

## A cultural landscape on the border

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### Abstract

This paper introduces the Fertő/Neusiedlersee cultural landscape, which is an UNESCO world heritage transnational site on the Hungarian and Austrian border since 2001. It provides an exceptional example how nature defines human ways of life and interaction and how human history can affect the life of natural surroundings. The presentation is aimed to point out the uniqueness of the transnational heritage sites besides describing the case study's outstanding features as a cultural landscape. The research focuses on the history of this area from its first appreciation to its international scholarly acknowledgement by analysing official reports and oral history elements as well.

**Keywords:** *cultural landscape, transnational heritage site, Hungary, Austria*

### Introduction

The Fertő/Neusiedlersee cultural landscape site is very unique due to many reasons. It has the category of a relatively new type of cultural heritage site that incorporates both natural and community/social values. The heritage territory is divided by the border of Austria and Hungary since 1919, it can be seen as a transnational heritage that is a case study not just for the adaptation of international recommendation on regional or local level, but also for the harmonization of two nations' cultural policies as well. By taking into account European level regulations and two sets of national regulations, the realization of EU-wide trends and the identification of certain possible responses for global changes might be decoded as well. Moreover, the area is not just receiving all these diverse influences and forms a unique response to it, but also affects the whole region too. Having a marvellous flora and fauna with jewellery box like small cities in the neighbourhood that is united into and protected as a national park, a world heritage site as well as a newly awarded European Heritage site, the Pan European Picnic Memorial Park (since March, 2015) in the area unquestionably effect the life and the possibilities of the locals. Starting from the increasing traffic and tourism to the restrictions in agricultural or industrial activities are just a few

examples of the direct influences. Human history connected and also divided this territory throughout the centuries and therefore it forms a very complex and interesting case study.

### **When landscape becomes cultural heritage**

In the last few decades European rural landscape has been experienced deep changes: infrastructures logistic and commercial centres have consumed agricultural territory. Meanwhile technologic innovation has led to intensive soil exploitation causing the degradation of large areas the abandonment of many buildings and generally the impoverishment of the rural landscape and its ecological and cultural values (Newman, Jennings 2008). As another consequence especially small historical towns are suffering an increasing depopulation too. The decline and abandonment of old structures within the urban landscape poses new challenges for the architects and landscapers.

On the other hand, people construct, cultivate and preserve both their personal and collective identities as they remember and forget, commemorate and repress the past and present narratives. Henri Lefebvre noted that space becomes transformed into a place by way of 'lived relationships,' which are related to the concept of dwelling. 'Lived relationships' may be recognized through the material traces imprinted on a given space (Lefebvre 1999, p 34). Hence, when the given layers of traces are superimposed on one another, there appears a possibility to observe the ongoing changes in the material and iconic layer of a place. As a result the change of meaning embodied in the material layer can be seen. Not only the mutual relations between individuals are of significance here but also the ways in which places and space are used, as well as every-day experience of the 'things' which fill them. As observed by Edward Casey, places have the ability to gather 'things,' which ought to be understood not only as animate and inanimate entities, but also as experiences, histories, even languages and thoughts (Casey 1996, p. 24).

The history of a place is continuously created. Everybody contributes its own individual share to it. This individually added value allows us to shape the character of a given site and our relationships with it. The personalized perception of a given site promotes it to the position of a unique destination, which may be prided with and sold as a tourist product. This idea may be a good solution to protect the unique character of historic cities in time of crisis (Szymanska, Grzelak-Kostulska and Holowiecka 2009, p. 15-30). By preservation and protection projects, the aim is to recount the history of the landscape, because it refers to a shared history, a collective work developed over the course of time. Landscape is a historical construction but with little value for its character as cultural good. The consideration of landscape like a cultural good is based on its protection although changes are necessary and desirable in an active economy. They can be done without losing the

valuable components of the landscape and by always considering the quality of life of the community and the social and environmental sustainability.

According to EU goals about rural development, sustainability and about requalification of historical landscapes through place-based policies, the technological environment design practices executed in the project: „Recovery and enhancement of the GAL Oglio Por rural heritage.” It focused on demonstrating how it could be possible to reuse abandoned rural heritage as an incentive to the innovation and cultural socio-economic growth of the local communities. This is possible through the reuse proposals oriented to the multifunctionality and to the realization of fruition well-structured systems, and through the implementation of multiscale management models intended to develop the network integrated enhancement of the territorial heritage components (Grefe 2005). The enhancement of the rural landscape can lead to upgrading local identities (landscape and cultural values), quality of the environment (ecological values) and socio-economic factors (Bolici, Gambaro and Tartaglia 2012). Not only architectural features are important, methods can be taken from urban sociology, anthropology, psychology, social communication and marketing to preserve monuments of the past (Fortlani 2011, p. 88-95). After analysing these concepts, the possibilities to intervene in the recovery of the vernacular historical and cultural heritage that form the landscape, are valued (Sholz 2002).

Preserving and managing a landscape changes its perception from a whole of dead element of the past to an active heritage to the social, economic and cultural revitalization of the rural areas. Both the isolated recovery of the heritage like the preservation of an old telegraph tower and the landscape management by the creation of a cultural park represent together the only strategy of a viable intervention to preserve the documentary, technical and cultural value of the regional history. Several interventions to execute will lead to a regeneration of the urban landscape and have created a unique environment for collective experience. However the perceived value of the constructed heritage can be seriously distorted as a result of tourism, which requires a structured response. An alternative option would overcome the current situation, and makes use of a different philosophy on how to determine the visit-able elements displayed and by nearing those elements to the tourist accommodations. The inclusion of points of interest that share a common historical and artistic ground allows to behold a much wider selection of monuments as well as provides a deeper context than what is usually available on the current touristic market. The project should aim to enhance the less known architectural heritage that though not recognized as official cultural heritage plays a fundamental role for the identity of a territory and its population. Touristic itineraries should be built in the combination of scientific (archival and bibliographic research) and unconventional (citizens participation) contribution and aimed at facilitating the discovery of small valuable buildings that are often overshadowed by more well-known heritage (Caramel, Anzani, Baila and Guarisco 2015, p. 22-24). A

possible solution would be to arrange the project around strategic themes or with the aim to see the area as one cultural landscape. Positive impact of cultural heritage on economic social spheres as well as on culture and the natural environment is unquestionable. It should be regarded in terms of a development resource, rather than a domain requiring financial investment and protective measures. It is accepted on many levels that cultural heritage plays a major role in all spheres of life and on all administrative levels.

### **Historical background**

The researched territory was occupied by humans as early as in the prehistoric period based on the archaeological findings in the region. The border of the Roman Empire, its roads and settlements flourished here as well. The territory was occupied by Hungarians and other ethnic groups from the 10th century. The Habsburg family connected the Austrian and Hungarian history since the 16th century and the golden age of this cooperation here was in the 18th and 19th century when the Esterhazy family along with other noble families had estates in the area increasing its importance culturally, economically and many times politically as well (Gates-Coon 1994).

Under the peace treaty of St. Germain (1919) the western areas of the former Sopron and Moson counties were ceded to Austria and a new state boundary was established. World War II had also a direct impact on the region based on the Potsdam Conference in July, 1945. The winning powers announced the deportation of the German minorities from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The deportation from Hungary started in January, 1946 based on the 1941 census. More than one hundred thousand people had to leave the country mainly from and around the capital and the Western borderland. This historical event led not just to the loss of population on the researched area but also the arrival of new groups, usually peasant communities from the less prosperous areas of the country (namely from the Northern and Eastern parts) (Gonda 2014).

The Cold War period also defined the life and the possibilities here. Death zone was established as early as in spring, 1949 with fens, landmines and constant military presence. In 1965, the actual death zone was replaced with an electronic signing system until 1989. This second system was called “gentle iron curtain.” Even though this version of border protection caused significantly less tragedy, it still defined the outlook and the life in the region especially for those thirty-three settlements that were trapped in between the actual state borders and the electronic system. By the late 1980s, the system did not fulfil its function successfully and their improvement or repair would both cost too much for the state. Moreover the international events and the new aims of the Hungarian political leadership (especially the inauguration of world passport in 1988) made the strong military border control redundant (Sallai 2009). The Hungarian political change of 1989, its

accession to EU in 2004 and then to the Schengen agreement in 2007 motivated the establishment of more and more cooperation through the border. Nowadays Hungarians work daily in Austria and Austrians settled in the Hungarian side of the border. This oversimplified review about the history of the region also justified the unified management of this area, hence the existence of a transnational cultural site.

### **Natural protection at the two sides of the Fertő/Neusiedlersee cultural landscape**

The centre of this area that was interested for biologists and ethologists since the early 20th century is a salty lake, the third biggest one in Central Europe that serves as home and as resting place for hundreds of animals including migratory bird species and exceptional flowers and plants. The lake itself dried out many times in the history creating special content of the ground on its territory and the nearby area. Locals lived with nature by knowing the seasons and changes of the vegetation. There was an almost equal cooperation between humans and nature. But people interfere in the natural flow of this area for instance by building dams and restricting the free flow of the rivers. By regulating the flow of water in the Danube as well they made the water level at the researched territory equal and the originally salty water to river-like which led to a chain of changes in the natural environment.

The earliest legal steps to protect nature happened by the 1930s, when both the Federal Province of Burgenland (1926) and Hungary (1935) signed laws about environment protection. By that time intensive research (mainly by ornithologists, geologists and forestry scholars) had started at both sides of the border in the researched area. In Austria a preventing factor was that in the government of the Federal Province of Burgenland the agriculture and environment protection was assigned to the same ministry hence less possibility was given for the latter one. Only private donations helped the improvement of the projects such as the establishment of the research centre in Neusiedl am See in 1950 and the generous and ongoing support of WWF between 1960s and 1980s (Triebel 2012, p. 32-37). The institutionalized environment protection on the Hungarian side could start only in the late 1960s due to the historical and political events of the country. A government decision was made in 1967 to establish a committee within the Hungarian Academy of Sciences to plan the necessary protection plans in the Fertő area. By the mid-1970s regional and local offices of the National Environment Protection Bureau started to operate in the territory as well (Kárpáti 1979, p. 341-351).

Accordingly, in the second part of the 20th century environment protection at both sides of the border was launched and managed. In 1977, the Austrian side of the researched territory became a biosphere reserve and two years later the entire Fertő landscape was nominated to be part of UNESCO Man and Biosphere program that provided international

acknowledgement of the fruitful coexistence of human activities and natural environment. As a result of that comparative monitoring work was launched regularly that further increased the cooperation through the border. Austrian professionals initiated the idea of a unified natural park in the late 1970s with publications and conferences (such as in Mattersburg in 1978 where the theme of the conference was: Neusiedlersee National Park – the model of an interstate cooperation) after a meeting in Sopron in 1976 (Rakonczay 2009, p. 428-430).

Commonly organized public and professional events (such as co-organized summer camp about environment protection in 1985 and the first Environment Protection Conference in Burgenland focusing on the formation of one national park of Fertő-tó in 1986) continuously supported the idea of professional cooperation and a transnational nature park in the 1980s as well (Kárpáti 1990). It became more and more realistic due to the forming political change in Hungary and the numerous international acknowledgement and support by for instance the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (RAMSAR 2016) and the PHARE programme of the Council of European Committee (PHARE 2016).

The Hungarian national park was established in 1991 and its Austrian counterpart in 1993. The different legal statuses and economical possibilities caused some difficulties to harmonize the processes in the two countries but the cooperation was unstoppable and as a result the common national park was formed in 1994. After further discussions and harmonization of aims, plans and management direction the united national park applied successfully for the UNESCO World Heritage site nomination as a cultural landscape. The cultural landscape of Neusiedlersee inscribed on the World Heritage List includes the Neusiedlersee – Seewinkel Ramsar wetland, the territories of the Neusiedlersee – Seewinkel National Park and numerous settlements in the region with their fields and field systems. The buffer zone is identical with the Neusiedlersee – Seewinkel nature conservation and landscape protection area and parts of the Neusiedlersee – Seewinkel National Park outside the core area (World Heritage Fertő / Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape Management Plan 2003, p.10). The Hungarian portion of the world heritage cultural landscape of Fertő / Neusiedlersee seems to be much more mosaic-like. It includes the whole area of the Hungarian Fertő-Hanság National Park and segments of certain settlements in the area that have outstanding cultural sites such as the protected historic environment of the former Széchenyi Palace of Nagycenk; the inner area of Fertőd and the protected historic environment of the Esterházy Palace. The buffer zone is formed by the outer parts of Nagycenk, Hidegség, Fertőhomok, Hegykő and Fertőszéplak (2003, p. 11).

Besides the different legal and economic situations even the territories have significant diversity at the two sides of the border, which imply extra tasks on the leadership of the world heritage site. In Hungary, the strictly protected areas are small sections spread out on

a relatively wide area which makes its proper protection and promotion both very complex. Moreover numerous acknowledged values can be found outside the protected areas as well such as noble built heritage of the past, natural beauty and the traditional lifestyle in harmony with the natural environment due to which the internationally acknowledged transnational heritage site is hardly definable for the general public.

### **Culture heritage elements in the Fertő/Neusiedlersee cultural landscape**

Differences in the evaluation of the heritage site by the two countries are especially vivid regarding the cultural aspects of the cultural landscape. In the management plan composed in 2003 as well as in the nomination document, the Austrian professionals emphasized the unity in human and nature cooperation (“agrarian land use and way of living” (2003, p.15)) that is ongoing from the prehistoric times until today. The notion of continuity is also emphasized with the provided maps from different time periods showing common urban structures in the region. Moreover even about the noble estates during the Habsburg period their preservation and continuation effects on the settlement structures are emphasized (2003, p.24).

While in Hungary due to the overall ideology-driven influences from the late 1940s rather the vernacular architecture became the centre of the attention as unique value and not as a continuation of historical settlements in the region. Both identical vernacular architecture and system of buildings became especially important to protect. As early as in the 1960s both in Győr-Sopron and in Vas county (the two counties in the protected area at that time) eight vernacular architecture examples and a preservation area were already under official protection (Mendele 1988). Many national and international provisions and specialized institutions (such as the Bi-annual Békés Conference of Vernacular Architecture since 1970s, and the CIAV, International Scientific Committee on Vernacular Architecture at ICOMOS) have been established to research and to provide possible methods and guidelines to protect, conserve and restore them. These scientific meetings and organizations have dealt with among many other threats: with the influence of depopulation of settlements and decreasing of the heritage value (Krizsán 2010, p. 49-57). Similarly to vernacular architecture elements, urban city centres and building became protected in the area such as Győr, Kőszeg, Sopron, Szombathely, Veszprém, out of which none became included in the UNESCO world heritage site (Román 2004, p. 225-246).

Both national sides emphasized the importance of the Austro-Hungarian nobility especially from the 17th century. However in the Hungarian territories the centres of these families are part of the world heritage site such as in Szécsény and Fertőd, none of the Austrian counterparts is involved in the UNESCO protected area neither Eisenstadt nor Forchtenstein. On the other hand, while the free city of Rust forms an integrated part of the

cultural landscape on the Austrian site, the famous independent city of Sopron is not included in the core heritage area. Nor the location of the Pan European Picnic, where the iron curtain was first opened next to Sopron got included.

Not just different types of cultural heritage were chosen to protect but their adaptation differed as well. Past and present should communicate with each other, where both realities support each other by a mutual improvement. Although such concept is shared fully in theory it is equally true that many times the implementations of this kind of valorisation result in hidden problems. The aim is to reconsider and re-read the system of rules and shared procedures, in which technical variables do not neglect the conservative instances and the need for integration combining them with the technological design and production aspects of the recovery process (Pagliuca, Guida and Fatiguso 2007, p. 1532-1729). The shared criteria in the field of conservation can be the common denominator to define effective methodologies. Such criteria are for instance the material compatibility, the preservation of the surface's values of the architecture and the respect of all the historical layers. It is necessary to read and understand the old building in order to ensure the architectural principles to be adapted for the new usage.

The major difference in the rehabilitation procedures of built heritage at the two sides of the border was due to the diverse ownership possibilities. In Hungary monument protection could take place only at state-owned buildings, while in Austria private individuals, foundations as well as civic organization could manage to organize the protection and accessibility of such architecture examples. For example by the early 1980s circa two hundred vernacular architecture got new public/political function in Hungary (Istvánfi 2014, p. 131-139), while private museums and the Esterhazy Foundation initiated different type of heritagization in Austria (Esterhazy 2016 and Burgenlandkultur 2016). Later many Hungarian vernacular building got musealized forming a national system of rural heritage buildings, where both the tangible and intangible heritage aspect of vernacular lifestyle is protected and promoted on spot (UNESCO Tentative List 2010). In Austria the buildings with similar values turned to rather be service buildings, where restaurants and cafés were opened with special atmosphere and offered menus as well (Burgenland 2016). Many evaluate both as a kind of combined (tangible and intangible) heritage protection methodology. The creative potentials of the region have become more and more pronounced in recent years at both sides of the borders. Regional and local decision-makers, entrepreneurs and researchers open to innovation and sustainability (Forlani 2011, p. 88-95 and Kraftprojekt 2016). Unfortunately these initiatives have not found their ways through the borders yet.



### Further differences and concluding thoughts

Similarly different historical events and significances of the past are emphasized in the Hungarian and in the Austrian representation of the territory. The Austrian narratology emphasizes the area as the green heart of the Vienna-Bratislava-Győr metropolitan region (World Heritage Fertő / Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape Management Plan 2003, p.15.) and highlights the fact that the ancient Amber Road located (Landesmuseum Burgenland 2016) here as well. Even though this ancient trade route had significant parts in Hungary too it is much less emphasized in the Hungarian publications (Dosztányi 2002). The reason behind this is similar to the case of the significant noble families' tangible heritage. The opposing emphasis about the Amber Road is due to the fact that Austrian settlements (like Purbach and Donnerskirchen) became part of the world heritage site due to their role in this memory, while Hungarian cities with the same significance (such as Sopron or Szombathely) are not part of the UNESCO protected area. On the other hand, for Hungarians the Communist past and the Cold War realized in death zone and emotional and physical iron curtain at the researched territory are important parts of the recent past, which are dissimilar to the Austrian history. After 1989 all countries of Central and Eastern Europe have faced the problem of dealing with the material remnants of its Communist past. Sharon Macdonald calls difficult heritage (McDonald 2008) and perceives as typical for the particularly conflicted legacy of the region. It has the potential to break into the present and open up social divisions. At the research territories open air museum sites, memorial park and private museums (Iron Curtain Heritage in Hungary 2016) are all dealing with this time period and such diversity alludes to the still unstable discourse about it.

Not just the past, but the present circumstances influence the representation power and contemporary use of the region on the two sides of the border. In Austria, the lake is still navigable and the level of water is high enough to swim in it. Accordingly, it can serve recreational aims of the public. Even today it is evaluated as the Balaton of Vienna. Moreover the region is famous for its vineyards that also attract recreational tourism (Neusiedlersee 2016). On the other hand the Hungarian part of the lake is mainly covered with reed vegetation. It has been used as building element, the material of diverse equipment and one of the major manufactural industries even in the mid-20th century (Bognár 1966, p. 1-15). There is a very limited possibility for swimming comparing to Austria. The lake much rather serves as home for the rich animal fauna of the world heritage site. This natural heritage value defines a different type of tourism called as ecotourism that can be served with bicycle roads and introductory programs. That led to the increasing importance and preference of the programs and services of the Hungarian nature park (Fertő-Hanság National Park 2016) and the rural heritage houses in region. The vernacular architecture in Hungary is especially interesting as it reflects the nationality of

the inhabitants as the structure and the material clearly define the inhabitants' origin. Accordingly, these buildings provide information not just about the given architecture, the settlement structure, the inhabitants or their lifestyle, but also about the nationalities of the people and their cooperation with each other. German-speaking minorities have been part of this region for centuries and their architecture formed an identical category (Fejérdy 1972). In our age when multiculturalism and the sensitivity towards minority are both well-known and spread these minority vernacular houses can serve as interesting and informative sites for the visiting tourists.

All in all it can be said that even though transnational heritage sites require more management tasks and create a more complex situation it can lead to fruitful cooperation even at difficult political time periods as well. If the heritage value of the territory happens to be on human created, artificial borders it is clearly our duty to overcome such obstacles and protect as well as promote the natural and cultural values of the territory.

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