



La Chaux-de-Fonds / Le Locle, Watchmaking Town Planning

States Parties: Switzerland

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UNESCO - Statement of Outstanding Universal Value



*The site of La Chaux-de-Fonds / Le Locle watchmaking town-planning consists of two towns situated close to one another in a remote environment in the Swiss Jura mountains, on land ill-suited to farming. Their planning and buildings reflect watchmakers' need of rational organization. Planned in the early 19th century, after extensive fires, the towns owed their existence to this single industry. Their layout along an open-ended scheme of parallel strips on which residential housing and workshops are intermingled reflects the needs of the local watchmaking culture that dates to the 17th century and is still alive today. The site presents outstanding examples of mono-industrial manufacturing-towns which are well preserved and still active. The urban planning of both towns has accommodated the transition from the artisanal production of a cottage industry to the more concentrated factory production of the late 19th and 20th centuries. The town of La Chaux-de-Fonds was described by Karl Marx as a "huge factory-town" in *Das Kapital* where he analyzed the division of labour in the watchmaking industry of the Jura.*

Brief synthesis

The watchmaking urban ensemble of La Chaux-de-Fonds and Le Locle demonstrates outstanding universal value as these twin manufacturing-towns constitute an exceptional example of organic urban ensembles entirely dedicated to a single industry. They have been constructed by and for watchmaking. They are the product of an extremely close symbiosis between socio-technical needs and responses provided by town planning choices. Watchmaking has given rise to a remarkable architectural typology

in the built structure. Housing designed for home working is situated alongside owners' houses, workshops, and more recent factories, in a homogeneous and rational urban fabric that is open to the outside. The two towns bear witness to the exceptional uninterrupted continuation of a living and world-renowned watchmaking tradition, which has succeeded in coping with the socio-technical and economic crises of the contemporary world.

Criterion (iv): La Chaux-de-Fonds and Le Locle constitute a unique urban and architectural ensemble, wholly dedicated to watchmaking from the 18th century until the present day. Watchmaking space and living space co-exist in an extremely close relationship. The rational, pragmatic, and open planning of the urban space has encouraged the sustainable development of this mono-industry, as a 'manufacturing- town.'

Integrity and authenticity

The integrity of the watchmaking vocation of the two towns of La Chaux-de-Fonds and Le Locle is total, and has remained so for more than two centuries; furthermore, this vocation is still active. It is given concrete expression in the permanence of the ordered and cumulative street plans of the first half of the 19th century and the continuity of the basic architectonic motifs of the built structure, based on a comprehensive typology from the end of the 18th century until today. The typological and environmental study of post-1930 buildings shows some important disruptions (high buildings) but above all functional and architectural continuity (factories of the 1960s, workers' housing estates) with the earlier built structure. The numerical indexes based on precise data in the evaluation of the integrity and authenticity of an urban ensemble are useful.

Protection and management requirements

The day-to-day management process is carried out by the Communes and their urban planning and heritage departments. The Steering Committee for the nomination dossier became the Permanent Coordination Committee for the sites in March 2008. Its role is to designate a 'site manager' and set up various working groups. It is supported by a Multi-disciplinary Group whose role is to provide scientific and professional advice. The efficiency of the urban management already in place should continue.

(source : <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1302/>)