

Editorial

Sustainability of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. An introduction

Guest Editor: Sergiu MUSTEAȚĂ

Cultural heritage is a shared resource of people worldwide, representing humanity's relationship with the past and its traditions. Cultural heritage is diverse, and people are responsible for understanding and safeguarding it for future generations. UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and other international organizations have adopted several conventions in cultural heritage preservation that have set common rules and standards.

All signatory countries have accordingly agreed to establish efficient cultural heritage management and safeguard it. As such, cultural heritage emerges as a key element of individual and social well-being, and its protection, management, and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone. One of the most important treaties in the heritage field is the UNESCO Convention concerning protecting the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted in 1972 during the general convention held in Paris (UNESCO, 1972), which aims to safeguard humankind's cultural and natural heritage internationally. However, becoming a part of this international convention and implementing it nationally is a long process.

Recent debates on cultural heritage have increased due to the UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which encourage member states for a global partnership to recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth, etc. Another critical decision was made by UN Security Council Resolution 2347 (UN, 2017), which condemned the unlawful destruction of cultural heritage. However, the preservation, management, and promotion of heritage have become a global problem from many points of view: political, international, regional security, scientific, technological, socio-economic, and cultural.

Marking half a century of implementation of the World Heritage Convention and following the culmination of the third Circle of Periodic Evaluation, a timely debate emerges regarding sustainable management practices for World Heritage Sites. Investigating the sustainability of UNESCO World Heritage sites requires a multifaceted approach, given the various layers of significance linked with them and their positioning within the broader frame of heritage preservation. Embodying significant cultural and historical value, the UNESCO heritage sites require actions pertaining not only to the conservation of monuments and ensembles but also to environmental conservation (as many of them house unique ecosystems threatened by climate change and human activities), careful management of the impact of tourism (albeit a significant revenue source, tourism may also trigger a compromise of site integrity and a negative impact on local communities).

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The global collaboration facilitated by being a part of the UNESCO World Heritage List encourages knowledge exchange and collective solutions. Meanwhile, educational initiatives receive a larger reception and likely have an increased impact, thus raising awareness about their cultural, historical, and ecological importance. Environmental sustainability, cultural preservation (including community engagement and educational programs), economic viability (initiatives to support local communities, tourism management strategies, and community-based enterprises), social equity, collaboration among various stakeholders, and promoting policies that balance conservation and development objectives as well as risk preparedness (to address threats such as natural disasters and human activities) are but a few of the many challenges raised by considering sustainability as a key component of world heritage sites management.

A new special issue of the journal *Culture. Society. Economy. Politics* (Culture-SEP) includes papers focused on the Sustainability of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites and gives examples of an integrated approach to better preservation and management. Oleksandr Kapranov, in his paper *Spraying Paint on Stonehenge: The Framing of Climate Change Protest by the Leading Anglophone Media*, discusses how the leading Anglophone mass media frame an incident of spraying paint on Stonehenge, one of the well-known World Heritage Sites from the United Kingdom. Lucia Nováková, in her paper *UNESCO Water Structures: Heritage, Innovation and Sustainable Use*, analyses ancient water structures, such as Roman aqueducts and Persian qanats, as an exemplary representation of water management, their adaptive reuse, and integration into modern environments. In their paper *A Participatory Approach to Developing an Integrated and Sustainable Management Plan: The Case of Regensburg*, Sebastian Franz-Josef Daniel, Matthias Ripp, and Nils Scheffler critically examine the requirements for today's World Heritage Site Management. The study is based on an analysis of the Regensburg World Heritage Management Plan as an example of sustainable and inclusive cultural heritage management. The study of Sergiu Musteață *The World Heritage Tentative List. A Case of Romania: Problems and Perspectives* discusses the role of the Tentative List in the nomination to the World Heritage List process. Based on the Romanian case, the author analyzes the latest developments, decisions to update the list, and the perspective of the World Heritage List nominations. A. Ege Yildirim's contribution *Mudurnu: The Realities of a Small Turkish Silk Road Town vs. UNESCO World Heritage* is a story of a heritage management professional's journey through various roles, from the academic, consultant, administrator, and property owner through to entrepreneur, to support the cultural and natural heritage-led sustainable development of the Historic Guild Town of Mudurnu, a small town inscribed on Türkiye's UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List and located on the northwest Anatolian section of the Silk Road.

Although the Sustainability of the UNESCO World Heritage is a rather broad topic, we hope that our studies, based on concrete examples and situations from various countries, will contribute to a better understanding of the realities faced by properties inscribed on the World Heritage List and the need to apply comprehensive management for their sustainable preservation and promotion.

References

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Guest editor biography

Sergiu MUSTEAȚĂ, PhD, is professor at the Valahia Univeristy of Targoviste, Romania. He earned his PhD in History from "Al. I. Cuza" University, Iași, Romania, in 1999, and completed habilitations at "Ovidius" University, Constanța (2017), and "Ion Creangă" Pedagogical State University, Chișinău, Moldova (2021). A former research fellow, he has held several scholarships in the US (Fulbright at the University of Maryland, UC Berkeley, and Stanford), Germany (DAAD and Humboldt at Bonn, Freiburg, and Braunschweig), Hungary (OSI at Central European University), Sweden (Swedish Institute at Uppsala University), and Poland (Thesaurus Poloniae at the International Cultural Centre, Krakow). Author of numerous monographs and scientific publications, as well as editor of books and two journals, his research focuses on Eastern European history, cultural heritage preservation, and history textbook analysis.

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