

UNESCO, CULTURAL HERITAGE, AND OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

Value-based Analyses of the World Heritage and
Intangible Cultural Heritage Conventions

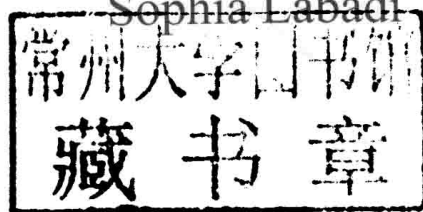
SOPHIA LABADI



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UNESCO, Cultural Heritage, and Outstanding Universal Value

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A mes parents
To Ken and Elaine

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Introduction

Dissecting Outstanding Universal Value

The 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (henceforth the World Heritage Convention) is unquestionably one of the most prominent and recognized legal instruments in the protection of natural and cultural heritage sites worldwide. In the process, the World Heritage List it established has become one of UNESCO's most popular and celebrated programs. Indeed, as of July 2012, a total of 962 properties (745 cultural, 188 natural and 29 mixed sites) located in 157 States Parties have obtained this coveted status on the basis of what is deemed to be their "outstanding universal value."

Despite its renown, however, the World Heritage Convention and its subsequent application present many unanswered questions. I first became aware of these gaps and grey areas in the discourses and policies surrounding World Heritage sites when I found myself asking the same questions over and over during my own work in this field.

Over the past ten years that I have been involved in UNESCO's programs, I have listened again and again to its successive director-generals insist on the importance of the Convention not only as a tool for heritage conservation, but also as an instrument for pursuing noble goals like peace, postnationalism, social cohesion, cultural diversity and sustainable development. For instance, just such an understanding of the Convention was highlighted by Irina Bokova (the current director general of UNESCO), who emphasized in her opening speech of the thirty-fifth session of the World Heritage Committee in 2011:

Heritage is a building block for sustainable development, a vector for social cohesion and reconciliation, and a catalyst for regional cooperation. In a world of change, world heritage is a reminder of all that unites humanity. It is a reminder also of the ties between culture, nature and societies. (UNESCO 20 June 2011)

Listening to lofty speeches such as this one, I consistently find myself wondering exactly how States Parties have understood “outstanding universal value,” the central notion of the Convention that nonetheless seems to leave ample room for a multiplicity of interpretations. Above all, I ask, have States Parties truly associated outstanding universal value with collective and postnational histories, cultural diversity and sustainable development? If not, what principles have States Parties tied to notions of outstanding universal value in their place? How do their articulations of outstanding universal value inform their obligations to protect heritage sites for future generations? Can dissonances be detected between these official, high-level UNESCO discourses on World Heritage and their subsequent national implementation? Most crucially, have States Parties considered the past in nomination dossiers as something dead and unconnected to the present, or have these histories been embraced as key aids to solving pressing societal concerns?

In an effort to offer a response to these questions, this book focuses on three major themes that structure it as a coherent whole.

1. In-depth analyses of the evolution of official understandings of outstanding universal value (as produced by the World Heritage Committee) and the association of outstanding universal value with wider issues such as the construction of the nation, cultural diversity and sustainable development.
2. Analyses of States Parties’ understandings and interpretations of these official texts in nomination dossiers of sites for inclusion on the World Heritage List with an eye to how these documents have shaped their presentation of the nation, cultural diversity, sustainability and authenticity.
3. Postcolonial consideration of these dossiers through an identification of those which represent an ambivalent and hybrid space, one that maintains but also transgresses dominant European concepts of heritage.

Since the turn of the millennium, the World Heritage Committee has indeed officially recognized the need to pursue this kind of in-depth reflection on the history and impact of its documents and programs. The result of this recognition has been a number of meetings and publications that explicitly address these questions, especially with regard to the concept of out-

standing universal value. However, the products of these discussions—for instance, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) compendium titled “The World Heritage List: What Is OUV?”—does not truly explain how States Parties themselves have understood outstanding universal value, or indeed whether and how they have related it to broader topics such as social cohesion, cultural diversity and sustainable development (ICOMOS 2008).

These shortcomings certainly justify further research on the subject, particularly in tracing the articulation of outstanding universal value, clarifying its varying uses in different contexts and offering some thoughts about potential future directions. This present volume—working in the same vein as official World Heritage Committee studies but pushing these discussions further than before—seeks to do just that. In doing so, it contributes to wider reflections on value-led heritage conservation and management as a field, working from the premise that the identification of values is a fundamental step in the long-term conservation and management of sites (Sullivan 1997; Mason 2003; de la Torre 2001). Specifically, this volume identifies both the central and marginalized values implied within nomination dossiers (considered to be statements of significance that detail the reasons for which sites should be preserved for future generations) and provides some explanations for these patterns.

From an academic point of view, this research is nourished by studies on the notion of outstanding universal value conducted from the standpoint of the World Heritage Committee (see, in particular, Titchen 1995; Titchen 1996, 235–42; Cleere 1996, 227–33). It also situates itself within recent critical analyses of the use of the Convention for the construction of the nation (see, for instance, Labadi 2007; Askew 2010; or Hevia 2001, 219–43), of dissonances between international discourses on (world) heritage as fostering peace and their national implementation (see Beazley 2010; Van Krieken-Pieters 2010; or Layton, Stone and Thomas 2001) and of the exclusionary nature of heritage (see Langfield et al. 2010; Labadi 2007; Merriman 2000). Moreover, it embraces the growing literature on heritage as sustainable tourism and development (see, in particular, Boccardi 2007; Lafrenz Samuels 2010; Winter 2010), as well as the considerable resources on heritage and authenticity, with particular reference to Larsen (1995), Stovel (2008) and Jones (2009).

While the research presented here certainly draws inspiration and support from such existing publications, it represents a departure from prior studies in its comprehensive considerations of the complex relationships between the global institution of the World Heritage Committee and national/local institutions represented by States Parties, especially in terms of their respective use of heritage for building national identities, enhancing cultural diversity and promoting sustainable tourism, development and authenticity. Thus, this

research extends its scope beyond what has been published previously through engaging simultaneously with a diversity of discourses across the humanities and social sciences, as well as with related issues pertaining not only to heritage conservation but also to political sciences, social theories, tourism and development studies, economics, cultural studies and feminism or gender studies.

Moreover, borrowing from valuation and postcolonial theories and implementing the concept of reiterative universalism, this book goes into uncharted territories by analyzing whether a broad universalist framework can be indeed understood in a diversity of ways by States Parties themselves. In doing so, it departs from simplistic considerations of the Convention as Euro-centric, providing instead a complex analysis of official narratives relating to non-European and nontraditional heritage as subversions of dominant, canonical European norms.

DATA AND METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

Data collection for this volume has been based, first of all, on an intensive study of UNESCO's archival documents, which provided detailed information on the evolution of the implementation of the World Heritage Convention from the standpoint of the Committee.

This book has also benefited from discussions with UNESCO, ICOMOS and International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) colleagues, past and present, as well as observations and active involvement in the work of the secretariat of the World Heritage Convention and of the Intangible Heritage Convention and active participation in major UNESCO publications (primarily the "World Report on Cultural Diversity" and the *International Social Science Journal*) over the past ten years. Also, as a Getty Conservation Guest Scholar in 2006–2007 and a fellow at Stanford University in 2010–2011, I was able to take a step back and to analyze the World Heritage and Intangible Heritage programs in a more academic, critical and distanced manner. This positioning, I would argue, has provided me with a privileged viewpoint, locating my analyses on a third way that is uniquely both inside and outside UNESCO and the academic world, and from which I have been both an observer of and a professional embedded within the organization's programs. It is hoped that this privileged positioning has enriched the reflections presented in this volume.

More precisely, the actual data for this publication focuses on nomination dossiers, considered to be States Parties' official understanding of the World Heritage framework. They have been selected because they "should provide all the information to demonstrate that the property is truly of 'outstanding universal value'" (UNESCO February 1997, Paragraph 10). By the Commit-

tee itself, they are considered the best documents to explain States Parties' understanding of outstanding universal value, as they compel these countries to clarify in explicit terms the values and attributes that make their nominated properties so special. I consider these as statement of significance that serve as the basis for later decisions concerning the conservation and management of sites.

To consider the questions and themes put forth above, purposefully sampled nomination dossiers of sites for inclusion on the World Heritage List were selected.

The logic and power of non-probability sampling lies in choosing information-rich cases for in-depth study and enabling multiple comparisons that can allow patterns to be identified easily. Two primary sampling strategies were used in selecting the nomination dossiers for analysis: typical case sampling, on the one hand, and extreme case sampling, on the other. The rationale behind this sampling strategy is that, beyond a mere reduction of the variables, comparing extreme and more typical cases can better highlight patterns, evolution and differences. In this instance, religious heritage was chosen as a typical case. "Religious" here has been understood broadly as encompassing those qualities human beings consider "holy, sacred, spiritual or divine" (New Encyclopedia Britannica 1995, 1016), regardless of whether a specific god is being worshipped. Thus, "religious heritage," in this research, refers to a wide variety of cultural properties including cathedrals, mosques, early Christian monuments, sacred archaeological sites, grottoes, temples, pilgrimage routes and cemeteries. Religious sites can be considered as being at the historic core of the definition of heritage since, in a number of countries, they were the first structures and places to be considered and labeled as heritage. This can partly explain the fact that this category is, according to single- and multi-category analyses of the World Heritage List, one of the most represented groups on the World Heritage List (ICOMOS 2004). In addition to being a typical case, this category raises a number of interesting issues apropos to the themes explored in subsequent chapters. For instance, while religious sites were used by former colonial powers as instruments of expansion and domination, it is important to ask whether they have been transformed, in postcolonial times, into sites of contestation against European hegemony and hitherto dominant narratives. In addition, the popularity of some religious sites as places of pilgrimage raises several problems for their sustainable development, conservation and management.

Industrial heritage was selected as an extreme case in this study, as it is a nontraditional category of cultural heritage numerically and thematically underrepresented on the World Heritage List (ICOMOS 2004). Industrial heritage is a recent branch of cultural heritage. It is only in the past forty years that coordinated movements and policies for documenting, recording and listing that type of heritage have been developed, mainly in Europe

(Labadi 2001, 77). (Other nontraditional categories of cultural heritage—modern heritage, for example—were not considered for this research because they are so few in number that they would not have provided a large enough sample.) It was expected that the nomination dossiers of industrial heritage sites would present diverging values to religious sites by focusing on humble and negative versions of history, as well as the working classes who tend to be marginalized from official discourses. In addition, the conservation and authenticity of industrial structures, heavily transformed over time and often considered as temporary buildings or even eyesores, pose many original challenges that may require new methods and definitions.

The first step in the identification of the sample was to select the industrial heritage sites to be analyzed because it was the smallest group. The second step was to select the religious properties. To reduce the variables, it was decided that, whenever possible, religious properties analyzed would be selected from States Parties that also possessed examples of industrial sites. Because of the numerical importance of European religious properties in comparison to those in the rest of the world, I also chose to further sample the traditional heritage sites according to their geographical region. Such an extended sampling of religious heritage has facilitated the postcolonial study of the resulting data. Hence, in total, three categories of cultural heritage on the World Heritage List, amounting to 114 nomination dossiers, have been considered (see appendix for the list of the properties considered). The first group corresponds to the most typical sites: European religious sites, also referred to in the text as the “European religious group.” This category is composed of forty-six dossiers of sites located in twelve countries. The second group corresponds to typical sites found outside this regional scope—that is, non-European religious sites, also referred to as the “non-European religious group.” This category is composed of thirty dossiers located in five countries. The final group contains underrepresented sites: industrial heritage properties, referred to as the “industrial heritage group.” This collection includes thirty-eight dossiers located in nineteen countries.

Each sentence of each nomination dossier selected was coded using ATLAS/ti, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Using ATLAS/ti facilitated the coding of texts more systematically and thoroughly than doing so manually (Fielding 1994), helped to manage the data and assisted in the mundane task of ordering this material (Kelle 1997, 15). I am not aware that CAQDAS has ever been used in a published academic project in the field of archaeology (understood in its widest sense as encompassing cultural resource management, cultural heritage and material studies). The coding of the dossiers was based on a system of values and sub-values that reflected the themes of the different chapters of this volume, as well as the content of nomination dossiers (see table). In addition, references to “authenticity,” “conservation,” “restoration” and “reconstruction” in

nomination dossiers were also recorded. The results of the coding of nomination dossiers were then analyzed and interpreted in light of the international discourse on outstanding universal value and the criteria defined by the Committee, as well as of previous academic publications and the theoretical framework of my own research.

Social value	Architectural and aesthetic value	Economic value	Informational value
Reference to the lower classes/women	Architectural and aesthetic value of religious buildings, works of art, remains	Touristic venue/visitor numbers	Research value/documentation on the property
Reference to the lower classes/men	Architectural and aesthetic value of secular buildings, works of art, remains	Visitor facilities and activities	History and development
Reference to the lower classes/collective citation	Layout of the town/settlement	Development project/regeneration	Importance and influence of the property in the region/country/world
Reference to the middle and upper classes/women			Influence from other countries
Reference to the middle and upper classes/men			Comparison with other sites
Reference to the middle and upper classes/collective citation			Relation between cultural and natural elements
Local population			
Political value			
Religious value			

Value System Developed

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Chapter 1 clarifies the theoretical framework that structures and guides the analyses of the data and the conclusions drawn from it. It discusses the notion of values, arguing that they are necessarily extrinsic and relative and that they change with time, individuals, frames of mind and geographical locations. It adopts “reiterative universalism” as a structuring concept that guides the book’s subsequent interpretations of the selected data. This concept recognizes the possibility for common understandings of the World Heritage Convention framework, while also leaving room for the interpretation and translation of this framework into different cultures and divergent frames of reference. This chapter finishes by introducing the notion of the nomination dossier as a contact zone, another structuring theme that enables one to recognize that narratives on outstanding universal value can be copied by States Parties or, on the contrary, rejected and transgressed.