

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION

- SUBMISSION FOR TENTATIVE LIST -

Lonjsko Polje Nature Park



January 2005

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Name of the country: Croatia
Regions: Sisačko-moslavačka county
Brodsko-posavska county
Drawn up by: Ministry of Culture
Date: January 2005.

Name of property:

Lonjsko Polje Nature Park
(mixed site)

Geographical location: Central Sava River Basin

Coordinates: 45°30'N 017°00'E





Description:

The Lonjsko Polje Nature Park is situated in the alluvial plain of the Sava River in the central Sava River basin region, between the cities of Sisak and Stara Gradiška and represents a unique landscape and ecological systems of flooded river plain of the Danubian basin. The Sava River begins to meander in this area creating typical wet areas that greatly determine its flow and the appearance of the surrounding region. With a total surface of 50 650 ha, the Lonjsko Polje Nature Park is one of the largest wetland area in the entire Danubian basin. The most significant ecological element in the Lonjsko Polje Nature Park is flooding which can appear any time of the year, because of the extraordinary constellation of the Sava River and its tributaries. Water waves are often so huge and Lonjsko Polje Nature Park has a very important role as a flood control system. In addition to this specific water regime, the micro relief plays an important role in creating the great diversity of habitats. Accordingly, a mosaic of diverse habitats typical for flooded areas has been created, resulting in the rich variety of different biocenosis. These include various types of wet forests, grasslands, meadows various types of marshy and water habitats but also of ditches and canals as a result of longstanding human impact. In the area of the Park, approximately 12 000 ha of pastures are used by cattle livestock of all inhabitants. They are the last examples of a cultural landscape that once extended throughout Central Europe all the way up to the end of the 19th century. With the highest concentration of indigenous breeds (horses, pigs, cattle) in Croatia, they represent a unique way of managing pasturelands and are, at the same time, one of the most important habitats for a large number of rare and endangered plant and animal species.

It is possible to assess the natural values supported by this wetland area by the richness of diversity of the living world, particularly of species considered endangered both on national and international level according to IUCN red list: white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), saker falcon (*Falco cherrug*), corncrake (*Crex crex*), pygmy cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pygmeus*), ferruginous duck (*Aythya nyroca*), spotted eagle (*Aquila clanga*), otter (*Lutra lutra*), bechsteins bat (*Myotis bechsteini*), european pond turtle (*Emys orbicularis*), european common tree frog (*Hyla arborea*), danube crested newt (*Triturus dobrogicus*), european mudminnow (*Umbra krameri*), sterlet (*Acipenser ruthenus*), danube salmon (*Hucho hucho*), balkan loach (*Cobitis elongata*), danubian gudgeon (*Gobio uranoscopus*), danube roach (*Rutilus pigus*), striped ruffe (*Gymnocephalus schraetzer*), streber (*Zingel streber*), large copper (*Lycaena dispar*), blue ground beetle (*Carabus intricatus*) and rosalia longicorn (*Rosalia alpina*). Thereby large pasture lands have remained preserved to the present as all as indigenous livestock species found in this region (the Posavina horse, the Turopolje pig, slavonian-syrmian grey-cattle).

Due to its natural values and cultural heritage this area has been protected as a nature park since 1990, according to the Law on the Nature Protection, and has been included since 1993 in the List of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar site). Given the abundance of bird species, specific areas of the Park: Krapje Đol, Rakita and Dražiblato areas have been protected in the category of special ornithological reserves while the entire Park has been included in the List of important bird areas in Europe (IBA)

The village Čigoć, located in the area of Lonjsko Polje Nature Park, in which a very large white stork population nests, so that almost every house has its "own" nest, it has been proclaimed the European village of storks in 1994.

The cultural values of the Lonjsko polje Nature Park should be viewed as the result of the centuries long harmonious cohabitation of the human population with nature in which a dominant role is played by the river with its natural flooding cycles. The Sava River with its tributaries has had an impact on the morphological, natural, aesthetic and functional features of the cultural landscape which has the characteristic of a lowland agricultural region.

The characteristics of the cultural landscape and cultural identity are linked to traditional rural settlements. Traditional values of the area have been preserved in the organization of space, specific ambiances and traditional wooden architecture but also in the broader ethnological and anthropological sense; in the life-styles, cultivation of land, skills and intangible cultural heritage.

This area is permanently and continuously inhabited back to the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th centuries, when in this part of Europe (Croatia) the centuries-old threat from Ottoman conquerors ceased. The need to defend Central Europe/the Austrian Empire from the Turks in the period from the 16th to the 19th centuries resulted in the organization of a specific military-economic organization set up of the Croatian border area which for centuries represented a dividing line between European and Turkish otoman culture in Europe.

Precisely these historical circumstances, in addition to natural geographical characteristics gave rise to the distribution of settlements in a continuous line along the bank of the Sava River. Rural settlements are located on the natural terrain elevations, so called "traverses", which provides in the river floodplain some kind of protection against floods. They developed as linear, longitudinal settlements situated unilaterally along the road which goes along the Sava River bank oxbows created by the regulation of the river in the 18th and 19th centuries. By their structure they are compact, densely built settlements, with a strictly defined distribution and symmetrical, exceptionally narrow lot divisions. The regular rhythmical rows of wooden house facades with the narrower sides facing the road and built on the same building lots give the settlements a unique appearance.

In the course of time, some villages had different central functions either as the parish and local administrative centers or as school centers which influenced the appearance of the settlements and formed specific characteristics in terms of space - ambience and architecture.

The primary characteristic of traditional architecture is wood as a the basic building material, namely the well know and top quality wood of the common oak from flood forests.

The architectural heritage is represented by a large number of preserved wooden houses (two or one storey houses). Approximately 700 houses have been preserved in the entire area of Lonjsko Polje. They are traditional houses, even standardized by their construction and architectural solutions and built of oak. The house is constructed by walls made of planks which are horizontally laid and connected by wooden joists. The whole structure is covered with steep gable roofs. An essential element of the architectural structure of the houses are the roofed-over outer staircases with porches, with different decorative details along with variously formed windows and ornamental carved details, give this buildings an individual and specific appearance. The various outbuildings, such as barns, hay-lofts, curing plants (storehouses, woodsheds), hog houses, corn sheds are located deep in the plots and along its edges.

The traditional land use is represented by the distribution and type of arable land and meadows-pastures. The cultivated plots in their functional and land forms represent a link between the protected nature and rural settlement areas. The

specific characteristics of the area are connected to traditional crafts and use of waterways for navigation, fishing, and other needs of rural households.

The river was very intensively navigated in the 18th and 19th centuries, at a time of bustling economic activities linked to trade and timber exploitation when in order to secure the waterway for navigation the river bed had to be regulated by intersecting the river meanders.

It should be pointed out that the cultural landscape spreads out of the boundaries of the Lonjsko Polje Nature Park. The same cultural landscape features are present in the entire zone of central Posavina region, from town Sisak to the town of Gradiška and including inhabited areas on both sides of the river (the area of the community of Sunja). The system of doubled, and confronted settlements located on the both sides banks along the river which were traditionally connected in all spheres of life and made a sociological, economic and cultural entity is one of the basic characteristic of the cultural landscape.

Traditional architecture and architectonic structures are damaged the region has suffered during the last Homeland War.

The mosaic landscape formed by nature and man such as we find in Lonjsko Polje represents a unique phenomenon in Europe. The wetland habitats in the Sava River basin represent a typical Central European river valley landscape as it existed 150 years ago. The state of preservation of nature, endangered and rare plant and animal species as well as cultural identity of this area, the traditional way of life and work of its population represents a unique heterogeneous area of protected natural and cultural heritage.

JUSTIFICATION OF "OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE"

Criteria met:

Criteria for the natural values

44. (a) (ii)

The Lonjsko polje Nature Park represents the largest floodplain in the Danube River basin. It is exposed to unique flooding dynamics caused by an exceptional constellation of the Sava river and its tributaries which flow from three different climatic zones and can cause flooding at any time of the year. In addition, the Sava River has preserved its main natural features in the central part of its course. Reacting to the flooding dynamics, inhabitants developed the traditional land use system and thereby generated a second ecological process that is crucial for the preservation of wet meadow areas. The flooding and traditional land use processes have created a unique landscape with a mosaic of wet pastures, meadows, hedges, wet forests, ponds and oxbows.

44. (a) (iv)

Given that most European rivers have been channeled or put in narrow corridors left between bank embankments, flood plains are among the most engendered habitats today. Therefore, the floodplains along the Sava River which comprise a complex of wet forests, marshes, meadows, ponds represent the unique remains of a wetland habitat area of vital significance for the preservation of biological diversity of the entire bio-geographical region. No other part of the Danube basin contains today such a large area of wetland habitats. The Pan-European strategy for the preservation of biological and landscape diversity has categorized the Sava River system as a priority region regarding the protection of biological and landscape diversity and included it in the Action Plan for drawing up a program of protection for natural and semi-natural rivers and their wetland areas.

The Lonjsko polje Nature Park as an area included in the List of Wetland Habitats of International Importance (Ramsar Convention). It is an exceptionally good example of a large natural wetland area characteristic for this bio-geographical region which plays an important role in the life of nature in the Danube basin. This area belongs to a special type of flood wetland habitats and as such supports important communities of rare, vulnerable and endangered plant and animal species. As a nesting ground, winter refuge or resting place for numerous bird species, Lonjsko polje is of international importance for the population of spoonbills, cormorants, ferruginous ducks, black storks, little egrets, white-tailed eagles, corncrakes, lesser spotted eagles and whiskered terns. Today 250 species of birds have been registered here, of which 170 species also nest here. Lonjsko polje is also an important spawning area ensuring thus the survival of many fish species in the Danube basin.

Criteria for cultural properties

24. (a)(iv)

The cultural landscape of the Lonjsko polje Nature Park and the broader cultural landscape of Central Posavina illustrate a very important, and today unique, example of the formation and shaping of cultural landscapes in Europe from the 16th to the 19th centuries. It is characterized by a specific type of regional distribution of rural settlements and communications as well as broader land organization characteristic for river basins in Europe. This type of organization, characteristic for Europe and older epochs /middle ages has completely disappeared owing to the urbanization in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, a time of industrial development and in the post-industrial era by the construction of infrastructure, river regulation, land reclamation and spreading of cities and settlements. In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Lonjsko polje Nature Park is a site that is: the combined work of nature and of man. It is a cultural landscape in the category of organically evolved landscapes - subcategory continuing landscape which retains an active social role in contemporary society closely associated with the traditional way of life and in which the evolutionary process is still in progress.

In the historical sense, Lonjsko polje Nature Park illustrates a very specific historical, military-political and economic system in Europe/Austro-Hungarian monarchy in the period from the 16 to the end of the 19th centuries (cca 350 years) which was characterized by the wars waged against the Turks. At that time, the area was located at a borderline that fenced off Western Europe from the penetration and impact of the Orient. Precisely these specificities of the historical development of Central Europe have been preserved to this day in many of their aspects: regional, functional, cultural, sociological and anthropological, and have been assessed as exceptionally important for the development of human communities in general.

24.(a)(v)

The outstanding universal value of this area can be classified into a number of value categories: aesthetic, ethnological and anthropological.

The Lonjsko polje nature park is an outstanding universal example of a system of traditional settlements and human communities with specific land use linked to periodic flooding. The settlements represent highly developed rural traditional agricultural type organizations which by their methods of production and general life styles have generated complex and comprehensive expressions in the form of intangible and tangible culture. This is particularly emphasized in Lonjsko polje Nature Park (Central Posavina region), not only in the organization of the settlements, land use, types of houses and building methods but in the richness of various traditional handicrafts, costumes, ornaments, customs and knowledge of traditional economic activities that include agriculture, stockbreeding, fishing, etc. The preservation of the original land organization is considered outstanding - historic networks of settlements and communications, and the authentic structure and size of the settlements and holdings themselves which together with the preserved natural ambience result in a unique harmony of architecture and nature.

Of particular aesthetic value is the very picturesque appearance of the rural settlements which are symmetrically structured in a continual row of house plots built unilaterally along the road that follows the flow of the river. The very picturesque vistas of the waterway with its specific vegetation contribute further enhance the

appearance of the settlements. In terms of construction the villages of Lonjsko polje are traditional ensembles characterized by exceptionally well preserved vernacular residential architecture. There is no major new land development in the area. The specific land use is reflected in the typical distribution of surfaces, which viewed from the river as the backbone of the system, have the following pattern: waterway; developed settlement area - road, holdings, houses, plow fields; flood pastures; flood forests.

The Lonjsko polje nature park area is assessed as an example of very vulnerable habitats under the impact of irreversible change. The area is not at risk from urbanization and changes in land use caused by the development of new infrastructure.

Assurances of authenticity or integrity

Authenticity is expressed in the very specific character of the landscape whose continuity has been preserved.

In 1990 the area was proclaimed a nature park by a decision of the Parliament of the Republic of Croatia. Legal protection was thus provided and the state committed itself at the highest national level to preserve the national resources of this area.

Specific rural settlements and architectural structures and buildings have been proclaimed cultural assets and inscribed in the List of Immobile Cultural Assets of the Republic of Croatia. Documentation for inscription of the Central Posavina cultural landscape in the List of Cultural Assets of the Republic of Croatia is under preparation. However, it would not be wrong to say that from the aspect of cultural heritage legal protection is insufficient, and that it should be implemented in accordance with the Law on the Protection and Preservation of Cultural Assets of the Republic of Croatia.

The documentation status regarding the cultural heritage is satisfactory: lists and detailed descriptions have been drawn up, an architectonic survey, photo documentation and the evaluation of immobile cultural heritage also carried out. Historical and in part archival research has been carried out. The data are a very good basis for the further planning of protection models.

In regional plans at all levels, the Lonjsko polje Nature Park cultural landscape has been marked as an area of national interest and in line with the type of plan, conditions of protection and reconstruction have been prescribed. The county plans of the Sisačko-moslavačka County prohibit the destruction of wooden houses and provide for conditions regulating the consistency of new architecture with the ambience. On the level of municipal plans, conditions and zoning of the area according to cultural and natural heritage protection criteria are prescribed in even greater detail. The officially proposed Regional plan for the Lonjsko polje nature park as a special plan for an area of special state interest has passed through the public discussion phase and has been approved by the Parliament of the Republic of Croatia. The plan is based on all the internationally accepted criteria for the integral protection of cultural and natural heritage. In 2000 a general assessment of the technical status and costs of reconstructing all the wooden houses in the protected area have been drawn up.

In the development plans of the local communities programs of revitalization and reconstruction of the area through sustainable development have been adopted and are based primarily on traditional agriculture and stock breeding. It is precisely in these plans that the inhabitants see a chance for the economic development of the region.

The establishment of the Public Institution of the Lonjsko polje Nature Park in 1998 initiated the intensive promotion of the area in general and as a tourist destination in particular. The lack of the adequate presentation of the contents became apparent very soon as did the great financial resources needed for the integral development of the region. On the local level, continual activities are undertaken on informing and educating the public as well as raising awareness on the need of protecting this area. The media have also been very active in this respect. The proclamation of the village Čigoć as the European village of storks and village of Kraplje as a traditional buildings heritage village has done quite a lot in the popularization of the area. The celebration of European Heritage Day takes place each year in the village of Kraplje and is becoming an important traditional event for the community.

Conservation and regional development projects have multiple interests and high overall investment costs. For the time being activities are financed from a number of state funds of the Republic of Croatia. Finding investors and additional sources of financing are permanent activities.

The International Union for the Protection of Nature (IUCN) has included the Lonjsko polje Nature Park among seven experimental examples which represent the best planned protection of nature in rural regions of Central and Eastern Europe.

A Management Plan is under preparation and its basic objective will be the preservation of the present harmony of man and the natural environment geared at promoting the life of people.

The Public Institution headed by its Managing board and director manage the Nature Park. The founder of the Institution is the Government of the Republic of Croatia. Professional activities in the Institution are carried out by the expert service, and supervising activities by the supervision service. An Advisory council comprised of village representatives and all those that use the area assists the Board. The Board has an advisory role and gives proposals for the solutions of problems that arise due to the dynamics of life in the Park. In this way maximum cooperation is achieved between the local population, the Public Institution and other users of the Park.

Comparison with other similar properties

There are no other examples of this type of continuing cultural landscape.





