

## 7.1.2 UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

DER SPIEGEL

### UNESCO Site Protest Ended

#### POLICE PULL ROBIN WOOD OUT OF DRESDEN TREE

January 15, 2008

For over a month, activists from Robin Wood had been living in a 200-year-old tree to protest a controversial bridge under construction in Dresden. The project might destroy a UNESCO-protected site, but the tree protest ended on Tuesday. The tree has now been cut down.

The police showed up out of nowhere. It was shortly after midnight in the wee hours of Tuesday morning and 13 activists from environmentalist group Robin Wood were bedded down for yet another night in the branches of a 200-year-old beech tree in Dresden. They were there to prevent the tree from being sacrificed for a controversial new bridge being built over the Elbe River in Dresden. But the end was nigh.

Black-clad, helmeted cops wearing balaclavas swept in as other units blocked streets leading to the tree. Outfitted with a boom lift, ropes and saws, the police scaled the tree and pulled the activists out. Twelve of the 13 were taken into custody along with over 20 other demonstrators. The protest -- which had seen environmentalists nesting in the big old tree's branches since Dec. 12 -- had come to an end. A short time later, the tree was cut down.

"The police tried to clear the tree last week but were unable to," Ute Bertrand, press spokeswoman for Robin Wood, told SPIEGEL ONLINE. "The city told us they wouldn't try again."

On Monday night, though, Robin Wood heard whisperings that something was up. But the police came earlier than they expected, said Bertrand. By the time the group could notify supporters by text message, the roads were blocked off, preventing more demonstrators from gathering. A small protest of about 100 demonstrators on the street in front of the tree was quickly broken up by the police.

Robin Wood's primary interest was saving the tree, but it was the most spectacular of a number of demonstrations recently undertaken in an attempt to prevent the construction of the new bridge. The €160 million (\$237 million) project will, say supporters, solve Dresden's inner-city traffic congestion problems, but it will also cut through the Elbe Valley, endangering the site's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. UNESCO has already placed the site on its "red list" of places that are at risk of losing their status.

Last summer, it looked like the so-called Waldschlösschen Bridge might not be built at all. A Dresden court halted construction due to the presence of endangered lesser horseshoe bats at the site. Bridge designers were ordered to come up with more "insect-friendly" lighting.

Construction, though, has resumed -- the beech tree was felled to make way for a road that will eventually provide access to the bridge when it is finished in 2010. But the controversy surrounding it continues. On Monday, bridge opponents announced a new signature-gathering campaign in an effort to force another public referendum on the project. In 2005, a referendum found that 68 percent of the voters were in favor of the project, but that was before it was known that the valley's World Heritage Site status -- a major draw for thousands of tourists each year -- might be lost. The numbers of those opposed to the project have since risen dramatically.

Organizers of the referendum effort have proposed the city build a tunnel instead. They claim to have consulted numerous experts, all of whom say that a tunnel would be technically feasible and would not cost more than the bridge project. Twenty-thousand signatures are necessary to force a second referendum.

Robin Wood, for its part, likewise vows to keep fighting. Even though they have no further plans to occupy trees at the site, they are supporting the signature-gathering campaign. "Our protest will continue," Bertrand said. "Too many people have had their hearts into this fight for us to give up now. The last word has not yet been spoken."

#### Source:

(2008, January 15). *UNESCO Site Protest Ended: Police Pull Robin Wood out of Dresden Tree*. Retrieved from Der Spiegel Online, July 2011: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/unesco-site-protest-ended-police-pull-robin-wood-out-of-dresden-tree-a-528655.html>

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DER SPIEGEL

## Dresden Bridge Ultimatum

### UNESCO TELLS CITY NO BRIDGE WILL DO

March 6, 2008

For years now, a dispute has been raging in Dresden over a bridge being built to ease traffic congestion. UNESCO has now turned down the city's revised bridge plan and warned that building any bridge will cause the Dresden Elbe Valley to lose its prized World Heritage Site status.

Under threat? UNESCO believes that views like this – of Dresden's Church of Our Lady – will be spoiled by a new bridge.

In a dispute raging between UNESCO and the German city of Dresden, the organization rejected the city's revised bridge plan Wednesday and warned that if the city doesn't build a tunnel instead, the Elbe River Valley will lose its coveted World Heritage status.

The city, located in the eastern state of Saxony, has wanted to build a bridge by the Waldschlösschen (forest palace) to ease traffic congestion. But the plans have provoked controversy from many, including those who feel it will have unnecessary ecological costs and those who feel a tunnel should be built instead.

A spokesman for the Paris-based organization told the *Sächsische Zeitung* that the United Nations body had rejected the revised bridge design and that any bridge in that spot would destroy the landscape and ruin the views of Dresden's famous landmarks. He added that the only acceptable solution was for Dresden to build a tunnel under the river and that UNESCO would make a final decision on the city's status in July.

Here's what could happen to that view of a new bridge is built in the city. Work on the €125 million (\$172 million) bridge got underway last November after months of wrangling within the courts. For example, delays arose last August when one court ruled construction would strip away the habitat of the endangered lesser horseshoe bat. And, in January, police arrested an activist who lived for over a month in a 200-year-old tree to protest the bridge's construction.

More recently, opponents of the 635-meter (2,100-foot) structure have collected 40,000 signatures in Dresden, calling for a tunnel to be built instead.

**Source:**

(2008, March 6). *Dresden Bridge Ultimatum: UNESCO Tells City No Bridge Will Do*. Retrieved from Der Spiegel Online, July 2011: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/dresden-bridge-ultimatum-unesco-tells-city-no-bridge-will-do-a-539751.html>

[www.spiegel.de/international/germany/dresden-bridge-ultimatum-unesco-tells-city-no-bridge-will-do-a-539751.html](http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/dresden-bridge-ultimatum-unesco-tells-city-no-bridge-will-do-a-539751.html)

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DER SPIEGEL

## World Heritage Warning

### UNESCO GRANTS DRESDEN ONE YEAR REPRIEVE

July 8, 2008

UNESCO has made it clear that Dresden will lose its World Heritage listing if it goes ahead with construction of a bridge over the Elbe River. But on Thursday, the Elbe Valley was granted one more year to shape up.

What does the eastern German city of Dresden have in common with the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary in Oman? Nothing yet. But following a meeting of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee on Thursday, the famous Elbe Valley likely has just one year before it joins the Oman refuge on the short list of World Heritage sites that will soon lose their status.

Meeting in Quebec City, the committee decided to give Dresden one last chance to rethink its planned bridge across the Elbe River. Even as construction is underway, there are still a number of legal challenges working their way through the court system aimed at torpedoing the project.

“Although the committee decided last year that it would remove the property from the World Heritage List if a bridge were built, it decided to give Dresden more time in view of legal proceedings underway in Germany,” UNESCO said in a statement on its Web site. “The committee felt that the opposition to the construction of the bridge must be given a chance to succeed and that retaining the property on the list would help that fight.”

UNESCO, along with many critics of the bridge, claim that a tunnel would be much more suited to the site so as not to disturb the beautiful views through the 18 kilometer-long valley, crowned with the now-rebuilt Dresden city center. Environmentalists are also opposed to a bridge out of concern for the habitat of the endangered lesser horseshoe bat.

Should the Elbe Valley be removed from the list, it would also set a record for the shortest time spent on the World Heritage List. It received its UNESCO badge of honor in just 2004, only to be placed on the endangered list two years later. So far, most court cases brought against the bridge have failed due to judges’ unwillingness to counter the region’s voters. In a 2005 referendum, 67.9 percent of the city’s voters came out in favor of the bridge – support which came largely from a desire to solve the city’s traffic woes.

Critics have pointed out that voters at the time were not aware that

by moving to build the bridge, the city might have to sacrifice its World Heritage title. Still, a survey carried out last September found that over 63 percent of Dresdners continue to support the bridge project.

On Friday, the president of the National Committee for the Protection of Monuments in Germany, Eva-Maria Stange – who is also the Minister of Science for the state of Saxony where Dresden is located – demanded that construction on the bridge be stopped immediately. But Dresden’s mayor-elect Helma Orosz blasted UNESCO saying “from the perspective of Dresden, the (UNESCO) decision is wrong, incomprehensible and unjust.”

Dresden did change the design of the bridge slightly in an effort to placate UNESCO officials, making it appear lighter and airier. But the committee remains unmoved. The Arabian Oryx Sanctuary was stricken from the list in 2007 after Oman decided to reduce the size of the protected area by 90 percent to explore for oil.

#### Source:

(2008, July 4). *World Heritage Warning: UNESCO Grants Dresden One Year Reprieve*. Retrieved from Der Spiegel Online, July 2011: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/world-heritage-warning-unesco-grants-dresden-one-year-reprieve-a-563865.html>

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## THE NEW YORK TIMES

## Op-Ed

## SAVE THE DRESDEN ELBE VALLEY

By Günter Blobel

June 5, 2009

The Dresden Elbe Valley is likely to be deleted from the list of World Cultural Heritage sites at the annual meeting of the World Cultural Heritage Committee of UNESCO on June 23. This is due to the construction of a huge four-lane highway bridge that bisects the Elbe Valley site at its most sensitive position, thereby destroying one of Europe's last river landscapes. Ultimately responsible for this impending calamity is Chancellor Angela Merkel herself. As chairwoman of the Christian Democratic Union she failed to correct the misguided politics of her party colleagues in Dresden, the capital of the federal state of Saxony. She did not publicly oppose their numerous provocations of UNESCO. And with her assertion that this is a "regional" problem, she has ignored Germany's contractual obligations to UNESCO.

Here is a short synopsis of this conflict. In 2004, after application by Saxony and the German federal government, UNESCO granted the title "World Cultural Heritage Site" to a stretch of the Elbe Valley in which Dresden is located. This is a beautifully conserved natural setting of a meandering river surrounded by wide meadows and gentle hills that are dotted with culturally significant, centuries-old villas and castles that survived the ravages of World War II.

In 2005, the German Automobile Club, together with the Dresden branch of the Christian Democratic party, instigated a plebiscite. Through a campaign of misinformation, this coalition managed to obtain a majority of votes for the construction of a highway bridge in the midst of the World Cultural Heritage site.

Armed with this vote and thereby legally enabled to bypass opposition of the Dresden city council, the CDU governor of Saxony set out to build the bridge. In 2007, UNESCO responded with a warning by putting the Dresden Elbe Valley on the Red List of Endangered World Cultural Heritage sites. But the governor-led coalition began construction of the bridge to create facts on the ground.

UNESCO had no choice but to put the site on a Reinforced Red List in 2008. UNESCO indicated that the Cultural Heritage designation would be taken away in 2009 if construction of the bridge was not halted. But the construction continues unabated. I have written two letters of protest, to which I received a standardized answer from the department of cultural affairs that this is a regional issue.

What is at stake? After the near total destruction of Dresden in the Allied fire-bombing of February 1945, few people believed that its beauty would ever return. Dresden's slow but steady comeback was thus met with great relief. Eventually, most of the great buildings were rebuilt, culminating in 2005 with the reconstruction of the soul of Dresden, the Frauenkirche, literally from a pile of rubble. With its unique bell-shaped cupola, it restored the beautiful skyline that was immortalized in many of Bernardo Bellotto's celebrated vedute.

Moreover, the rebuilding of the Frauenkirche evoked broad international support. Millions were contributed, notably by America and Britain. Dresden became a powerful symbol of reconciliation.

This will be the first time that UNESCO will be deleting a site from its list of several hundred World Cultural Heritage sites. The loss will severely tarnish Dresden's status as a cultural icon. It will also greatly diminish the impact of Dresden's message for reconciliation.

The damage for Germany will be even greater. Here is a wealthy country that is spending huge sums to destroy one of its World Cultural Heritage sites while many poorer countries struggle to maintain theirs. What can be done? Chancellor Merkel should tell her colleagues in Dresden that the loss of the title for the Dresden Elbe Valley is not acceptable for Germany and is particularly detrimental to Dresden.

*Günter Blobel, professor at Rockefeller University in New York City, was awarded the 1999 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. He is founder of the nonprofit Friends of Dresden.*

**Source:**

Blobel, Günter (2009, June 5). *Op-Ed: Save the Dresden Elbe Valley*. Retrieved from *The New York Times*, July 2011: [www.nytimes.com/2009/06/05/opinion/05iht-edblobel.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/05/opinion/05iht-edblobel.html)

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DER SPIEGEL

## Germany's Elbe Valley Loses UNESCO Status

*By Günter Blobel**June 25, 2009*

UNESCO announced on Thursday that it was removing Dresden's Elbe Valley from its list of World Heritage Sites. The decision is the result of a bridge the city is currently building across the valley. But another German site may soon be added.

The famous Elbe Valley in Dresden became a member of an exclusive, and not altogether desirable, club on Thursday. UNESCO, meeting in Sevilla, Spain this week, removed the site from the coveted World Heritage list of global sites honored for their unique contributions to culture and natural beauty – making the valley just the second site ever to have been removed from the list.

Many in Germany have been expecting the decision ever since the eastern German city began building a bridge through the valley in 2007. UNESCO placed the Elbe Valley on its list of endangered sites in 2006 in response to the bridge plans and delayed a decision on whether to remove the site last year.

"The decision unfortunately does not come as a complete surprise," Walter Hirche, president of the UNESCO Commission in Germany, said in a statement. "I had hoped for much more openness with regards to the bridge plans."

### A List that Includes Dresden and Oman

Dresden now joins the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary in Oman, which was removed from the list in 2007 after the country decided to reduce the size of the protected area by 90 percent to explore for oil.

UNESCO said the €160 million bridge destroyed the "universal value" of the 18-kilometer-long section of the valley which had been protected. The group proposed that the city build a tunnel instead, but was rebuffed. In repeated lawsuits, Dresden courts have been wary of blocking construction of the bridge given that 67.9 percent of the city's residents voted in favor of the structure as a solution to traffic woes. Critics have pointed out that voters were unaware at the time of the referendum that the bridge could result in the loss of the Elbe Valley's UNESCO status.

Dresden Mayor Helma Orosz tried in vain to convince UNESCO to wait until the bridge was finished before making a decision. She felt that once the committee saw the bridge, they would be convinced that it did not irreparably harm the appearance of the valley. The decision means that Dresden will no longer be eligible for money

from a €150 million pot set aside for the maintenance of Germany's UNESCO sites, the number of which has now fallen to 32.

It may not stay that way for long, however. The World Heritage Committee is also considering this week whether to add the Wadden Sea tidal flats on the North Sea coast, one of Europe's richest biospheres (known as the Wattenmeer in German), to the list. Another German UNESCO site, the graceful Lorelei Valley on the Rhine River, almost became the next World Heritage List casualty after communities in the region revealed plans in May to build a bridge across the river at the site. But after UNESCO voiced concern, the state of Rhineland-Palatinate elected to consult closely with the World Heritage Committee to ensure that the valley maintains its status.

### Source:

(2009, June 25). *Germany's Elbe Valley Loses UNESCO Status*. Retrieved from Der Spiegel Online, July 2011: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/world-heritage-revocation-germany-s-elbe-valley-loses-unesco-status-a-632637.html>

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## DER SPIEGEL

*Dresden Will Survive' UNESCO's Decision*

By Josh Ward

June 26, 2009

Dresden's Elbe Valley lost its status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site on Thursday and many in Germany are upset. Commentators, though, say that some of the blame lies with the World Heritage Committee itself. On Friday, UNESCO added another German site to the list.

When the announcement came on Thursday evening that Dresden's Elbe River Valley had lost its UNESCO World Heritage status, few were surprised. The site had long been seen as endangered due to ongoing construction of a new bridge across the valley. And the city had, for just as long, insisted that the structure was necessary to ease traffic woes in the eastern German metropolis and pointed to a 2005 referendum in which 67.9 percent of the city's residents voted in favor of the bridge.

Still, many in Germany are sad to see the site removed from the list. Federal Commissioner of Culture Bernd Neumann said "it is more than regrettable that those involved weren't able to reach a compromise."

He was echoed by Stanislaw Tillich, governor of the state of Saxony -- of which Dresden is the capital. "I regret the decision of the World Heritage Committee.... It is too bad that the will of the citizens and the decision of the committee could not be brought together."

After an extensive back and forth, preparations for the construction of the €160 million bridge began in late 2007, despite last minute calls to revisit the plans in the hopes that Dresden would ultimately opt for a tunnel. UNESCO on Thursday said it was removing the Elbe Valley because the bridge would damage the "outstanding universal value" of the landscape. After being thoroughly demolished in 1945 by Allied bombing raids, the city was painstakingly reconstructed. Its distinct baroque architecture and the city skyline have earned Dresden the moniker of "Florence on the Elbe."

The Elbe valley was first given the designation in 2004, but it was placed on a list of endangered sites in 2006 after the city's plans for the bridge were made public.

On Friday, though, UNESCO was able to offer Germany some good news. The World Heritage Committee decided to add the Wadden Sea tidal flats on the North Sea coast to the list, bringing the number of German sites back up to 33. The area is one of Europe's richest biospheres, full of undisturbed wetlands teeming with wildlife.

German commentators discuss Dresden's loss of UNESCO status on Friday.

Right-leaning **Die Welt** writes:

"Many of Dresden's inhabitants are worried that the city will once and for all lose its splendor. But is that really true? Whoever believes that underestimates the power radiating from this city. Dresden is pregnant and burdened with history, and just hearing its name has a very deep resonance for Germans. As a result, there is a certain heightened sensitivity here, and messing with the city's skyline elicits immediate defensive reactions marked by a nervous passion. But even that shows just how much vitality this formerly independent commonwealth has and that it is much more than just the sum of its parts. ..."

"No bridge can destroy that. There is a particularly strong impulse in Germany to protect and preserve monuments, wetlands and other places of natural and cultural beauty. Perhaps a bit less developed, though, is the ability to see the modern's encroachment upon the familiar as something other than a catastrophe as well as the ability to integrate the two into the overall image that we have of our environment. Dresden will survive this onslaught of the present on the past."

The center-right **Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung** writes:

"For Saxony and its 'Florence on the Elbe,' being thrown off the UNESCO list is the logical consequence of an unbounded self-infatuation. Dresden has suffered much. It's payback has come in the form of the financial help from Germany and abroad, which has transformed the city into a baroque wonder. But, little by little, it became spoiled, self-centered and smug.... Being stricken from the UNESCO list will be painful, but it might also turn out to be an important moment of maturation for both Dresden and Saxony. But for UNESCO ... the decision is a rather pathetic victory. Perhaps when such institutions react to the situations in Pompeii, Beijing, Angkor Wat or Babylon as energetically as they did in Saxony, they can show that they are genuine custodians of our global heritage."

The left-leaning **Berliner Zeitung** writes:

"The decision was the correct one. Without any regard for nature, cultural history or contracts ruled by international laws, the automobile lobbies in the center-right Christian Democratic Party (CDU), the

business-friendly Free Democratic Party (FDP), the ADAC German motor club and the administration of the state of Saxony pushed through the construction of the bridge -- a bridge that will cut right through what was up until recently idyllic meadows, right through one of Germany's most famous urban panoramas." "UNESCO found the courage and the strength to make a loud and clear signal that even rich and powerful countries must respect contracts and rules. But it's still impossible to tell the damage that open-road aficionados, provincial insularity and unimaginative politicians have wreaked on both Dresden and the international reputation of Germany's cultural policies."

Center-left **Der Tagesspiegel** writes:

"In recent years, UNESCO has been very liberal about who it bestows its honorary title upon. But it becomes absurd when any old thing can be classified as belonging to our 'global cultural heritage' and you run into such sites everywhere you turn.... Dresden will continue to be 'Florence on the Elbe,' and this slap on the wrist isn't going to scare floods of tourists away from visiting the city."

The left-leaning **Frankfurter Rundschau** writes:

"It would be disingenuous to attribute this situation exclusively to the complications of a democratic process.... UNESCO's World Heritage Committee also played a clear role; it sat back and watched Dresden squirm while placing a questionable emphasis on purism. Behind this behavior is an attitude which holds that only the untouched have the right to claim the title of being part of the world's cultural heritage; that culture is a sacrosanct remnant from the past. Early on, UNESCO put its foot down and insisted that the only alternative would be to build a tunnel running under the Elbe. The committee emerged as the Keeper of the Grail for whom the only cultural goods that have value were those of museum quality. But cultural goods are also invigorated when they are called upon to stand as a witness to a past that is re-integrated into everyday life. ... UNESCO might have reached a decision, but it didn't find a solution."

**Source:**

Ward, Josh (2009, June 26). *'Dresden Will Survive' UNESCO's Decision*. Retrieved from Der Spiegel Online, July 2011: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/the-world-from-berlin-dresden-will-survive-unesco-s-decision-a-632845.html>

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