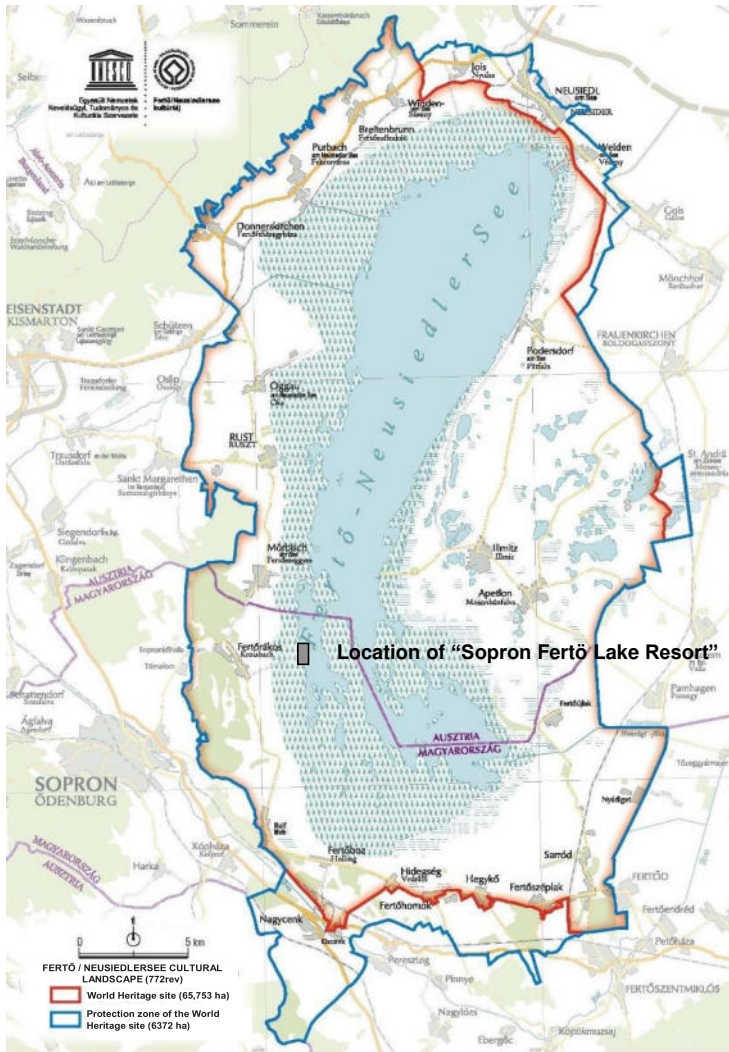
If the recommendation to definitively cancel the project “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort” is not implemented, the property is faced with a threat that could have deleterious effects on its inherent characteristics.

ICOMOS remains at the disposal of the State Party for further clarification on the above or assistance as required.

ICOMOS, Charenton-le-Pont  
May 2021

Annexe: Figures

Annexes



Map of the World Heritage Property  
 “Fertő / Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape”  
 (AUSTRIA, HUNGARY)  
 North is up



Presentation of  
 “Sopron Fertő Lake Resort”  
 Phases I and II