



2.2 Significance of the World Heritage Site

2.2.1 Justification for Inscription on the World Heritage List

- Fertő-tó / Neusiedler See: the westernmost steppe lake within Euro-Asia.
- Significant occurrence in the Seewinkel area of salt pans and saline soils that dry out periodically.
- A meeting point of floral and faunal borders.
- A man-ruled landscape of outstanding richness in species of flora and fauna, gene-bank.
- Coexistence of man and biosphere reserve.
- Cultural landscape created by diverse ethnic composition of the population.
- Centuries-long socio-cultural and economic unity crossing over national borders.
- Centuries-long continuity of land use forms.
- Richness of archaeological heritage of successive civilisations.
- Geological, mining and aesthetic curiosities.
- Rich architectural traditions of the settlements in connection with the land use.
- Rich and valuable stock of monuments.
- Particularly valuable ethnographical heritage.

2.2.2 Overall Statement of Significance

The Fertő-Neusiedler See region is of unique diversity in both geological and geo-morphological terms. Within Euro-Asia, Fertő-tó / Neusiedler See is the westernmost steppe lake. Because of the various climatic effects – continental, sub-Mediterranean, alpine – it is a meeting point of not only geographical but also floral and faunal borders. The ethnic composition of the population shows a similar diversity, consisting of German, Slav (Croat) and Finno-Ugrian-Altaic (Hungarian) ethnic elements.

The extraordinarily diverse and special beauty of Fertő-tó / Neusiedler See is of outstanding universal value, created and preserved by an organic process of evolution, by the work of man living in symbiosis with the natural environment.

In addition to the diverse and unique value of flora and fauna around Fertő-tó / Neusiedler See, we find plenty of archaeological heritage from successive civilisations; the quarries in Fertőrákos have been in use since Roman times, the Mörbisch and St. Margarethen quarries are geological, mining and aesthetic curiosities alike.

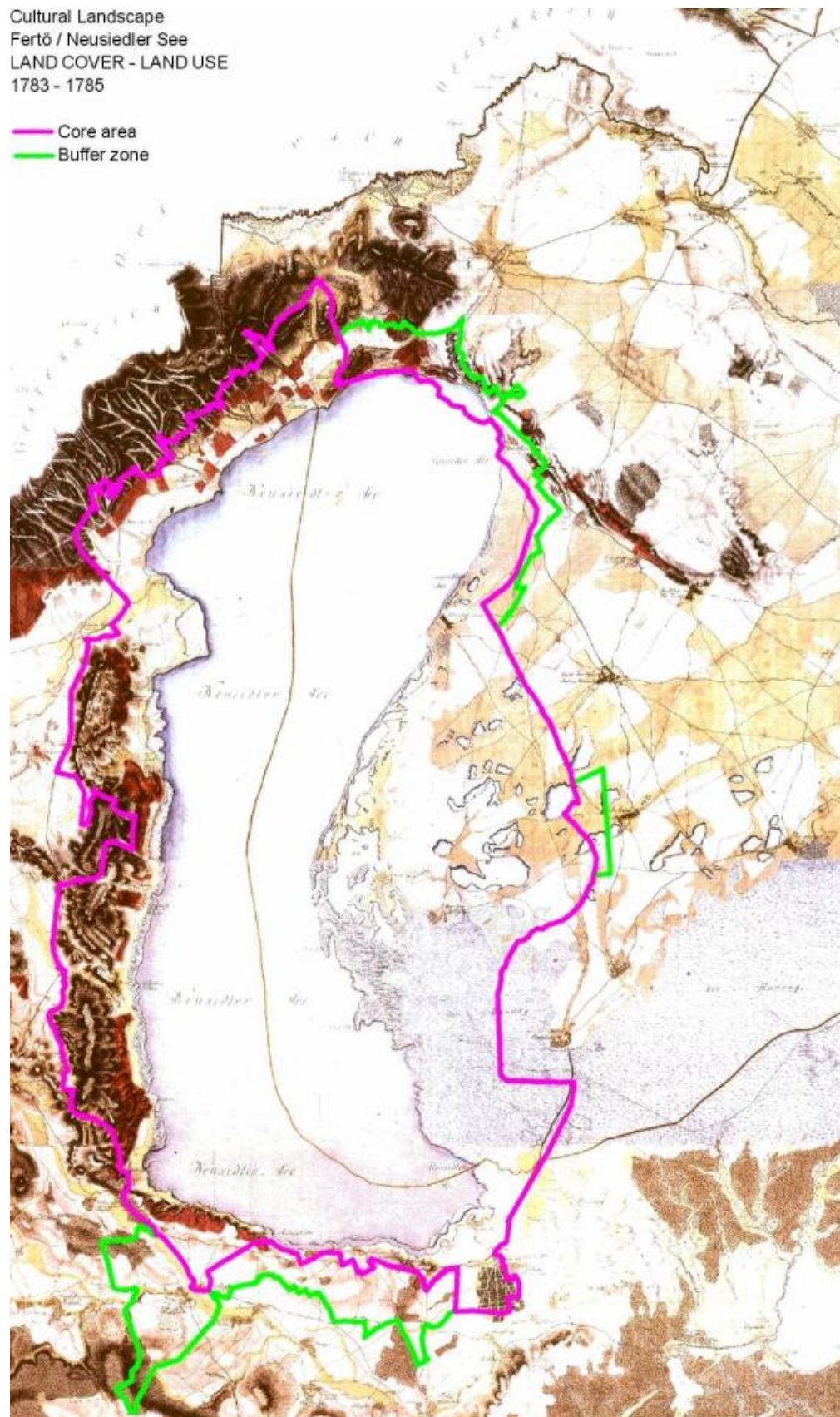
The life of the lake was very dynamic; it flooded, then retreated or disappeared. It is not surprising that the imagination of the local population was excited by its continuous transformation and impressive changes. It entered the tales, sagas and legends of the area and has become part of the spiritual heritage of this cultural landscape.

The component features of the Fertő / Neusiedler See area are of great variety, its main features being reeds, water and hilly vineyards.

The row of settlements around the lake harmonises with the land in both its scale and internal structure. There is a rich and valuable stock of historic monuments which is an architectural documentation of the traditional agrarian land use and way of living. The area has been



Map 3: Land survey commissioned by Joseph II, 1785





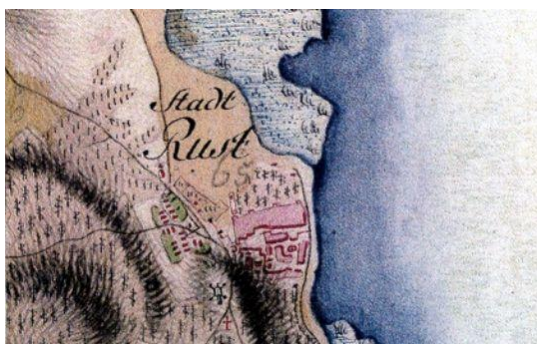
Economic use and environmental protection have been inseparably linked all along. For instance, the agricultural and commercial exploitation of the reed beds always entailed the preservation of the natural stands of reeds. This close relationship is also a central element of the centuries-old traditions of agriculture and winegrowing in the immediate surroundings of the lake. To this day, the cultivation and management of the land in accordance with the special physical characteristics and limitations of the natural environment still forms the basis for the development of the cultural landscape.

Although the settlement structures around the lake have the same basic building mode and typology as other Burgenland and western Hungarian settlements, they also display the specific features of radially laid out paths through fields and vineyards, and of routes (now roads) running parallel to the shoreline and interconnecting villages and towns. This network is an organically grown feature of the settlement pattern and is clearly recognisable to this very day.

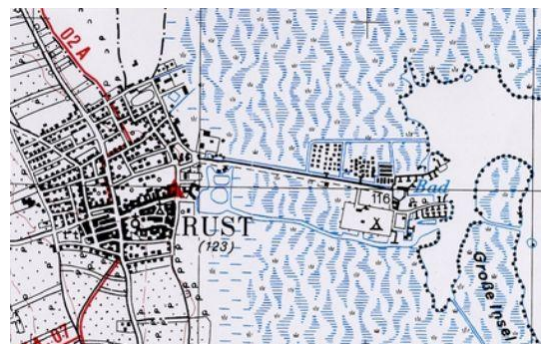
The island-like town or village centres, which mirror their different socio-historical backgrounds, fit into the overall ecological and economic structure of the lakescape and at the same time illustrate an only recently and partially abandoned social order. This can also be seen from the various types and shapes of buildings: the imposing town houses of farming burghers (Ackerbürger), the characteristic rows of oblong farmsteads in the villages with their typical roadside gables and pigsties, henhouses and barns at the back, or the cellar lanes on the outskirts.

To give a graphic presentation of the organic unity between water and land use, of the interaction between people and their environment, we enclose map details from the 1785 land survey under Joseph II and from a current depiction (maps 6). The map details illustrate the continuity of settlement forms and settlement patterns until the present day.

The first comparison shows the old town of Rust and its hinterland including the channel to the lake. They clearly illustrate both the changes and the continuity in this cultural landscape over 200 years. The reed belt is now slightly wider, and the town of course a bit larger, but the association with the lake, the typical agricultural land use in the immediate surrounds and its smooth transition to vineyards have been fully preserved.



Map 6.1

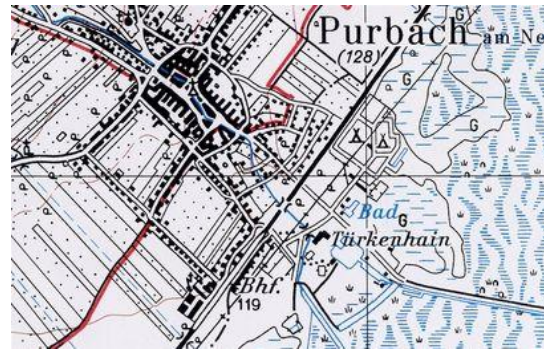


Map 6.2

This comparison of walled Purbach now and then shows that the long navigable channel in the reeds, which connects settlement and lake, and its opening towards land, fields and vineyards have hardly changed at all.



Map 6.3



Map 6.4

Another characteristic example is the ribbon-built village of Breitenbrunn along the road that runs parallel to the lake. Its settlement form has remained almost identical and has evolved in response to the requirements of lake use, agriculture and viticulture.

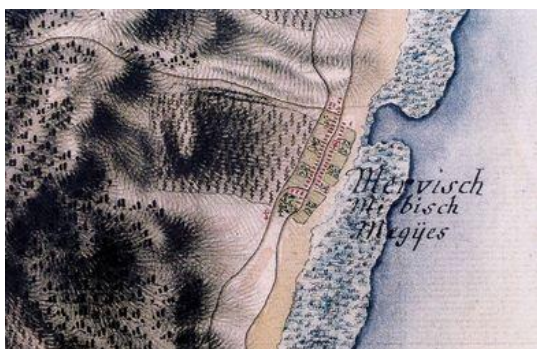


Map 6.5



Map 6.6

The map details of Mörbisch show the characteristic oblong farmsteads and narrow lanes leading down to the lake. The layout of the barns, pigsties, etc., which face towards the reed stands, illustrates the economic considerations involved in the village's ground-plan. The maps and map details highlight another important aspect characteristic of the Fertő / Neusiedlersee cultural landscape, namely that man's intervention in the reed belt has been limited to the narrow channels and has thus remained minimal, and that the habitat of the diverse fauna (especially bird fauna) has always been fully respected.



Map 6.7



Map 6.8



The comparison of historical maps with today's situation shows clearly that nature has defined the essential parameters of resource exploitation. This expression of people's respect for the natural spatial situation has been material in maintaining the ecological integrity of the Fertő / Neusiedler See region and creating a nature reserve of world-wide renown.

This is where the cultural landscape of Fertő / Neusiedlersee becomes an outstanding example of man living in symbiosis with the natural environment, i.e. of man respecting the boundaries and exploiting the links between culture and nature. On the one hand this symbiosis allows maximum but sustainable economic exploitation of the lake, reed-beds, shore area and adjoining land (characterised by the lake's climate and used for arable farming and winegrowing), while on the other hand it ensures that the natural space of the lake remains largely untouched and intact as this climatic and ecological balance is indispensable for proper land use by, and continued existence of, the local population. Reed, for example, was mainly used by farmers in former times.

It was a cheap building material and continues to be processed commercially nowadays. This has resulted in the people living near the lake being sincerely interested in preserving the reed belt, which in turn has a positive impact on the natural environment.

2.2.4 Ecological Significance

In former times the Fertő-Neusiedler See was in hydrological contact with the Danube and Raab river system, and, following drainage of the Hanság basins in the 20th century, greater floods of the river reached the Fertő-Neusiedler See through the Mosoni-Danube and Rábca, which contributed to major fluctuations in the lake's water level: at some times the lake flooded the surrounding area, at other times it dried out completely. In the higher-lying Fertőzug - Seewinkel area there are isolated saline ponds, some of which tend to dry out for several years. Here saline biotopes similar to those of Kiskunság have been formed. The saline biotope complex at Fertő-Neusiedler See and its vicinity is a unique formation, and there are no similar primary biotopes farther to the west which, like Fertő-Neusiedler See, are situated far from the sea and are primarily determined by the high salt content of soil and water.

The diversity of the natural environment could stem from the geo-morphological variety of the Fertő-Neusiedler See region in conjunction with its blend of climatic zones. The lake basin formed by subsidence near the western end of Kisalföld ("small lowland") is bordered partly by the gravel terraces of the ancient Danube and partly by the Fertő-Neusiedler See hills (consisting of 12 million year-old Leitha limestone from the Miocene Age) and the Leitha hills. Farther to the west the massif of the Alps and the sub-Alpine Sopron mountains and Rosaliengebirge are seen on the horizon.

The Leithagebirge with the foothills Hackelsberg and Jungerberg in the north and the Rust Hills range in the west with their forests, forest fringes, dry meadows, vineyards and orchards, as well as the flat country in the south-east and the south with its multitude of wetlands, host an exceptional diversity of landscapes, flora and fauna within a comparatively small area. For these reasons it can be regarded as unique within Europe.

The cultural landscape of Fertő / Neusiedlersee contains habitats for maintaining the most diverse fauna and flora characteristic of the biographic province and ecosystems under consideration.



The different typical habitats of the Pannonian region are closely spaced and all transitions between the extremes of wet/dry, salty/salt-free soils, silt/rock substrates and hot/"cold" sites (containing Alpine and eastern cold-loving species) can be found.

The whole area has been a nature and landscape protection area since 1965, and the protection area has been classified a reserve under the Ramsar Convention since 1983. This Ramsar zone contains parts of the Neusiedler See – Seewinkel National Park (established in 1993).

Within the protection zone of the area there is the Biosphere Reserve, whereas the biogenetic reserve is much larger than the whole World Heritage area and more or less identical with the hydrographic catchment area of the lake. As regards the Hungarian part, there is less influence than on the Austrian side since there is only one village (Fertőrákos) with direct access to the lake and this southern part is on the outgoing side in hydrographic terms. It has been a landscape protection area since 1977 and the Fertő-Hanság National Park since 1991. The Hungarian part of the lake and its surrounding wetlands have been a Ramsar Area and a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve since 1989.

Fertő-Neusiedler See's rich flora and fauna and especially its outstanding variety of birds are a remarkable natural phenomenon but may also be understood as the result of human cultivation, of a holistic approach and interaction between people and nature within this cultural landscape. When seen from a historical and evolutionary perspective, the notion of nature reserve is not entirely fitting. Nature has never existed as a separate or isolated entity. Rather, it has always been considered an integral part of a greater whole where people and nature meet within the kind of symbiosis referred to above. This argument, of course, not only applies to those shore areas that have always been used for arable crops and winegrowing but also to the less intensively cultivated pastures at the lake's eastern and southern edge. Grassland now occupies the same territory as it did in the 18th century. On some parts of the grasslands an ancient method of extensive livestock farming is also preserved today - the husbandry of cattle reared all year round in the open air (in the 'puszta'). The 'grey cow', the 'white donkey' and 'racka sheep' kept here represent protected ancient species of animals and are part of the gene-bank. They represent another kind of interaction between people and their natural environment, which has been maintained throughout centuries and has led to the preservation of the steppe landscape, saline meadows, etc.

The cultural landscape of Fertő / Neusiedlersee contains the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

In the transition zone from the western Pannonian to Alpine climatic conditions, we find the most important and significant habitats such as salt pans, shallow lakes, blanket bog, wet meadows, sand and gravel dry meadows (including their salt-rich varieties) and rocky dry meadows.

All these habitats are "priority habitats" according to Directive 92/43/EWG (FFH Directive of the European Union). Accordingly, a high percentage of the species present are considered rare and threatened and can be found in the "Red Lists" of endangered species of plants and animals as well as in the annexes of various international conventions concerned with nature conservation.



2.2.5 Socio-economic Significance

An important aspect for the authenticity and integrity of the Fertő / Neusiedlersee cultural landscape is its socio-historical and socio-political background. During the time that actually shaped today's cultural landscape (beginning in the second half of the 17th century) the region was mainly in the hands of the Austro-Hungarian nobility, i.e. the Esterházy, Széchenyi and Habsburg families (maps and plans 7). Smaller portions were owned by the Roman Catholic Church (parochial properties, land owned by the Cistercian order). Overall, large estates dominated the land outside (market) towns and villages. The stability of land ownership greatly contributed to the continuity of land-use patterns. Even the socio-political upheavals after 1914 and 1945, when the nobility was in part succeeded by the public sector, has not really changed this pattern. The basic social structures defining the land in terms of ownership and source of subsistence for the population have largely remained the same. This is a factor that must not be underestimated. It definitely has an impact on the cultural landscape as it has helped maintain the traditional socio-economic structures and thus the balance between land use and natural environment.

Special mention ought to be made of the fact that the cultural landscape of Fertő / Neusiedler See has not been and will not be impaired by any new economic or industrial projects, and that the development of tourism has only a minor and harmless influence on its integrity and authenticity because existing legal barriers and the visitor management afford sufficient protection, as will be explained in greater detail later.

That the economic options for land use around the lake have been very attractive since the 16th century is evidenced by the existence and prosperity of the free town of Rust, by the string of clearly arranged villages around the lake, and by the construction of large and impressive palaces and gardens in the lake's environs. The attractiveness of the mentioned homogeneous correlation between a beautiful natural environment and a land use adapted to it and still profitable was realised by people in past centuries, thus contributing to the economic and socio-political significance of this cultural landscape.

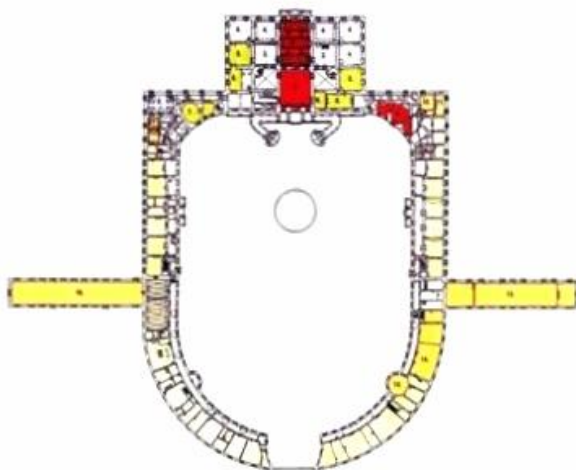
The settlement structure and the above-mentioned development on the western and southern shores of the Lake (in Austria between Mörbisch and Winden, in Hungary between Fertőrákos and Sarród) are such that they justify inclusion in the core zone of the site.

In the Fertő-Neusiedler See region many cross-border cooperations and regional efforts are being undertaken to make the region a model for sustainable development of the environmental, business and social fabric. Examples of already existing activities are village renewal schemes, the National Park management and the Austrian-Hungarian pilot projects for "Sustainable Transport and Tourism in Sensitive Areas, based on the Example of the Neusiedler See Region".



Maps 7: Palaces and gardens: Fertőd –Esterházy Palace and garden, Nagycenk – Széchenyi Palace

Fertőd –Esterházy Palace and garden



Nagycenk –Széchenyi Palace

