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**Cultural Landscape**

**"Dresden Elbe Valley"**

**Kulturlandschaft**

**"Elbtal Dresden"**

**Comments and Observations on the Application by the City of Dresden and the Free State of Saxony for Admission to the WORLD HERITAGE LIST**

This report is based on the written part of the application documents as well as the excellent maps and charts provided on request by the Dresden Office for the Preservation of Historical Monuments.

**1. Reasons for the Admission**

The submitted application "Dresden Elbe Valley" falls into the category of cultural landscapes. The cultural landscape which it describes has developed over centuries as a result of the interaction between human cultural achievements and various natural phenomena. For that reason, the Dresden Elbe Valley is not a landscape deliberately planned and created by humans, such as e.g. Potsdam-Sanssouci; here, the inhabitants have through their labours and efforts created a very special landscape which is both distinctive and unique:

The valley of the free flowing Elbe did and does enjoy a number of geological and climatic advantages. Even though the history of its settlement goes far back into early human times, it is only with the foundation of the city of Dresden in the Middle Ages that its cultural character becomes tangible. The Elbe was and is a life line in the truest sense – it was the link which enabled communication and association between the commercial centres of that age in Europe.

This unmistakable and unique river landscape lies embedded within the urban one, which developed from the residencies of the Saxon Prince Electors to a bourgeois city, advanced and characterized by the high cultural expectations of its citizens. Even though Dresden, too, experienced a typical period of stormy growth during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, attention was from very early on focussed on an appropriate and well-planned continuance of its urban development.

The 20 km stretch of the Dresden Elbe Valley is a cultural landscape of immense variation and harmony with an exceptional wealth of cultural/architectural testimonies. Even though Dresden is generally praised as the “Florence on the Elbe”, its exceptionality and uniqueness in comparison with Florence and similar cities – such as Paris, Budapest, or Prague – is based on the harmonic combination and intensive interpenetration of the city and the region, resulting in a cultural landscape, whose appearance to this day is characterized by one of the most traditional forms of agriculture – the cultivation of wine.

The cultural landscape of the “Dresden Elbe Valley” owes its outstanding universal value to more than 400 years of positive interplay of the naturally developed one to two kilometres wide river landscape with its open unbuilt meadows against the backdrop of the rising slopes, and the cultural impact of human hand and spirit, and also to its impressive authenticity.

Looking at the overall picture, the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady) and the Royal Palace (Schloß) are absolutely justified as part of the recreation of the city’s baroque skyline in accordance with Canaletto’s famous panorama.

## **2. Description of the Cultural Landscape**

The application “Dresden Elbe Valley” provides detailed descriptions of a large number of individual objects, elements, and subsections of the cultural landscape. It complies with criteria II, III, IV, and V of § 24, as well as criteria II and III of § 39 of the World Heritage Convention.

However, missing from the application are any references to any of the artists’ associations which also had close links with the city and the Elbe valley. The Dresden Elbe Valley, like no other German region, has from the Baroque onwards attracted innumerable writing and visual artists: for example, Dresden was the founding place of the “Deutscher Bund für Heimatschutz” in 1904, and the artists’ group “Die Brücke” in 1905. With their cultural contributions, they also had an effect on the region as a whole.

It is recommended to remedy this omission with a complementary supplement, thus ensuring compliance with criterion VI of § 24 of the Convention.

The application provides a precise definition of the world heritage core zone. For its safeguard, this core zone is surrounded by a buffer zone, both of which terminate respectively in the former villages of Söbrigen and Übigau. However, the boundaries of the buffer zone seem in some instances to be too narrowly defined to safeguard a long-term and enduring influence in discussion and planning on the interplay between city and region.

### **3. Effects on the Cultural Landscape**

The much praised distant effect of the city and the outside view onto the city continue to deserve consideration. This is inherently less endangered by the new congress centre (under construction) on the Elbe embankment near the big Erlwein warehouse – the latter to be used as a congress hotel and thus integrated into the project – than by the building of an arched bridge, leading from the Johannstadt across the Elbe to the Waldschlösschen Brewery. This – already agreed – intervention in the traditional urban and natural scenery can only be met with a very high degree of creative quality.

Considerable action is also required in the quarters of the Friedrichstadt close to the centre of the old town – the Elbe harbour with its industrial premises – as well as in the Ostragehege (Ostra Deer Park) with its expansive green fields for leisure and sport and also the buildings of the old municipal abattoir, some of which are already converted as part of the Dresden Messe (Exhibition Centre). The preservation of the baroque residence of Schloss Übigau is still not secure because of its long period of standing empty, and the view of the scenery in this area leaves a negative impression.

The Elbe river frontage of the old town with Brühl's Terraces and the associated cultural monuments is in a good condition. From there, the two high-rise ensembles at the Carola Bridge and the freestanding high-rise buildings at the Johannstadt Elbe embankment are perceived as a serious impairment of the appearance of the cultural landscape in the upriver view towards the Elbe slopes with the three palaces generally referred to as the Albrechtsschlösser. In accordance with the world heritage concept, recognition has to be given to the planned height reduction of the 10 to 15 storey prefabricated template buildings (Plattenbau) at the Carola Bridge, which is included in a medium-term development plan. However, no such plan has yet been passed in respect of the Johannstadt high-rise buildings.

### **4. Administration and Monitoring of the Cultural Landscape**

The Free State of Saxony and the City of Dresden as its regional capital are responsible for the administration of the cultural landscape of the “Dresden Elbe Valley”. It is fortunate that the cultural landscape in its entirety will be designated within the territory of the regional capital, because the entire area of this application, including the buffer zone, is already covered by an almost complete set of plans in respect of concerns such as the preservation of monuments, the preservation of the countryside, nature conservation, and flood protection, as well as legally binding development (Bebauungspläne) and management plans (Pflege- und

Entwicklungspläne), thus ensuring that ideal prerequisites for the demanding tasks of the future are already in place.

The application does not specify the detailed implementation of the monitoring process. In this context, it will be necessary to develop criteria and procedures for the monitoring of changes within the cultural landscape, which could well be based on the extensive inventory and documentation compiled after 1990. In order to coordinate all of the groups and public bodies already involved in development and management, it seems imperative to set up a single point of contact, a specific office. Only an independent and competent advisory committee of experts can prevent any decisions, which might be necessary in future, from uncontrollable proliferation.

## **5. Conclusion**

The application shows very clearly that the outstanding universal value of the cultural landscape of the “Dresden Elbe Valley” and the reason why it merits protection are not based on the – without any doubt – exceptional importance of its great number of individual monuments, but specifically on the uniqueness and variety within the interacting elements of its culture and landscape: the wide expanse of the flowing river with its open meadows, the surrounding slopes and terraced vineyards, the various buildings ranging from simple farmhouses to royal residences, including town houses and representative civic buildings, as well as industrial sites and traffic infrastructure both on and along the river. Within this organically and harmonically developed cultural landscape, a steady process of continued growth takes place, and is documented time and again in the changes within the natural scenery. The special and unique feature of the cultural landscape of the “Dresden Elbe Valley” – in international comparison as well – is the successful and close interlinkage and integration of a continuously developing urban lebensraum and its surrounding traditional cultural landscape.

**The outstanding quality of the submitted application “Cultural Landscape Dresden Elbe Valley” in text and illustrations justifies an admission to the cultural landscape category of World Heritage List, and for that reason receives the vigorous support of CIVVIH - ICOMOS.**

signed: Ilse Friedrich

Konstanz, 8.12.2003