

The Dresden Elbe Valley: UNESCO World Heritage Site Status and Economic Decision Making

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Stage One: Essential Understandings

The Unit Focus – Germany has a long and vibrant history and economy. Honoring and preserving the history creates challenges for Germans when faced with economic concerns.

Big Concepts - Economic decision making involves making choices.

There are many perspectives regarding the costs and benefits of historical preservation.

An Essential Understanding – Students will understand there are a number of choices to be made by Germany and the residents of Dresden concerning preserving their past as well as ensuring economic health.

Students will understand that individuals and groups in Germany and the world have a variety of opinions on how best to maintain the Dresden Elbe Valley as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Essential Questions – What are the costs and benefits of restoring and maintaining a UNESCO World Heritage Site?

How does making choices among the costs and benefits incur an opportunity cost?

State Content Standard(s) and Performance Indicator(s)

Standard 1

Productive resources are limited. Therefore, people cannot have all the goods and services they want; as a result they must choose some things and give up others.

Stage Two: Individual Summative Assessment

Assessment Type - Students will critically analyze articles and websites concerning the Dresden Elbe Valley's World Heritage Site status.

Short Scenario for the Individual Summative Assessment - Students will work in groups of three. Each individual will have one or two articles to read and analyze. Based on the information from the articles, students summarize the costs and benefits of historical renovation and keeping UNESCO World Heritage Site Status in Dresden for the other members of the groups. Each group will create a poster detailing the costs and benefits (as well as who pays and who benefits) and identifying at least one opportunity cost paid by keeping the World Heritage Site status and by building a four-lane bridge.

Directions/Criteria –

Each student will take notes listing costs and benefits of a modern bridge across the Elbe at Dresden and the maintenance of World Heritage Site Status.

Each student will orally present information from his or her article(s) to the other members of the group.

Each group will complete a chart detailing costs and benefits of a bridge vs. World Heritage status, who pays or benefits, and identifying at least one opportunity cost paid for either decision.

Directions for the “Go Beyond” - Students may research the controversy over building a bridge over the Rhine in the “Lorelei Valley” and write paragraphs summarizing the similarities to the situation in the Elbe Valley.

STAGE THREE: Sequence of Lesson

Target: Secondary Students enrolled in economics classes or German language classes

Length: One to two 45-minute class periods

Anticipatory Set: Remind students that every person and group makes choices. Every choice has a second-best option which must be given up, and that’s the opportunity cost. Ask students for examples. Answers might include studying vs. spending time with friends, reforming health care vs. more funds for schools or infrastructure, etc.

Background Information: A number of sites around the world have been designated World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. Information is available on the UNESCO website. Germany has more than two dozen such sites. A recent controversy involves the city of Dresden and its decision to build a large bridge with lanes for vehicles and tram service. UNESCO has rescinded World Heritage Site status because plans for the bridge have been carried out. Teachers may want to consult the Dresden city website at www.dresden.de for further information concerning population density, economic development, etc. Part of the concern about the Heritage status is that Dresden occupies an important place in the history of Europe and was a unique example of rebuilding after particularly devastating bombing in World War II.

Lesson Steps:

Tell the students they will work in groups of three with sets of articles.

Each student should read either the article from *Deutsche Welle* on the Elbe Valley, the two articles particularly concerning Dr. Blobel, or the article from *Deutsche Welle* concerning Dresden losing the World Heritage Site status.

Students may read the articles in class or as a homework assignment. Instruct students to keep notes on who benefits from the building of the bridge, who benefits from the Heritage Site status, and what the costs and benefits involve for individuals and groups are.

Students report to their group members on the information they gleaned from the articles. Working together, students will create a chart on poster paper and using markers to detail costs and benefits for various individuals and groups supported by information from the articles. Each chart will also contain at least one opportunity cost paid by groups favoring the bridge, and one paid by those who would have maintained World Heritage status for the Elbe Valley.

Follow up by combining two or three groups of students and allowing them to discuss findings and compare each other’s charts in class.

Optional Independent Practice:

Have students research the Rhine Valley castle or “Lorelei” area, leaders of which are also considering a modern bridge in a World Heritage site and summarize their findings of similarities with the Elbe Valley in paragraph form.

Formative Evaluation:

Each student will be observed by the teacher for reading, active note-taking, and oral presentation within groups.

Each student group’s chart will be graded on organization and thorough use of examples within categories (i.e. costs to at least two groups, benefits to at least two groups, and at least one specific opportunity cost paid in each scenario).

Each student will be graded on respectful discussion with students from other groups concerning costs and benefits of maintaining UNESCO World Heritage Status.

Resources:

Four to six copies of each article, Poster sized paper, markers

OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR
Save the Dresden Elbe Valley

By GÜNTER BLOBEL
Published: June 4, 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: *New York Times* June 5, 2009 <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/05/opinion/05iht-edblobel.ht>

Germany's Elbe Valley Loses UNESCO Status

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.

cgh -- with wire reports

Source: Spiegel Online International. June 25, 2009.

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,632637,00.html>

Dresden loses UNESCO world heritage status



Some see the UNESCO loss as a setback for Dresden's image

UNESCO has dropped the German city of Dresden from its list of world heritage sites for constructing a disputed bridge that UN officials say will ruin the city's historic Elbe Valley landscape.

The move makes Dresden just the second site to lose its status since the World Heritage list was created in 1972.

Some officials say the loss will damage both Dresden's reputation and its tourism revenues. But a recent poll showed that more than half of the people living in the city are willing to see the title go.

The saga of Dresden's World Cultural Heritage status has been going on almost since the city was granted the title, in 2004, for its beautifully conserved river landscape. In 2005, the town proposed a bridge across the Elbe, and that structure has been at the heart of the dispute ever since.



The building site is already an eyesore, some say

Conservationists warned that if it was built according to plan, the Waldschloesschen Bridge would ruin the 20-kilometer long (12 mile), World Heritage-worthy stretch of Dresden cityscape. Urban planners countered that it is needed to reduce traffic congestion.

The seemingly endless debate has seen as many twists and turns as the meandering Elbe River itself, involving several reworked plans for the bridge, public demonstrations, back-and-forth legal actions, and a debate over an endangered species of bat.

But what does it really mean to have - and lose - a cultural heritage title? The answer depends on who is being asked.

Impact both practical and symbolic

UNESCO World Heritage designation is attached to some 878 cultural and natural properties world-wide, from the Taj Mahal to the Grand Canyon to the Great Barrier Reef. Including Dresden, Germany has 33 of these sites.

In practical terms, the loss could mean fewer tourists coming to Dresden, says Martin Roth, the director of the Dresden State Art Collections.

"The bridge, which is architecturally banal and was pushed through against all warnings to the contrary, is idiotic," Roth told Germany's *Tagesspiegel* newspaper. The dispute has led to a "damaged image" for Dresden, and the fact that the city has seen a 10 percent drop in tourism this year is "not due to the economic crisis alone," he said.



The Buddhas in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, are also on the list

But it seems that damage to Dresden's image as a post-War, post-Communist success story cuts deeper than any financial pain the city might feel.

'Shame on Germany'

The move "will severely tarnish Dresden's status as a cultural icon.... It will also greatly diminish the impact of Dresden's message of reconciliation" in the wake of World War II," Guenter Blobel, the founder of the nonprofit organization Friends of Dresden, wrote in an Op-Ed piece in the *New York Times*.

The move also shames Germany, Blobel added. The image of a "wealthy country letting one of its World Cultural Heritage go to waste while many poorer countries struggle to maintain theirs" is disturbing.

Indeed, no other European country has a spot on the "red list" of 30 Sites that are currently in danger of losing their status. Most of these endangered sites are in poor and violence-ravaged countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Iraq and Yemen, to name just a few. (So far, UNESCO has struck only one other site from the list: the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary in Oman.)

Poll shows citizens unmoved

Still, Dresden's citizens do not seem much bothered by the threat of loss. In a snap survey of 500 people conducted for the local newspaper the *Sächsische Zeitung*, 57 percent of those asked said the UNESCO title is not absolutely necessary. Younger people were generally less concerned

than older folks, with a full 61 percent of those between 30 and 49 saying the city did not need the UNESCO heritage designation.

However, 44 percent complained that the city should have done more to maintain the title.



Dresden's reconstruction was hard-won

In two separate plebiscites, Dresden citizens have voted in favor of the bridge. Some city officials who support the project say that while Dresden might lose its official UNESCO designation, the bridge has become a symbol of something even more important for a post-Communist city like Dresden: citizen action.

"In a democracy, we cannot have a dictatorship of a minority that, acting out of cultural or aesthetic grounds, thinks they know more than the overwhelming majority of citizens," wrote Dresden city councilman Jan Mücke, in a commentary in the *S-Z Online* newspaper.

Symbol of democracy?

For Mücke, the construction of the Wadschloesschen Bridge is "a symbol of an educated and self-confident citizenry, which wants to make its own decisions without being criticized or accused of being culturally backwards."

Bridges have been an enriching part of the European landscape for centuries, Muecke added.

Now, it looks like the European landscape will have one more bridge - and one less landscape deemed worthy of a Cultural Heritage designation.

Author: Jennifer Abramsohn

Editor: Nick Amies

Source: *Deutsche Welle*. June 21, 2009 <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4415238,00.html>