

Forum: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Issue #1: Considering the protection of cultural heritage sites from damage due to armed conflict and tourism

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Introduction

After WWI and WW2, UNESCO was founded to keep Earth's and humanity's most important sites alive, making sure that everyone can have the opportunity to experience them. The preservation and record of these sites is of utmost importance, since it shows us where humanity has come from, and the great things we have achieved through collaboration and leadership. For the most part, UNESCO and the world have succeeded in this regard, keeping Machu Picchu alive, Ancient Egyptian temples from flooding, etc. However, since the 21st century, more and more threats have been looming on these coveted world heritage sites, war, and tourism most prevalent among them.

For many years, historic places have been backdrops for heavy armed conflicts. In July 2012, the Syrian City of Aleppo, a World Heritage Site, became a battleground for an uprising led by rebel fighters against the control of the Syrian government. Because of this armed conflict, a lot of the most important sites inside of Aleppo have been destroyed. This historic city then became the battlefield for the fighting, especially funded from other less involved governments. Not only was the city torn apart by handheld weaponry, but it

was also destroyed by mortar fire and rockets.

On the other hand, tourism related to UNESCO world heritage sites may sound like a good thing, and for the most part, it is encouraged and enabled by UNESCO. However, in some cases, like Angkor Wat in Cambodia, the increasing tourist attention to sites like this has caused major problems to the site, where scientists are struggling to find ways to keep it intact. Increases in accommodation for tourists has led to some of Angkor to sink into its foundations. Some temple steps have been sanded away by the amount of people that have walked on them. Its structural integrity has been damaged, and its tour guides fear it may collapse one day with tourists inside.

Stories like this aren't just limited to these two places. For the longest time, and especially in the 21st century, the accessibility of people to historic sights and the increase of armed conflicts in unstable countries have led to many sites being destroyed. Recently, the war in Ukraine has become a high-profile case of cultural heritage that should be preserved.

On the other hand, tourism and overcrowding of such wonders can actually lead to a detrimental effect. It is absolutely imperative that the countries of the world work together to make sure that these historical sights, that are critical to our heritage as humanity, be kept alive for the next generations.

Definition of Key Terms

Armed Conflict: Fighting amongst States or prolonged armed violence between government authorities.

Cultural Heritage: Landmarks, buildings, archeological sites, artifacts, beliefs, and practices that we inherit and are part of our cultural identity rooted in the

collective memories of individuals in the past.

World Heritage Sites: Places on earth that are of outstanding universal value to humanity and part of the World Heritage List, selected by UNESCO.

Cultural Diplomacy: Making a decision based on the exchange of ideas, values, beliefs, and any other cultural values in order to promote collaboration and trust between people of different cultures.

Intangible Heritage: Practices, expressions and knowledge that individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage and representation.

Conflict heritage : Cultural remnants and intangible aspects of past conflicts and wars including monuments, structures, and artifacts associated with the conflict.

Over-tourism: A scenario in which the presence of an excessive number of tourists results in a negative impact on the local community, the surrounding environment, and the quality of experience for visitors.

Heritage Preservation: Measures taken to protect and extend the duration of buildings, structures, artifacts, and other cultural resources that have significant historical or cultural value.

Iconoclasm: Motivation to destroy and deconstruct artifacts, icons and monuments, frequently influenced by socio-political rationale in order to dismantle one's culture.

General Overview

Heritage Preservation

It is vital for the world to understand the origin and evolution of humanity and of what surrounds us. Heritage is the representation of cultural and historical treasures that generations before us have left. Preservation of such treasures is not exclusively about the protection of heritage but also about honoring the

past and creating a sense of appreciation for the distinctiveness it brings to the world, the identities that shape countries and the reflection of behaviors and cultures that others have left behind. This historical evidence stands as a valuable source of education as it is a prominent factor of being able to preserve cultural identity and ensure that future generations have access to the history and traditions of their ancestors, just as we did with past cohorts. Heritage landmarks are nowadays, a common retaliation strategy during times of conflicts. There are far too many cases of deliberate destruction or damage to these sites as a result of military conquests and invasions. Such attacks can be traced back to the ancient emperors and sultans in Greece and Egypt, who took the Pyramids and the Library of Alexandria as a form of retaliation and a means to teach a lesson. Assaults like these are what cause global disparage on these sites, which often lead to a tangent of questions and doubts on why these landmarks were even as vulnerable in the first place. However, the world's open-mindedness creates a strain on the effort of protecting these sites systematically. The world recognizes and sheds light on the intangible cultural heritage that many countries hold. This form of heritage is everything that is embodied by individuals, their representation, and their practices. For instance, groups like the Ughyurs and Rohingya are particularly vulnerable to losing what represents their intangible heritage as they face displacement and violence on a daily basis. The damage to cultural heritage sites doesn't just derive from natural factors but from those that are caused by human activities, in particular theft and looting. These actions are done with the intention of depriving people of their identity and past. The common controversiality when talking about the resulting damages is these : Physical structures like mosques, monuments, and temples can be reconstructed, yet, much like others, the cultural and historical integrity they hold is undoubtedly lost. To appreciate our heritage we have to understand that this preservation helps connect communities with their past and

brings a sense of belonging, hence, an investment in heritage preservation is an investment in the future.

Repercussions of Heritage Tourism

While tourism can be a useful tool for promoting heritage and increasing public appreciation of world heritage, it is often perceived as a threat to the preservation of said heritage artifacts and sites. Tourism can have several adverse effects, but one of the most significant is poorly managed heritage tourism, which frequently results in over-tourism. The numbers of visitors increase dramatically, even reaching critical levels. One of the biggest impacts of over-tourism on heritage sites is the physical damage that can occur from the large numbers of visitors. Erosion, damage to the site's foundation, or even collapse are probable to happen in the case of overcrowding. At the same time, the environment becomes a target, as large numbers of visitors create excessive waste and the influx of people causes pollution. UNESCO had even classed Australia's Great Barrier Reef, endangered, after man-made pollutants influenced the water's temperature and quality resulting in damage to the coral and reef structure. But most importantly, direct vandalism to the structures become higher in risk as people tend to hide amongst tourists. Damage like graffiti on the Colosseum and spray paint on The Bean in Chicago are compromised by the uncontrolled entry of tourists. Ultimately, the sites become a commercialized attraction rather than a place of cultural significance.

Motivation behind targeting heritage in conflict

"The systematic destruction of cultural symbols embodying Syrian cultural diversity reveals the true intent of such attacks, which is to deprive the Syrian people of its knowledge, its identity and history", said UNESCO's Director-General. In this particular case, the terrorist group Daesh, strategically targeted a specific demographic area in Syria with the aim of not only physical

destruction but attacking the identity of its citizens. The Daesh not only destroyed the site, but pursued to exploit and loot the area illegally as a means to improve financial gain by digging and trading tangible heritage. These actions fall under the definition of iconoclasm, which involves the impulsive destruction of images, landmarks and artifacts for political reasons. As cultural heritage becomes increasingly intangible, it becomes a challenge to understand the extent of the damage caused. Due to the intangible nature of cultural heritage, it becomes a vulnerable target in moments of violence and chaos and proves to be challenging to protect from deliberate attacks by armed groups. These attacks are carried out with the intention of undermining the culture and history of their opponents, or in a move of financial gain by looting and selling the artifacts. In conflict zones, perpetrators often go unpunished, leading to an environment of impunity. This lack of accountability sends a message that cultural heritage is not valued or protected, thereby diminishing its importance.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Italy

Italy is the host country of ICCROM, one of the most significant organizations in preserving cultural heritage. It has always been dedicated to preserving the heritage of the world. It has been very active, particularly as it pertains to armed conflict, as it sought to outlaw and punish the export, import, and selling of cultural heritage in Iraq in the early 21st century. Italy has long had a stance of upholding values like human dignity, acceptance, as well as zero tolerance for any attacks against a culture.

China

China, one of the most ancient still-standing civilizations in the world, naturally has a lot of cultural heritage to bask in and protect. Because of its 56 World Heritage Sites and impressive globalization, it hailed 145 million tourists before the pandemic. Because of these rising numbers, China has experienced the symptoms of mass tourism. In response, China created the Tourism Law to help manage and limit the number of tourists at its most important destinations and sites. However, China should be held responsible for its suppression of the Uyghur and Yazidi populations and their culture.

Iraq

A country very much affected by armed conflict. Iraq has experienced first-hand what war can do to even the most prized sites. Now, its ancient city of Mosul has become one of UNESCO's leading projects following its 2014-2017 occupation. This has since become one of the most challenging UNESCO campaigns to date, looking to restore the city to its former glory, making sure that it goes exactly back to what it was. Churches, Mosques, and Minarets are currently being built.

France

France, a country that has its own rich history and culture, has been committed to encouraging companies as well as countries to participate as much as possible. In 2016, it was the French who organized the United States, NGOs, private partners, public institutions, and more in Abu Dhabi, to create a national alliance to protect cultural heritage. Hereby setting up the ALIPH, an organization that UNESCO itself is a part of. France, in comparison to other countries, wants to take a more aggressive approach to protection, which it urges the international community to consider.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1940	Destruction of the Leuven University Library in Belgium in the Second World War.
1954	Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the event of Armed Conflict, which asked signing countries to take action like registration for such things that necessitate action and special care, providing a place for storage of such items, and restricting their use to prevent it from damage.
1964	The Venice Charter: International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites - Set forth principles of conservation and authenticity of different architectural and monumental sites. This document is still used today as an establishment that places like this are not only art, but also a part of history, as well as gives instructions and regulations on how to properly upkeep such places from different periods.
1972	The Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage - Showed the link between natural sites as well as man-made sites, seeing as they demonstrate the link between humans and nature. This conference also defined the all-important World Heritage List and its criteria.
1975	Creation and ratification of the World Heritage List, along with the World Heritage Fund, used for preservation and promotion of these sites.
1976	Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas, which highlights the areas around such historic sights and why they're of as much importance as the sites themselves. Also, it calls for these sites to be protected

- from destruction, as they contribute to countries economically, and can lead to social disturbance.
- 1990 The Mosques of Bosnia were destroyed by Serbian and Croatian forces during the Bosnian War. Ethnic groups were particularly targeted, along with their places of worship. They're now fully rebuilt as of 2016.
- 1992 The UNESCO World Heritage Center is created, which concerns itself with the day-to-day management of the sites on the list.
- 1994 NARA Document on Authenticity - Document produced by experts that convened in Japan, decided that the heritage of each is the heritage of all, and that the whole world should be represented on the list, and be treated the same. It also emphasizes the need for more public attention, and that all people of heritage must feel represented and protected by this list.
- 2001 Taliban Extremists in Afghanistan blow up the Bamiyan Buddha statues as an act of iconoclasm, meant to cleanse the land of the symbols of the local people, whose religion was represented in the statues.
- 2002-2007 Creation of the 5 C's of UNESCO - Adoption of the Budapest Declaration on World Heritage, which is a new way for UNESCO stakeholders to contribute through 4 different key paths. Credibility, Conservation, Capacity-building, Communication, and Community. The World Heritage Partners Initiative, now known as PACT, was also launched at this time. This initiative makes it easier for organizations and people to help contribute to UNESCO's goals, making it a public mission for all.
- 2009 Chile's historic Atacama Desert is the driest place on earth, as well as a site where delicate drawings and artifacts of its old inhabitants remain to this day. In 2009, however, the Dakar Rally was hosted

there, and because of a combination of lack of preparation, disorganization, and negligence, six irreplaceable sites were destroyed.

2014

Destruction of the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, one of the most valued centers of historical preservation in the area. In 2014, a suicide car bomb attack aimed at the police hit the museum, ruining artwork and countless artifacts inside.

2018

The Warsaw Recommendation on Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage is developed - An outline and "instructional manual" on how to recover and restore a World Heritage site following an armed conflict or disaster otherwise.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

UNESCO has a small number of resolutions, measures, treaties and safeguards that focus on the protection and conservation of heritage sites. Nevertheless, they hold a popular history with hosting conventions and conferences that look into potential factors that might pose a risk for heritage treasures and what to do in case of said risks arise.

1. The Recommendation concerning the Protection, at the National Level, of the Cultural and Natural Heritage is one of few recommendations that the United Nations has set to move this issue forward. This assemblage was adopted by UNESCO's General Conference in Paris, November 16th, 1972. When talking about heritage preservation, UNESCO considers it of utmost importance to maintain and develop cross-national collaborations while simultaneously taking into consideration the importance and effort of fostering appreciation and uniqueness of these landmarks. Their endeavors were successfully represented with the focus of the recommendation, which was to develop the ongoing program that uses education in the field of heritage as a tool to treasure our culture. These

sorts of recommendations create a sense of unity as superiors are able to freely share the risks that arise from fortifying a heritage site in one's own country and what approaches can governments take in those scenarios.

2. United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili, predicts an increase in tourism and states that it has become a priority to encourage joint effort between culture and tourism sectors so that the world sees change as quickly as possible. In 2008, UNESCO joined a partnership with the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), in order to develop The UNWTO Guidelines for Sustainable Development of Cultural Tourism. The development of global criteria soon became an efficient method to protect heritage just as much as it is promoted. The recent decline of COVID-19 cases represents a significant increase within the tourism division, more importantly, its economic sector. In order to maintain the steady-state economy in the tourism sector the UNWTO has set a group of goals that aim to create a safer, more sustainable tourism environment. The World Tourism Organization, however, believes that the comfort of citizens is equally important, and so they want to ensure commerce when it comes to visitations on important landmarks. Their collaboration remained when they hosted the 4th World Conference on Tourism and Culture : Investing in Future Generations, on December 12th 2019. The conference serves as a lesson to understand that tourism is much more than an economic upswing but rather a tool to protect heritage tourism.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

UNESCO was founded first to fight for the preservation of the cultures of our world and their respective histories. Since then, UNESCO has funded, encouraged, and facilitated contributions to this case, from governments to NGOs to individuals alike. It has now become “harder” to damage historical sites theoretically. But in reality, the penalizing process is the only thing that has become more dramatic. For example, members of a Jihadist group, called Ansar Dine, were sentenced to nine years in prison for destroying Muslim shrines in Mali. Even so, this punishment is pretty tame and short-term. We must work not only to expand punishments after the crimes, but also take preventive measures. Past amendments facilitate the preservation and registration of sites. This is something that nations should expand upon, but also should diverge from and take more aggressive action than has been taken in the past.

Possible Solutions

The lack of resolutions that have been developed to battle this issue, is one of concern. The United Nations intends to target the scarcity of protection aimed towards heritage sites. However, they have not efficiently targeted more particular pressing issues like how armed conflict and over-tourism negatively affects cultural landmarks. Nonetheless, they have provided us with conventions, events, and recommendations that help us brainstorm systematic resolutions.

World heritage is playing a bigger role in our legacy and our future every day. The world's population is putting their own future in danger. A deeper understanding of the significance of these landmarks can be achieved by educating and molding young minds to appreciate world heritage. Armed conflict and the growth of the tourism industry frequently cause intended and unintended harm to these world heritage sites because people fail to

appreciate the significance of preserving these monuments with such high cultural value. Implementing heritage education in the curriculum gears students with the knowledge and skills required to grasp their special cultural and historical value. It fosters admiration and respect, helps students comprehend the restrictions that should be placed on visiting these historical locations, and motivates them to advocate for their preservation.

It is crucial that global leaders comprehend that political objectives shouldn't get in the way of UNESCO's efforts to safeguard cultural and natural assets. Governments frequently ignore UNESCO's decision-making process when deciding how to handle global heritage sites going forward. In order to prevent commercial considerations and self-serving state actions from jeopardizing global heritage sites, there should be an active process where legislation is made to guarantee complete openness among nations. While each nation must concentrate on building a strong foundation for itself, it is equally crucial to establish boundaries and a partnership with UNESCO, whose main goal is to advance elements that will inspire the world's future leaders and advance global evolution.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

This issue most relates to the 11th sustainable development goal, Sustainable Cities and Communities. This goal is mostly related to making human settlements sustainable, resilient, and safe. Additionally, a key priority is community building, which is the main goal of UNESCO, by making sure that the worldwide community has access to each other's history and cultures. Most importantly, this issue is verbatim of target 11.4, "Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage". This goal's indicators of success also focus on the amount of money and effort dedicated to the preservation and protection of historical sites.

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Appendix

I. ICCROM

A. UNESCO-founded organization based in Rome, Italy, dedicated to preserving the cultural heritage of all countries.

<https://www.iccrom.org/>

II. ALIPH

A. International foundation with a mission to protect culture and history, even around armed conflict. A great place to see the biggest international conservation projects right now, particularly as it pertains to armed conflict.

<https://www.aliph-foundation.org/en>

III. GSTC

A. A non-profit organization Council that actively participates with the aim of establishing global standards for policy-makers and destination managers in order to develop a better world wide

understanding and appreciation on the cruciality of tourism sustainability.

<https://www.gstcouncil.org/>

IV. UNWTO

A. A United Nations specialized agency that focuses on facing the challenges that the tourism sector faces. They find opportunities to promote responsible tourism while also progressing with the 17 sustainable development goals.

<https://www.unwto.org/>

V. ICOMOS

A. An international non-profit organization that aims to conserve world monuments, sites and intangible heritage by applying and promoting scientific techniques and methodology.

<https://www.icomos.org/en>

VI. International Humanitarian Law Centre

A. Website exploring important treaties, conventions and protocols regarding the targeting of cultural heritage areas, its use as a tool of retaliation, and the intentions that come along with.

<https://www.diakonia.se/ihl/resources/international-humanitarian-law/ihl-protection-cultural-heritage/>