

Chapter 38

Outlook



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Abstract The chapter “Outlook” brings together the main messages of this book; formulates concluding comments and reflects on the way forward. Out of the many conflicts affecting World Heritage, the chapter highlights some, which appear as obstacles that must be overcome for a sustainable protection. The unequal geographical distribution of World Heritage properties and of the decision-making bodies; and the difficulty to reconcile economic interests with conservation and development needs are two examples. Further examples refer to the discrepancies in the interpretation of the meaning of World Heritage between experts and the civil society; and the climate and biodiversity crises, which require full participatory and inclusive approaches that integrate culture and nature protection. In light of these examples, the chapter concludes by underlining that the future of the World Heritage Convention can only be envisioned if such challenges were confronted and resolved.

Keywords Future perspectives · Development · Sustainability · Equality · Justice · Participation

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Heritage creates identity and the destruction of heritage destroys identity. Therefore, individuals and societies are responsible for the sustainable safeguarding of their heritage. It is this message with which this book began and with which it ends. It is a message that relates to all of our heritage and to World Heritage in particular. And it is the message that legitimises the criteria for designating heritage as World Heritage, namely the so-called “Outstanding Universal Value”. It is also the message on the basis of which the standard measures for protection and use of World Heritage have been established. And last but not least, it is the message that can be used to verify whether and in what way the social, political, ecological, cultural and economic goals of the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 1972) have been met in the 50 years of practical application.

Fifty years of implementation of the World Heritage Convention – together with other heritage conventions, which have emerged in the meantime – have ensured that its fundamental message has been received worldwide. In practice, implementation is expressed by the list of 1154 World Heritage sites currently inscribed and by 1719 sites on the so-called Tentative Lists of the 194 signatory states to the World Heritage Convention (all figures are as of December 2021). However, it is also expressed in a growing list of heritage sites in danger, currently 52 sites, and in the fact that criticism of the inscription criteria and their implementation practices is becoming louder and more public (see Alexander, 2021; also Schwiering, 2021).

The above-mentioned numbers of signatory states to the Convention, of inscribed sites as well as sites on the national Tentative Lists prove the quantitative success in the 50-year practice of applying the Convention. In this respect, success can be clearly stated. This is true even if, as was also formulated in the introduction to this book, the worldwide geographical distribution of the sites shows a high degree of Eurocentrism, or as the geographical participation in the political decisions of the General Assembly of the World Heritage Convention shows a Eurocentrism and Asiacentrism (see Chap. 2 by Birgitta Ringbeck in this publication).

The message of this book was developed on the basis of its editors’ reflections on the mandate of such a Convention in view of its 50th anniversary and UNESCO’s commitment to implement the 2030 Agenda. It also emerged from a critical reflection on its successes and failures. On the occasion of the Convention’s 50th anniversary, we wanted to know whether and how the global community has aligned the changing social framework with the Convention’s goals.

Considering the current living, working, recreational spaces, which have developed through political, social, cultural, ecological and economic processes worldwide and have affected our heritage we have identified 6 areas of conflict of and for World Heritage. These areas have been discussed and reflected by a total of 61 authors from 28 countries. They form the core of this book. The authors have formulated a variety of approaches to dealing with conflicts. Additionally, central themes that are important for anchoring the ideas and goals of the Convention, especially in a changing world, were presented in part III. There are categories such as responsibility, reconciliation, sustainability, education and diversity, which are important for a further sustainable implementation of the Convention and are conveyed in particular through and with the voices of “young professionals” in our book.

A few aspects remain to be pointed out in the concluding comments. On the one hand, there is the need to address the unequal geographical distribution of inscribed World Heritage Sites, which has been demanded in a multitude of resolutions since the 1990s and has been tackled with diverse proposals. It is the geographically, culturally, professionally and gender-equitable composition of the various decision-making bodies of UNESCO, which has also been demanded for years. Adaptation in the implementation of the Convention, demanded by means of the principles of equality, justice and sustainability, would, for example, also allow the repeated criticisms of the increasing quantitative orientation of the Convention to be put into perspective.

Quantity alone is not the problem. The emphasis on inscription and the annual addition of more and more sites on the list are often based on economic interests. A focus on economic values without reference to the Convention's wider mandate contradicts its spirit. For example, nominations of World Heritage sites are increasingly justified by tourism and the associated potential for economic development. In many cases, the resulting damage to World Heritage is ignored or accepted. The fact that economic interests only emerged with the establishment of the World Heritage Convention and that economic development policies have become as important as encouraging people to identify with their heritage can be seen as a product of the Convention's 50 years of implementation. This should be cause for a critical examination of this approach.

However, not every economic development of sites, communities, cultural landscapes or regions that are made possible by World Heritage designations should be assessed negatively per se. On the contrary, the identification of people with their sites is fundamental to the sites' preservation and thus fundamental to the preservation of heritage, especially in these times of massive upheaval and rapid change. People identify with their locations and with their sites if they offer them quality of life. This includes an economic quality. And that is exactly what tourism can contribute to.

This is the crucial challenge, namely developing models that combine economic development with sustainability and responsibility. For tourism, as for many other uses of World Heritage sites, this means developing alternative models. Guidelines and experience are available, for example, in Günter Faltin's entrepreneurship concept, which he developed and successfully implemented in the 1990s as part of an economically oriented but developmentally just and relevant tea campaign. With an application of approaches based on entrepreneurship, economic use of World Heritage is brought together with local/regional or cultural/nature or object-related development and thus also fulfils the idealistic goals of the Convention (Faltin, 2013).

The quantification of heritage in an economic interest and its contradicting developments does not only concern tourism, but also the growing rate of urbanisation on a global scale. It is posing threats on the one hand. On the other hand, heritage sites in an urban setting represent a great potential and resource to stimulate sustainable development and improve the quality of life for local communities. Especially the focus on the "Historic Urban Landscape Recommendation" (HUL), which was adopted by UNESCO's General Conference already in November 2011

was a starting point for a holistic interpretation of the meaning of heritage for people (UNESCO, 2011). The application of HUL initiated a new understanding of how the different elements and entities of heritage are interconnected and relevant concerning current challenges like for example climate change and urban resilience. The topics addressed in this book will therefore serve as a reference and inspiration for World Heritage Cities to contribute to a new urban reality that the citizens are thriving for. World Heritage Cities are organised within the Organisation of World Heritage Cities (OWHC) (<https://www.ovpm.org>), which was also a cooperation partner in the development of this publication.

Another aspect that is relevant for the outlook is the increasing difference in the interpretation of the meaning of World Heritage between experts on the one hand and the civilian population on the other. This is due to the fact that communicating the significance of heritage has not been the focus of its representatives. However, in view of the dangers to which World Heritage is increasingly exposed, its communication is becoming more and more important. The significance of World Heritage for people and their societies must therefore be communicated in a holistic and sustainable manner. This concerns formal as well as non-formal, official as well as unofficial processes, which we have discussed earlier in this publication.

In light of climate change and the biodiversity crisis, a full participatory and inclusive approach is also emphasised in conservation strategies for nature friendly, sustainable, and climate-resilient development. Nature-based solutions (NbS) has emerged as an approach which can help society to move away from the destructive global economic model centred around GDP and infinite growth, to one where social and ecological well-being are the decisive measures that identify a healthy economy. As defined by IUCN “*Nature-based solutions are actions to protect, sustainably manage and restore natural and modified ecosystems in ways that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, to provide both human well-being and biodiversity benefits*” (IUCN, 2020, 1). The IUCN Global Standard for NbS is available for all interested parties including policy makers, heritage practitioners and local communities to have a common understanding and interpretation of the NbS concept (IUCN, 2020). Also recognising the urgency of the need to address society’s largely dysfunctional relationship with biodiversity, a Working Group has been established under the Convention on Biological Diversity to develop the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. This aims to realise a hugely ambitious plan “to ensure that, by 2050, the shared vision of living in harmony with nature is fulfilled” (Working Group, 2021, Annex A1). The intention is for this Framework to be used under all the biodiversity-related conventions, including the World Heritage Convention (Working Group, 2021, Para. 5a). In communicating the role that World Heritage can play in valuing, conserving, restoring and equitably and sustainably using biodiversity, the World Heritage Convention can support the effort needed to enable governments and society to implement changes for a sustainable future.

In this outlook, we would like to refer to an international initiative that is explicitly future-oriented as a constituent part of the communication of heritage. This is the initiative “Our World Heritage”, which was launched by experts from the broad context of the World Heritage Convention in 2020. Organised as a digital and global

discussion forum, its message is: “Join us – citizens and professionals – as we mobilize to renew and reinforce heritage protection for the next 50 years. Without action, the legacy of the past will not be here for tomorrow’s generation” and thus it contributes to the sustainable anchoring of the Convention. (www.ourworldheritage.org).

In summary, the success of the World Heritage Convention, which has been implemented for 50 years, can be considered unique and positive. Nevertheless – as has been formulated in a number of contributions – contradictions to the intended goals can also be observed in its implementation. When it comes to formulating goals for the future, it is long past time that such contradictions were confronted and resolved. To do this, one must first identify causes. With this publication we have begun to do so. We assume that this discourse will continue.

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