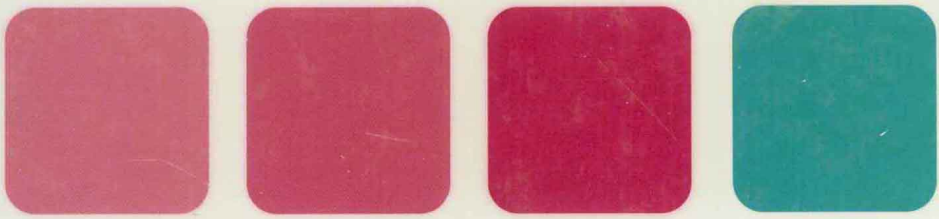
CURRENT THEMES IN TOURISM



The Politics of World Heritage

Negotiating Tourism and Conservation

Edited by David Harrison
and Michael Hitchcock

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Series Editors: Chris Cooper (*University of Queensland, Australia*),
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Foreword

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The major theme running through this collection of papers concerns the complex and sometimes fraught relationship of World Heritage Sites and tourism. While applications for World Heritage status are made on the basis of conservation, tourism is an attendant phenomenon. Inscription to the World Heritage list not only confers recognition in terms of conservation, but also raises a site's profile and stimulates tourist demand. In internationally well known sites, such as the Tower of London, World Heritage status may have little impact on visitor numbers, but in less established destinations inscription is usually accompanied by an upsurge in tourism.

Tourism is, however, a double-edged sword, which on one hand confers economic benefits through the sale of tickets and visitor spending on hotels, restaurants and other tourism-related services, but on the other, places stress on the fabric of destinations and the communities who live in them. Venice, my home city, is a case in point since it benefits financially from its buoyant tourism industry, but struggles to cope with the attendant conservation problems associated with such a large annual influx of tourists. Visitors have long sought peace, tranquillity and inspiration in Venice, but today the city is so popular that it attracts 13-15 million visitors a year, almost 40 for every one of its inhabitants. Such are the problems associated with tourism, ranging from littering to overcrowding, that Armando Peres, the man responsible for tourism in Venice, believes that tourism is on the verge of destroying the city. Tourism officials are experimenting with a 10-point code of conduct to try to make life more bearable there, which ranges from always keeping to the right when walking around the city to how to file a complaint. The rules will be conveyed to visitors via cards and posters, which will also carry information and useful phone numbers.

Venice is, however, in the relatively fortunate position of being able to explore ways of managing visitors on its own terms because it is so well established as a destination that it is assured repeat visitation. Problems arise, however, with relatively new World Heritage Sites, particularly those in lesser developed economies that are anxious to acquire the developmental benefits of tourism. For such countries the fact that tourism can be an environmental or cultural threat is far outweighed by its perceived advantages. Even though there are positive impacts from tourism, it is not invariably the people who live in World Heritage Sites who benefit. Some sites, for example, charge as much as US$20 for entrance, which is a great deal of money in a developing country, but there may be little transparency about how this money is used. High entrance fees may also deter local visitors who risk being excluded from learning about their own heritage in favour of foreign tourists.

Tourism is now widely regarded as one of the largest industrial sectors alongside financial services and manufacturing, and careful attention needs be paid to

the global repercussions of this many-sided phenomenon. The impact of tourism is such that progressive strategies are vital to ensure that tourism is managed in a culturally and environmentally sustainable manner. It is UNESCO's mission to help the 190 Member States in preparing their policies while reconsidering the relationship of tourism and cultural and environmental integrity, tourism and intercultural dialogue, and tourism and development. UNESCO aims to contribute to the struggle against poverty, and the protection of the environment and mutual appreciation of cultures, but it has no 'one size fits all' management blueprint for how this may be achieved. World Heritage Sites are simply too varied for UNESCO to be able to include a standard set of recommendations for each newly inscribed site. Instead, it prefers to use its coveted World Heritage Site programme as a means of spreading best practice in sustainable management, but to do this it needs the scientific and cultural insights of practitioners and researchers. UNESCO itself lacks the resources to undertake its own research, but it is able to act as a broker and a forum for the exchange of ideas.

The papers in this collection are to be welcomed because they provide invaluable insights into how tourism and conservation are negotiated in a wide variety of different contexts. The kind of empirical research that is represented by these papers is essential if UNESCO's World Heritage Centre is to fulfil its mission of promoting a discerning type of tourism that is developmentally beneficial on one hand, but is culturally and environmentally sustainable on the other. Negotiation is by definition a political act, hence the title of this volume, but it is a necessary step in the development and exchange of management strategies that will bridge the institutional gap between what is desirable and what actually happens.

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Introduction
Contested Narratives in the Domain of World Heritage

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The focus of this special issue is on the various relationships of world 'heritage' and tourism, and the purpose of this introduction is to raise issues that are germane to the topic, and in the process briefly relate them to the papers that follow.

The scene can be set with an anecdote. Many years ago, one of my neighbours was a Scotsman. He was stereotypically dour, in appearance and manner. A man of few words at the best of times, who struggled to respond to a greeting, he was never one to approach for a cup of sugar. However, once in a while he was transformed. On St Andrew's day, which is of great significance to Scotsmen, he would appear resplendent, immaculate, in kilt, sporran, and all the bright and shiny accessories that accompanied what, to this somewhat ignorant Sassenach, appeared to be a quite royal outfit. On one such day, I congratulated him on his appearance and casually (and undiplomatically) suggested, in passing, that the kilt and the tartan were actually English inventions the Scots had been persuaded to adopt, to the great profit of English tailors and the English cloth trade.

As anyone familiar with the work of Trevor-Roper (1983) would realise, the comment was not original. Nevertheless, it seems to have been unappreciated. I say it seems so, because although we remained neighbours for several more years, it was the last conversation we held. From that time on, my greetings in the street were utterly ignored.

Clearly, heritage is no joking matter. Wearing national costume is a mark or statement of at least two kinds of identity: one that is national or collective, and the other that is individual. And for Scots living outside Scotland, assertions about identity may be more important than for those in Scotland. For those far from 'home', the exile, the refugee or the expatriate, it may be imperative to preserve links with another 'place'. More collectively, in immigrant communities, the things of 'home' take on an additional poignancy, a bittersweet remembrance of things past, which are present, and yet are not. Faced with foreignness, with alienation, the appeal to a collective and individual 'heritage' takes on an added momentum.

Conflicting Inter-subjectivities

Landscapes, too, are often incorporated into individual and collective 'heritage'. The work of poets may reinforce feelings of association, as when Wordsworth writes of the daffodils of the English Lake District or R.S. Thomas describes the bleak Welsh hills, and removal from the 'place' of home may result

in alienation and restlessness. Dutch travel writer Cees Nooteboon (1993) recounts the story of an old sailor, recently retired, who was persuaded by his wife to take a holiday in Switzerland. They arrived at night, and in the morning he climbed out of bed and drew the curtains to look outside. Seeing the mountains, he disappointedly turned to his wife, and said 'I want to go home'. 'Why?' she asked, 'we have only just arrived.' 'I can't see the view', he said.

There is nothing 'natural' in our appreciation of landscape. We learn to appreciate it through our backgrounds and socialisation, but the socialisation of the expert may differ from that of the layman, and thus interpretations of what is natural will vary. Another example can illustrate this point. Near Brighton, on the south coast of England, there is a *camera obscura*, a darkened room, situated on a tower, with a lens on the roof through which is projected an image of the surrounding countryside. Through this, with the aid of a commentary provided by an interpreter, can be viewed the South Downs – an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. During one presentation, it was explained that South Downs rangers must ensure that the Downs remain pristine, and as part of this task must root out any gorse bushes (spiny yellow shrubs) they see growing, as they are not appropriate. Gorse bushes, it seems, are 'wrong' bits of nature, more like 'weeds', and have no place in an area of outstanding natural beauty.

What precisely is 'natural' about the South Downs can be disputed. A few hundred years ago it was heavily wooded, until the combined needs of the English navy for wood and farmers requiring grazing for their sheep conspired to leave them in their current 'natural' state. However, conflicts over the definition and exploitation of other 'natural' sites and resources are commonplace (Brandon & Wells, 1992), and examples involving tourists and residents can be cited from Newfoundland (Overton, 1980), Australia (Brown, 1999), Canada (Ritchie, 1998), the English Lake District (Clark *et al.*, 1994), South Pacific islands (Baines, 1987), and Kenya (Sindiga, 1999) What is frequently found is that the residents of such areas want to build houses, develop their businesses, harvest the forest or the wildlife, and generally put their surroundings to work. By contrast, town dwellers or tourism promoters, who may exert considerable influence with the politicians, prefer the wilderness untouched, to be visited on vacations, at week-ends, for fishing or photography, perhaps, or to enable outsiders to commune with nature.

Although positions over the use of natural and built environments may seem entrenched, they do change. When tourists first arrived at a Catalan seaside resort in Spain, for example, many local residents regarded them as interlopers, who interfered with the fishing industry. Later, when tourism became established, it was the fishermen who were considered the outsiders (Pi-Sunyer, 1989: 196–7).

There are, then, conflicts over what is natural and what is not, and how 'natural' sites are to be used. Something similar occurs over the built environment, particularly when buildings imbued with special meaning and significance are competed over by different groups, be they ethnic, religious or national. Nevertheless, a territory does not have to be considered sacred for violent conflicts to occur. Indeed, it is perhaps worth considering how many of these conflicts over territory, religious or not, are actually between groups of people who are in most ways very similar. Jews and Moslems, Protestants and Catholics, Turkish

Cypriots and Greek Cypriots: is it because they *are* so similar that the conflicts are so bitter, so violent, so destructive?

Faking it: Heritage, Performance, Commoditisation and Authenticity

Much of what we consider 'heritage' is a form of performance, and there are frequent debates about what is 'authentic' and what is 'fake' (Harrison, 1992: 20–2; MacCannell, 1976: 91–107; Olsen, 2002; Shepherd, 2002). In this context, however, it might be argued that we – and the term is used advisedly – 'perform' heritage for the benefit of people who are not 'us'. Some time ago, for example, in a study of tourism in Brittany, it was reported that there was a renewed emphasis on rural Brittany as a centre of tradition, where the Breton 'heritage', its language, customs, and cuisine, were very much alive. Eco-villages were started, villagers dressed in 'traditional' costume, and old buildings were restored. Middle-class tourists from Paris, seeking a world they thought lost, spent holidays with traditional Breton families, learning their language as they carried on their daily duties, and returned to modern Paris refreshed in the knowledge that Breton tradition was alive and well. For their part, at the end of the tourist season these rustic Bretons breathed a huge sigh of relief, put away the uncomfortable old furniture, and returned to speaking French again. The performance was over (Macdonald, 1987: 131–2).

In MacCannell's terms, the Bretons were putting on a performance of 'staged authenticity' (1976: 98). Was the experience 'fake'? One assumes the hapless visitors were unaware of the deception and, if so, it might be described as a 'genuine fake' (Brown, 1996: 32). Does it matter if it was? Does it matter if buildings considered to be part of heritage are also fake? The Pavilion in Brighton, England, for example, once considered a monstrosity and very nearly pulled down by an irate council earlier last century, is now a crucial feature of Brighton's 'heritage', and some years ago was duly restored. Most visitors to Brighton go there, but at least some of what they see is definitely 'fake'. The turrets, for example, are made of fibreglass – not an 18th-century product – because they are lighter and more resilient to the weather. Does it matter?

Clearly, the debate over what is or is not 'authentic' applies as much to historical objects as to buildings and rituals. It is highly unlikely that most visitors to the British Museum – including Greek visitors – could distinguish the genuine Elgin/Parthenon marbles from plaster casts. Nevertheless, there is continuing dispute about where they should be housed. The debate is not simply about whose *culture* is represented – Greek, British or the world's – but about who is entitled to possess the genuine article. In the West, certainly, much store is set on something being 'the real thing'. A fake Rolex may keep time as accurately as one which came directly from the manufacturer, but (if its provenance is known) is valued far less, and not simply because of the difference in monetary price. It is the *sense* of the real, the authentic. It is what it symbolises. Similarly, no one is going to be that impressed by a fine photograph of the Mona Lisa, and stories about discovered or rediscovered masterpieces are common.

Ultimately, perhaps, what matters are the meanings that people project onto these inanimate objects, these 'things men have made' – to quote D.H. Lawrence.

Such meanings are the result of a complex and continuous process of socialisation, symbolic interaction and negotiation, where we learn the value of x, y or z. Even under conditions of capitalism, these meanings continue to be defined and redefined.

That social scientists may underestimate the ability of members of cultures to adapt and change can be illustrated by reference to Fuentarrabia, in Spain. As reported by Greenwood in the 1970s, the town's annual festival of the *Alarde* celebrated a historic victory over the French, but when it was shortened for the benefit of tourists, and then performed twice rather than once, he considered it had 'lost meaning'. This was symptomatic of a commercialised yet devalued culture, bought and sold in the tourism industry as 'culture by the pound'. In fact, re-visiting Spain several years later, he found that despite tourism, the festival was thriving. However, he *also* discovered its meaning to the participants had changed, and was now perceived by them to be a celebration of Basque nationalism. It was an honest reassessment, an admission that what he had previously written 'was an expression of both anger and concern' (Greenwood, 1989: 181), but one that is rarely mentioned by many tourism commentators, who find his initial analysis more politically correct and convenient.

Tourism may indeed introduce or exacerbate major social change, but it is easy to forget the hardships of work in agriculture in less developed countries, which is often depicted as rustic and idyllic, when life might more accurately be described as nasty, brutish and short. A similar process occurred in 19th century England, when the invisibility of the rural poor 'helped perpetuate and uphold the myth of arcadian beauty which could be seized upon and utilised in selective imagery for a great variety of purposes' (Short, 1992: 2). And Short continues:

> Thus to be truly English by the beginning of the twentieth century was to be rural. But 'rural' did not really mean rural *people*, and especially not *poor* rural people, who might not even fit stereotypes of poverty by living in picturesque cottages. The countryside was made by working people, but the rural idyll of pastoral [life] from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, itself an urban product, has largely banished them from the scene. (Short, 1992: 2–3)

While tourism development is likely to promote or exacerbate the process of commoditisation, this is not necessarily a new phenomenon. The museums and art galleries so beloved of cultural tourists include much that was traded, even in small-scale societies, and it was the market (albeit sometimes a restricted one) that prompted their production and encouraged the use of skills that might otherwise have fallen into disuse. Furthermore, while indigenous arts and crafts have sometimes been undermined by tourism (Graburn, 1984), the literature is replete with examples of where tourism has prompted a creative reaction in local people and has been instrumental in reviving arts and crafts that would otherwise have disappeared (Cohen, 1993; Daniel, 1996; Popelka & Littrell, 1991; Silverman, 2000).

To the Victor the Spoils

According to Hewison, though, it is the promoters of tourism who sanitise the past. In re-presenting it as entertainment, the 'heritage industry' mocks the dark,

grim reality of what actually happened. Mines are cleansed of their dirt and their danger, nuclear test sites become 'heritage centres', and museums compete to 'exploit the opportunities for the sale of souvenirs, refreshments and so forth' (Hewison, 1989: 19). He continues:

> History is gradually being bent into something called Heritage, whose commodity values run from tea towels to the country house. My criticism is not simply that it is largely focused on an idealised past whose social values are those of an earlier age of privilege and exploitation that it serves to preserve and bring forward into the present. My objection is that Heritage is gradually effacing History, by substituting an image of the past for its reality. Our actual knowledge and understanding of history is weakening at all levels, from the universities to the primary schools. (Hewison, 1989: 21)

This is a powerful argument, but it does rather assume that someone, somewhere, has privileged access to *real* knowledge, to a proper understanding, of what history and heritage are *really* about. By contrast, though, whatever elements of the past are presented as heritage – arts and crafts, events, rituals or buildings – they have already passed through a complex filtering process whereby someone, or some group, has *selected* them. Nothing – but nothing – is automatic heritage material. As Weber put it, 'all knowledge of cultural reality is always knowledge from particular points of view' (1949: 81).

In the United Kingdom in 1983 it may have seemed sensible enough for the Natural Heritage Conference to define 'heritage' 'as that which a past generation has preserved and handed on to the present and which a significant group of the population wishes to hand on to the future' (Hewison, 1989: 16). The definition begs several questions. Why was something considered worth 'handing on'? Who or what is the '*significant group*'? Who does the selecting? As the case studies discussed in this volume show, and as Lowenthal has discussed at length (1985, 1997), when such questions are posed it is apparent that what is presented from the past, and how it is portrayed and interpreted, is a crucial ingredient in the continuous formation and re-formation of perceptions of the present (Uzzell, 1989a, 1989b). It is a process in which numerous groups and agencies jockey for influence and power, and where dealers in 'authenticities' range from casual excursionists to 'objective' ethnographers and museum curators (Cohen, 1988).

If this view is accepted, it becomes much easier to explain the key feature of the process whereby sites are selected for special treatment as 'heritage' sites of some kind or another. It can be crudely summarised as 'to the victor the spoils'. The achievements of vanquished peoples are rarely accorded the luxury of heritage status, and Robben Island, for instance, would never have been nominated for World Heritage Listing by a white government in South Africa.

However, the cultural contributions of the defeated and the subordinate are not necessarily lost. They can be absorbed and/or reinterpreted. The 'Turkish' belly dance, for instance, was an import from Turkey's Arab possessions. Tikka Masala, a dish served in Indian restaurants in the United Kingdom and said by Robin Cook, a prominent British politician, to be an essential component of a 'traditional' Saturday night out in Britain, is a 'South Asian' dish invented specifically for the English palate! At other times, a dominated group may take on at least the semblance of the coloniser's culture. We thus find that Methodism is

accorded a key place in 'traditional' indigenous Fijian culture, to the extent that some Fijian nationalists want Fiji (with 45% of its population of Asian origin, and primarily Hindu) to be formally declared 'a Christian country'. By contrast, the cannibalism once practised by indigenous Fijians is little remembered, and when it *is* recalled, it is with a degree of embarrassment.

Let us Forget

In fact, where heritage is involved, collective amnesia is common. What is remembered, as tradition or heritage, is selected from a vast range of built, natural and cultural environments, to celebrate the past and bolster the present. Shameful episodes are rarely given prominence. At least initially, the memorial in Jerusalem to the massacred Jews, *Yad Vashem*, was only possible in Israel – and deals but little with non-Jews who shared the same fate. And as a memorial, like so many other memorials, it serves a dual purpose, enabling visitors to remember the fallen and simultaneously symbolising Israeli nationalism (Bowman, 1992: 129). By contrast, the death camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland evoke much ambivalence among residents who live in their shadow, and are virtually ignored in some tourist promotional material (Lennon & Foley, 2000: 63–4). Noticeably, while there are many examples of thanatourism, or dark tourism, this complex is rare among World Heritage Sites in that it is a memorial to infamy and shame rather than a celebration of past glories.

Class, status, power and nationalism: all are involved in the presentation and re-presentation of 'heritage', and as groups and classes rise and fall, so, too, do the claims for attention of different sites. In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge did their best to destroy what they saw as the intellectual element of the society and its achievements and the current regime has to decide how far this resurgent nation should go in publicising what happened in the 'killing fields'. The sites of torture, death and burial are clearly part of the nation's heritage, and in Phnom Penh the former high school now known as *Tuol Sleng*, where the Pol Pot regime tortured its victims, and the nearby Killing Fields, are graphic and gruesome reminders of what happened. Both are much visited by tourists, but there are still many in Cambodia who would prefer to forget – or have others forget – this period of torture, massacre and ignominy.

By contrast, Angkor Wat, the significance of which is debated by Tim Winter in this volume, is a different matter, and there seems to be less of a problem in celebrating this magnificent complex (against Thai assertions) as the achievement of the Khmer nation.

Similar issues arise when one considers how periods of colonialism are portrayed. In this volume, examples are given of the dilemmas faced by governments and tourism promotion agencies in depicting the colonial 'experience' in, for example, Singapore and Fiji. If colonialism was as damaging to the development of the colonised as is usually claimed, why should its buildings and anything else associated with it be celebrated at all, far less glorified as a form of achievement? Are the quaint old buildings in the centre of very modern cities – as in the case of Kuala Lumpur or Singapore – simply there as tourist attractions? If this is so, it might be argued that designating them as 'heritage' is little other than a ploy to attract tourists.

Ambiguities also surround the role of sites related to African slavery in the UK, USA, Caribbean and West Africa. Initially, their existence seems to confirm what Dann and Seaton (2001: 19) describe as a 'domination critique', which 'suggests that the determination of slavery heritage was mainly by powerful business institutions, their commercial agenda and the mainly white audiences they targeted'. If so, this would be a further exploitation of black slaves for white profit. However, as the authors recognise, the available facts are inconsistent with such a hypothesis. Not all sites are financed by private capital or geared to profit, and some are geared to black as well as white consumption. There was also a perception that some black people opposed slavery heritage sites on the grounds that they accentuated and perpetuated social disadvantage. Those who promoted them were in a no-win situation: 'If slavery heritage is not memorialised, it can be read as suppression; if it is commemorated, such heritage may be construed as unethical or compromised truth' (Dann & Seaton: 20).

Narratives of heritage, and the domain that heritage covers, are contested because there is nothing intrinsically sacrosanct about any building, any part of nature, or any cultural practice. As social relations ebb and flow, as one class or pressure group takes ascendancy over another, new perceptions, new views on the past and what was of *value* in the past, also take over. Previous accounts are challenged. Old statues are removed and new ones installed; Marx and Engels are replaced by new icons.

Putting it more phenomenologically, what is considered 'heritage' is continually subject to interpretation and reinterpretation, claim and counter claim, and negotiation. Whether we are dealing with formal categorisations of heritage – on the World Heritage List, or in any national hierarchies – the outcomes will depend on the balance of status and power at any one time and on who among the numerous stakeholders (if, indeed, all can be delineated) has the loudest voice. Who *are* the stakeholders? And how much are those who have the least power *really* involved in decisions about who or what constitutes heritage, or how it should be managed? Studies in this volume of heritage sites in The Netherlands, the USA and Mexico, in Kyrgyzstan, Cambodia, Vietnam and India, and Fiji strongly suggest that their participation is often minimal. The meanings such sites hold for them may be quite different from those propounded by national tourism marketing agencies and UNESCO. Similarly, taking a more historical view of heritage, where can the voices of the previously dispossessed be heard?

Who Decides?

It has been suggested that heritage is about individual and collective identity, that conflict occurs because we are socialised into cultures which predispose us to favour one set of indicators that include us in a specific group or category – hence excluding others from members of our group and ourselves from membership of theirs. Culture includes and excludes. It has been suggested that heritage may be about performance, 'fake' or 'genuine', and that this is linked to notions and judgements about the role of the *market*. Most of all, what is defined as heritage is linked to *power*: the power to impose a view of the world, especially of the past, on others. Perceptions of the past are closely linked to present hierarchies, and the voices of those at the top are often the most likely to prevail. By contrast,

the voices of the most lowly stakeholders – whose houses were built of wood or thatch rather than stone – are muted or silent, and those whose lives were blighted by massacre, torture and discrimination are also less remembered. The unknowns of the past lie in unmarked tombs, where no flame burns.

It would be comforting if museum curators and archaeologists could define once and for all what is of world importance, of universal value. Unfortunately, despite occasional claims to the contrary, this is not possible. Like 'lay' members of society, they too are social products of their time, of their cultures, and they too are in the business of articulating *stories*, from their own perspective.

This also applies to guides, whose performance invariably has political ramifications, which may sometimes be quite explicit. Moshe Dayan, an Israeli General, reportedly said he would prefer to contend with an Arab bomber pilot than a Palestinian guide (Bowman, 1992: 131). Even if the comment were apocryphal, it contains the germ of accuracy, as the tourist guide – along with the guidebook – is often the visitors' main source of information about a destination area. Many states have recognised this, and Israel is not alone in ensuring that, as far as possible, international visitors 'see' the sights from the perspective of a guide who has been trained and licensed by the state. By contrast, as Gemma McGrath indicates later in this volume when referring to Peru, there is much to be said for exposing tourists to local guides, and their distinct narratives.

It would be tempting, perhaps, to view the World Heritage Committee as a ruling body, the cultural equivalent of FIFA in association football, that could stipulate what is and what is not 'world heritage'. However, despite its title, it cannot determine which sites should be included on the World Heritage List. The Committee itself does not make nominations. Instead, as indicated in the following pages, these come from nation-states, and an application for World Heritage Listing is far from the end of a complex political process. Even when tentative lists are submitted, and preliminary conditions met by the submitting state party, it is difficult for the Committee to decide which sites are of universal value.

In any case, applications for World Heritage Status are neither made nor received in a global vacuum and, as indicated later in this volume, Europe and Judaeo-Christian monuments and sites continue to dominate the List. Such an international imbalance has been recognised by the World Heritage Committee, and there is now a *political* imperative to go out to other parts of the world and find more sites! Understandable though the desire to widen representation on the List might be, however, such a quest may sit uneasily with the establishment of criteria that clearly establish sites to be of universal significance.

Thirdly, many UNESCO employees are part of an international elite, which others are anxious to join. Academics, archaeologists, surveyors and restorers, for example, have their own interests in working for UNESCO, and inevitably (and quite properly) they develop links with others of like mind in specific nation-states. One consequence of this international network is that UNESCO officials may deliberately or unwittingly seek to influence which built, natural or cultural sites are selected for possible inclusion on the World Heritage List. Indeed, if they can persuade countries or regions with little representation on the World Heritage List to submit other sites for consideration, they might do so at considerable benefit to their careers.

Finally, in UNESCO-organised activities, 'supervision' by experts can

sometimes come to mean domination by experts. UNESCO support is valued, prestigious and important, and in many respects UNESCO sets the agenda. Where, even if mistakenly, it is felt inclusion on the World Heritage List might bring more tourists, and would thus increase economic prosperity and status, it might be considered politic to do what the experts suggest.

While it would again be comforting if these dilemmas could be resolved, this is unlikely to occur. The idealistic quest for universals in heritage will always be conducted within the inter-subjective and highly political process in which World Heritage Listing takes place. As Tomke Lask and Stefan Herold suggest, in this volume, there would be clear benefits in setting up what they term 'tourism observation' stations in tourist destination areas, where all stakeholders could come together in a continuous exchange of information and concerns, and where inter-cultural interaction and exchange become genuine possibilities. However, the difficulties in such a project should not be underestimated. Debates and conflicts over 'heritage' take place in an ever-shifting scenario, where the 'achievements' of one class, one ethnic group, one nation-state, one era, are always negotiated and reassessed by the next. History will be doctored, presented and re-presented to suit the demands and the imperatives of the present. The barbarians are always at the gate, but today's barbarians are tomorrow's establishment. And much as we should like it to be otherwise, there is no objective referee 'out there', in Paris, or in any UNESCO office, who can decide for us.

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World Heritage as NIMBY? The Case of the Dutch Part of the Wadden Sea

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Acquiring the world heritage label, a reward for establishing and preserving an outstanding environment, is often assumed to be an honour for the local population and a useful leverage for the tourist and environmental organisations. However, the case of the Wadden Sea, a trilateral nomination by Denmark, Germany and The Netherlands, makes clear that this is not always true, and public consultation in The Netherlands has revealed that these local stakeholders do not support such a nomination. It seems they epitomise a 'Not in my back yard' (NIMBY) approach to World Heritage listing. This discussion paper examines the factors that complicate the nomination process. Contrary to common expectation, why do critical stakeholders, like the tourism industry, local inhabitants and environmental organisations become opponents? What are the interests at stake that subvert the balance of benefits and costs of the world heritage status to the extent that nomination is suspended? Is this phenomenon an exception, or an indication that obtaining the accolade is increasingly assessed from a rational rather than an emotional viewpoint, and that 30 years after the convention which created it the world heritage stamp has lost its uniqueness?

Keywords: world heritage nomination process, local opposition

Introduction

The Wadden Sea Conservation Area is the coastal area from Den Helder in The Netherlands to Esbjerg in Denmark (Figure 1). This wetland of 8000 km² is a breeding place for many species of fish and birds. With its tidal system, it is a natural area of exceptional value (Abrahamse & Van der Wal, 1989). Furthermore, the widely recognised archaeological value of the area, the sustained interaction of the population with nature that can be traced in the landscape, the considerable impact of urban culture, the element of tradition, and the awareness of the natural heritage, make the Wadden Sea a cultural area of 'national and international importance' (Vollmer *et al.*, 2001: 12–13).

In the light of these qualities, the World Heritage nomination of the Wadden Sea by Germany, Denmark and The Netherlands seemed to be a straightforward case for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and its subsidiary organisations. A feasibility study, documented in the Burbridge Report, underlined this. The Wadden Sea qualifies for listing because it fulfils the three most important criteria of outstanding universal value, integrity and the existence of management plans:

> The Wadden Sea Conservation Area is worthy of inscription as a world heritage site as it meets all the UNESCO criteria as a 'natural property' representing one of the world's greatest wetland ecosystems . . . the integrity of a world heritage site could be maintained [and listing] is feasible under the current conservation and management arrangements. (Burbridge, 2000: 1)