

Austrian initiative for a Virtual Conference

The Frontiers of the Roman Empire (FRE) – A transnational and transcontinental project

This concept paper aims to set out objectives of a virtual conference intended to inform permanent delegations at UNESCO and WH focal points about ongoing activities in relation to the World Heritage cluster “Frontiers of the Roman Empire” and envisaged new nominations

Introduction:

The frontiers of the Roman Empire (FRE) are the largest single monument built by one of the most influential civilizations in human history, stretching across three continents over more than 7000 km, including and linking together hundreds and even thousands of individual fortified sites and ancillary features.

From the outset, the final goal has always been to have the entire system of the frontiers of the Roman Empire declared as World Heritage. The idea of how to accomplish that has evolved over the years. The initial concept of having only one World Heritage property, that should include all the national segments, has evolved to the idea of having a series of single World Heritage properties under a common framework (not constituting a single property) named “Frontiers of the Roman Empire”, to be extended over time. So far, the existing World Heritage property related to FRE was subject to three rounds of enlargements (Hadrian’s Wall 1987, Upper German-Raetian Limes 2005 and Antonine Wall 2008). In the end, the common framework should encompass three continents and 18 countries, linked together in a “Frontiers of the Roman Empire-World Heritage Cluster”.

The “Frontiers of the Roman Empire”, if reunited in one single framework, offers not only huge potential for archaeological or historical research, but also cultural, social and touristic opportunities and related close transnational partnerships. The “common space” that will thus be created allows exploring and conserving a shared history and heritage that will not only unite heritage experts, scientists and site managers but also communities and governments for a common purpose.

“Frontiers usually divide people, but the modern study of the Roman frontiers is actually bringing countries and scholars together – not just those through whose territory the frontiers actually ran, but also those with artefacts in their national museum collections which have sometimes travelled very far from their places of origin. The creation of a new type of World Heritage Site that will encompass all the frontiers of the Roman Empire is an attempt to consolidate and develop a growing multinational project for the study and display of what may be the greatest system of border defences in human history.” (see

<https://www.world-archaeology.com/features/roman-frontiers/>)

Objectives of the conference :

- Understand the objectives, purpose and origins of the frontiers of the Roman Empire and explore their significance and meaning for today (what were the Romans’ realities and how do they relate to ours?)

- Inform about the origins, networks and state of play of the transnational World Heritage property/properties “Frontiers of the Roman Empire (FRE)” with a view to developing the unifying framework of a series of properties “FRE World Heritage Cluster”
- Understanding the potential for closer international cooperation (political, cultural, touristic) this unique project holds in terms of tangible and intangible value that creates a common space for 18 countries from three continents.
- Build a coalition of states/delegations at UNESCO who understand the potential for intensified cultural, social and touristic cooperation and who work on driving the project forward with a view to filing further transnational nominations and completing the “FRE World Heritage Cluster”

Target group/participants: representatives of the following delegations, focal points for cultural heritage as well as experts in member states:

- Algeria
- Austria
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Egypt
- Germany
- Hungary
- Jordan
- Libya
- Morocco
- Netherlands
- Romania
- Serbia
- Slovakia
- Syria
- Tunisia
- Turkey
- United Kingdom

Draft Programme

(max. 2 hrs programme)

1. Welcome and Introduction (Claudia Reinprecht , Mechtild Rössler–5-7 min) [outline of purpose of the meeting; significance of the dossier]
2. FRE – Origin and development (René Ployer – 10 min)
[Questions: What are the Frontiers of the Roman Empire (FRE)? What was their purpose? What is the scientific significance and the OUV of the FRE? What is the benefit of intensified cooperation on the FRE? What can we learn? Why does the overall project – inscription of all segments as a unity – make sense? What is the potential of the FRE WH cluster?]
3. From a single property to a transnational project – the “FRE World Heritage Cluster” (max. 45 min)

a) Overview of the evolution of the dossier, incl. Thematic Study/FRE Nomination Strategy (Marinus Polak, Susan Denyer, max 10 min)

[Explanation about how it started, tracing the different steps of the evolution, explaining the rationale for the Thematic Study and the Nomination Strategy, outlining why the Thematic Study focuses rather on Europe, and explaining what is needed for the MENA part]

b) brief overview of inscribed segments (Sebastian Sommer, max 3 min)

c) brief overview of nominations in the pipeline: Lower German Limes; Danube Limes (east and west), Dacian Limes (Marinus Polak, Sebastian Sommer, Silva Sabkova, Felix Marcu; max 3 min each)

d) brief overview of the remaining segments in the MENA region – (Mustapha Khanoussi for North Africa and Fawzi Abudanah and Mark Driessen for the Middle East; 5 minutes each]

e) overview of existing structures of cooperation (Bratislava Group, Hexham Group) (Patricia Weeks, Rebecca Jones; max 10 min)

[Questions to be touched upon: what was the evolution of the WH dossier in terms of process and what were the structures of cooperation and coordination to drive the dossier forward. What are the lessons learnt, success stories/benefits and challenges? What is the philosophy behind the Thematic Study and the Strategy? What is the benefit and potential of the unified “FRE World Heritage Cluster?” How can the decade long experiences and lessons learnt be applied to future nominations?]

4. Questions and Answers (max 30 min)

[Discussion/exchange of views on the significance of the property and its ramifications for international cooperation, what are the benefits and challenges?

5. Working together/ Next steps and Way ahead (max 30 min)

[Discussion on how to deepen and strengthen existing structures. How to move forward jointly? What could be features of a possible roadmap with a view to continuing and completing this unique transnational and transcontinental project]

6. Wrap up/Conclusion