Preserving the heritage of humanity? Obtaining world heritage status and the impacts of listing

Aa, Bart J.M. van der

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Chapter 1
Conceptualising world heritage

The establishment of the world heritage convention and subsequent formulation of a world heritage list can be regarded as a logical progression of events. Inheritance of property and objects takes place at different levels of scale. In the past, objects of inheritance could take the form of houses or tools to cultivate the land. Likewise, a whole community could pass their land on to the next generation. These processes at the *family* or *local* scale level can be seen as the instances of the continuity of heritage.

Roughly from the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century onwards, heritage has been used at the national level by countries to underline, among others, their historical roots. Attention to the past has been further increased by the rise of tourism and the appeal of ideas behind the Grand Tour or *Bildungsreise* (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996: 46; Williams 1998: 183). Heritage was a useful tool to show the continuous, long-lasting identity of a country, justifying its existence. Stonehenge (United Kingdom), for example, is "'explained' in terms of roots, and of 'our' 'deep' national past" (Bender 1993: 270). Besides these objects, the landscape itself has also "become a compelling symbol of national identity" (Lowenthal 1993: 6). The use of heritage to construct a national identity falls within the wider framework of 'nation building', and aims at "binding the state and its inhabitants – a nation or nations – together" (Paasi 1996: 42).

Heritage sites are preserved to pass on natural and cultural sites in a reasonable state to the next generation. For example, the consciousness of preserving the natural environment arose in the United States of America in the first half of the nineteenth century. The movement was a response to the destruction of the natural wilderness of Niagara Falls, which had been visibly turned into a man-made environment (Appleton 1993: 160). In 1872, Yellowstone, the world's first national park was established, and the idea of designating national parks spread throughout the world in the following decades.

One hundred years after the creation of the first national park, in 1972, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) introduced 'the convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage'. The accompanying world heritage list includes natural, cultural and mixed sites, whereby the last-mentioned category includes sites with both natural and cultural features. The aim of the convention is to preserve the most important heritage sites around the globe for all humanity. The 1972 convention is the research object of this study, which begins with a conceptual discussion on theoretical issues such as the existence and selection of world heritage.

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1.1 Background of the world heritage convention

The historical underpinnings of the world heritage convention were laid about forty years before its establishment in 1972. The 1931 Athens Conference organised by the League of Nations created the basis for cultural world heritage; the lobby for natural world heritage sites started in 1948 with the establishment of the International Union for the Protection of Nature (IUPN) (Pressouyre 1993: 20).

After World War II the United Nations (UN) continued the work of the League of Nations and one of UN's sub-organisations UNESCO had "to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among nations" (UNESCO 2004b). UNESCO became an important actor in saving heritage sites around the globe. Notable measures included the emergency projects to save Venice (Italy) and Abu Simbel (Egypt) from flooding in the 1960s. These incidental projects were followed by lengthier renovation projects at the Borobudur (Indonesia) and Moenjodaro (Pakistan) (Turtinen 2000: 9).

UNESCO was engaged in creating an international convention for *cultural* heritage sites to broaden its activities to include more countries and to give its activities a more structural character. At the same time, the IUCN (World Conservation Union), the successor of the IUPN, worked toward introducing a global treaty for *natural* sites. The two international movements led to one convention for both types of heritage sites largely thanks to American influence (Batisse 1992: 15). In 1965, the Nixon government expressed its wish to create a world heritage trust to preserve the most important *cultural* and *natural* sites in the world. President Nixon considered the centennial anniversary of Yellowstone National Park as the opportune moment to introduce a world heritage convention in which all countries would "agree to the principle that there are certain areas of such unique worldwide value that they should be treated as part of the heritage of all mankind" (Train 1995). The envisaged world heritage trust incorporated both natural and cultural heritage sites, which is analogous to the structure of the federal American National Park Service (NPS).

The bottom line has remained unchanged since the Americans formulated their ideas. Till today the world heritage convention for natural and cultural sites still envisions that "the preservation of this common heritage concerns us all" (UNESCO 2004a). The Spanish name of the convention – *Patrimonio de la humanidad*, literally meaning 'heritage of humanity' – stresses even more vigorously that the sites are a concern for all citizens of the world.

1.1.1 There is no world heritage

The world heritage convention has been in existence for more than thirty years, but there is still a fair amount of critique on the viability of the world heritage concept. Lowenthal (1998b: 227-235) underlined that heritage is a private, not public resource: "Heritage is normally cherished not as common but as private property. Ownership gives it essential worth… Claims of ownership, uniqueness, and priority engender strife over every facet of collective legacies". Similarly, Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996: 70) have stressed that "heritage is ultimately a personal affair", and it is likely to become a contested resource when more than one individual claims it. The term 'contested resource' refers here to the notion that various persons have different reasons for preserving or not preserving a site: "all heritage is someone's heritage and therefore logically not someone else's" (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996: 21).

World heritage sites are especially susceptible to contestation, as these sites are claimed for different purposes by various actors at more scale levels than any other kind of heritage. According to Lowenthal (1998b): "Too much is now asked of heritage. In the same breath we commend national patrimony, regional and ethnic legacies, and a global heritage shared and sheltered in common. We forget that these aims are usually incompatible" (p. 227; see also Graham *et al.* 2000: 181).

The contestation of world heritage relates to the varying views about the values that different people attach to heritage, which affects their opinion on the management of the site. Issues such as "should we preserve the site?", "how should we preserve the site?" and, "who is responsible for the site?" are likely to receive different answers from different actors. Various groups hold different views on how to manage a site, but who is in charge? The decision about who decides how to manage a site is either the society that values it (Pearson and Sullivan 1995: 33) or the one who owns it. This is, however, not always the same actor, and certainly not mankind as a whole.

People's contrasting opinions on how to manage a site can be illustrated with an example from the Ninstints village in Northern Canada. The local people prefer to stick to their tradition of throwing the totem poles away after new ones have been carved. They refuse to utilise a long-term high-tech treatment as made available by the national heritage organisation Parks Canada to extend the lifespan of a pole (Cameron 1992a: 4). Likewise, a group's belief can require material elimination rather than preservation, such as in the case of the destruction of the Buddhist statues of Bamiyan in Afghanistan (Gamboni 2001: 10; Ashworth and Van der Aa 2002: 447). Heritage sites related to warfare are especially sensitive to the conquered. Jacques (1995) poses a question for consideration: "does a battlefield where the outcome of one nation's history was determined merit recognition at a world scale? It might even be offensive to other (losing) nations if it does" (p. 99). Heritage often belongs to the past of one specific group, and is not likely to be regarded as the 'heritage of all mankind'.

Similarly, but at lower scale levels, such as at the European level, policy makers have been struggling to define a common cultural heritage (Pavković 1999: 73). Heritage is more often identified with and used for fragmenting rather than unifying processes and the world heritage list is at best a collection of local and national heritages (Ashworth 1997: 12; Ashworth 1998a: 117-118; Pocock 1997a: 267). As such, a truly world heritage convention, which was meant as an international attempt to create a global culture of a common human effort to preserve important heritage sites, does not exist: "a global culture could be only a memory-less construct or break up into its constituent national elements" (Smith 1991: 159).

1.1.2 World heritage exists

There are, however, also two indications that a world heritage list can be created and sustained. First, the convention is formulated in such a way that *national* and *world* heritage can co-exist side by side, as the international community can support heritage sites. And second, most heritage is in essence not national heritage.

1) National and world heritage can co-exist

The world heritage convention was designed to "complement, but not to compete with, national heritage conservation programs" (Bennett 1977: 22; see also ɪᴜᴄɴ 1982: 7).

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Each country is the primary actor over the designated heritage sites within its borders and decides how to manage the site. Other countries will only help when a site is in peril. Countries are likely to help, as the world becomes a global village. For instance, environmental issues are often at the top of the international agenda as they require a common approach (Vogler 1997: 225). The world heritage convention could, for example, "make a contribution to tackling the global climate issue" (Elder 1992: 214). Countries regard it their moral responsibility to assist foreign sites: "Unlike most of our forebears, we now see the living globe as a common legacy requiring our common care" (Lowenthal 1993: 5; see also Lowenthal 1998b: 228). Likewise, countries with historic links work together to manage their common heritage. For example, Sri Lanka and the Netherlands share dual guardianship for some heritage sites on the island, such as for the old town of Galle that is also included on the world heritage list (Attema and Keesom 1997: 349-350; see also Franssen 1997: 26-27).

Common care for important heritage sites makes its preservation independent from its location. Important heritage sites can be preserved in rich and poor countries alike. This is welcome, as not every country can preserve the heritage within its borders to the same standard (Fitch 1992: 399-400). This seems to be 'fair', as "heritage is no less important for the poor than for the rich" (Thompson 2000: 258). And the inhabitants of richer countries do benefit from the natural reservoirs such as in Africa (Cartwright 1991: 356), by making safaris or using its natural resources.

2) Most heritage sites are not national heritage
Countries consider heritage sites within their borders as their own, while they are often not the only legitimate owner. Some heritage sites originate from the period before the country wherein the site is located was created. Busek (2000: 256) has asserted that heritage related to persons like Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart or Franz Kafka are not national possessions. They have been claimed as a national property, while they were originally European or even global in character: "Bei der Fragestellung vom nationalen zum Weltkulturerbe möchte ich zu allererst festhalten, daß wir eigentlich geprägt durch das 19. Jahrhundert etwas als nationales Erbe verstehen, was in Wirklichkeit in der Tiefe der Geschichte von Haus aus jedenfalls immer ein Erbe einer uns bekannten Welt gewesen ist… Alle diese Dinge sind quasi 'national' geworden" (Busek 2000: 526-527). Likewise, Ashworth (1998b: 278) mentions the built relics of the dynastic regimes that pre-date the creation of the nation-state, such as the Habsburgs, Romanovs and Ottomans, as potential European sites.

The case for universal ownership is legitimate for some natural and cultural sites around the globe that deserve protection by all humanity. There are still some areas in the world, and even in the cosmos, which do not officially belong to any country, such as Antarctica, the marine environment, and the moon. In fact, the world heritage convention is the analogous version of the heritage of all mankind as conceptualised in space law (Van Heijnsbergen 1987: 9). In addition, Tuan (1977), reflecting on Ayers rock (Australia) and Stonehenge, points out: "certain objects, both natural and man-made, persist as places through aeons of time, outliving the patronage of particular cultures" (p. 162-163). Lynch (1960: 9) and Relph (1983) refer to 'imageability' instead of 'aeons of time'. Relph conceives 'aeons of time' in the following way: "Public places with high imageability do… tend to persist and to form an ongoing

focus for common experience – Red Square in Moscow, Niagara Falls, the Acropolis, have all attracted public attention through many changes in fashion and political systems and beliefs" (p. 35). As such, world heritage sites do exist.

1.1.3 The aim of the world heritage convention

The world heritage convention aims to preserve the world's 'best' heritage sites, that is sites that meet certain quality criteria. Other actors, however, may have other goals for obtaining the world heritage status, either for reasons of attracting tourists (Kinnaird *et al.*1994: 3; Richards 1996: 312; Gratton and Richards 1996: 7) or giving identity (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989: 196; Lash and Urry 1994: 247-248). Heritage tourism can offer an alternative source of income when regions have lost their traditional source of income. For instance, the deindustrialisation process has led to the creation of 'industrial heritage sites' (Hewison 1987). Local authorities can use the "valuable legacy of redundant sites" to give the local economy a boost when manufacturing jobs have been lost (Williams 1998: 185; Richards 1996: 312). Heritage sites which do not interest visitors may not become a heritage site (Larkham 1996: 14).

Heritage can also help to give meaning to the space around us as well. We may be in a better position to discover who we are and find shelter from the troubled present and uncertain future (Martin 1989: 3), because "the past is known, familiar" (Lynch 1972: 29). In this way, "the past is something inbuilt in human nature" (Williams 1998: 184) and satisfies "an important human need" (Relph 1983: 38).

1.2 The selection criteria

Each individual ascribes different values to a heritage site and will compose his or her own favourite heritage list: "All places and landscapes are individually experienced, for we alone see them through the lens of our attitudes, experiences, and intentions, and from our own unique circumstances" (Relph 1983: 36; see also Aitchison *et al.* 2000: 101). Drawing up a mutually acceptable heritage list is much more difficult, maybe even impossible, as each member of the group has to agree on its value.

1.2.1 Dimensions of valuating heritage

Determining *the* value of heritage sites is complex, as five dimensions of 'value' can be discerned. These five dimensions are, which values (functional), whose values (person- or group-dependent), where values (scale level), when values (past, contemporary or future), and uniqueness values (exceptional or general).

1) Which values: functional values of heritage

Dix (1990: 388) and Carver (1996: 46) discern a number of functional values under different headings with more or less the same meaning. Dix distinguishes three types of values concerning cultural heritage: emotional, cultural and usage value. The first one deals with "wonder, identity, spiritual and symbolic", the second with "historic, archaeological and scarcity" and the third with "functional, economic, social and political" values. Carver identifies more specific values and distinguishes between the associative, aesthetic, and economic. Feilden and Jokilehto (1998: 18-21) break the functional value down into eight possible dimensions: identity, artistic, rarity, economic, functional, educational, social, and political.

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General agreement on the value of a heritage site requires a means to weigh different functional values. This is not an easy task, as demonstrated by Divall (1999) on measuring the value of historic railroads: "One location might be of great technical significance, another of considerable social or economic value. How then can one weigh the two in the balance?" (p. 8).

2) Whose values: person- or group-dependent
Different actors assign different values to sites (Edwards and Llurdés i Coit 1996: 343). The scarcity value is of importance for real estate agents; a site manager might be more interested in the educational values of a site. Similarly, a site valued as highly exceptional in one culture may be less rated by another culture. This comes to the fore in different perceptions of the importance of site authenticity between the West and the Far East. Whereas authenticity in material, form and location is highly appreciated in the West, it is less important in the Far East: "Ise Shrine in Japan… has also been excluded from the world heritage list since it gets rebuilt every twenty years or so, and as such, is not considered 'authentic'" (Pettman 2002: 11). How can one compose a world heritage list while incorporating the values of different cultures?
The appraisal of a site also depends on people's level of education and specialisation (WVC 1993: 188). Should a site be valued by the general public or by experts in a specific field? Experts have commented on the absence of architectural ensembles from the twentieth century on the world heritage list: "No Corbusier. No Wright. No Neutra. No Kahn. No Aalto. No one was able to explain this mystery, which goes to show the distance modern architecture must travel to gain the hearts and minds of the general public" (Lefaivre 2002: 44). The general public has presumably never heard of these architects, let alone that it is bothered about the exclusion of modern buildings.
Heritage lists drawn up by academics and the general public are likely to differ. The problem would not be solved when only experts compose the list, as they have often different, even opposing, opinions on the value of a site (Leblanc 1984: 23). This is exemplified by the situation within the International Working Party for Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement (DOCOMOMO), where so many sections have been developed that one cannot reach consensus on the objects that should be nominated for the world heritage list (Meurs 1996: 52-53). The same pluriformity of views would apply in the event where only the general public were to compose lists.
The valuation of heritage sites is often a privilege for "elite groups and individuals rather than an articulated expression of the values of all members of a community" (Relph 1983: 71; see also Larkham 1996: 15). The question of who selects the past "is a question of who is able to identify him- or herself and the other at any given time and place" (Friedman 1994: 142). Powerful groups can deny the existence of identities other than theirs, which can especially affect minority groups. For instance, the cultural heritage of black South Africa was completely absent on South Africa's national monuments list until the 1980s (Tunbridge 1984: 178; Attema and Keesom 1997: 348).

3) Where values: local, national or global level
Heritage sites can be differently held in esteem at various scale levels, ranging between the individual and the global. The difficulty lies in deciding the applicable scale-level,

as this "depends upon our interpretation of history" (Thompson 2000: 257). Inherent danger lurks in over-valuation of one's own sites. Lowenthal (1998b), for example, observes "global agendas are still… recognisably rooted in chauvinism and imperial self-regard. The ideas stem above all from Europeans who rate their own national heritage as so superior it *ought* to be global" (p. 239; see also Lowenthal 1994: 47). Likewise, Van der Harten (1999: 19) observes that the local population of the city of Willemstad (Curaçao) highly value their historic city. This may be sufficient for a local or national designation, but does it substantiate the claim to universal recognition?

4) When values: past, contemporary or future
The outcome of a heritage valuation varies over time (Dix 1990: 388; Edwards and Llurdés i Coit 1996: 343). Sites regarded as valuable twenty years ago may be regarded as obsolete today. Likewise, today's heritage collection has not always been valued and their survival may well be regarded as an 'accident of history'. The present natural world heritage site of the Aldabra Atoll (Seychelles) was saved from oil-drilling in the late 1960s thanks to "the economic crisis of November 1967, the devaluation of the pound and the abandonment of a British military presence east of Suez" (Stoddart and Ferrari 1983: 25). Likewise, the windmills at Kinderdijk (the Netherlands) could survive, as they were used to house the millers after the opening of the new pumping station in 1927 (Bakker 1998: 32-360). Other, sometimes more impressive windmills, were demolished.
Heritage lists are drawn up in a current context (Lowenthal 1998b: 127). This means that "a world heritage list of hundred, even fifty years ago would have offered a fundamentally different profile of cultural significance than a list prepared in our own day" (Stovel 1994: 259). Similarly, "IUCN has recommended that several sites should be delisted due either to the loss of the values for which they were inscribed, or to the fact that they were mistakes to begin with" (Thorsell 2001: 34). To date the World Heritage Committee has never removed a world heritage site from the list, which is 'surprising' according to Davey (1992: 197).

5) Uniqueness values: exceptional or general
A heritage site can be valued between the two extremes of exceptional and general. Glantz and Figueroa (1997) argue that "nominations of many of the sites proposed for world heritage status use superlatives to describe these sites in order to meet the criteria of outstanding universal [value]: 'the largest', 'the only', 'the last', 'the first', 'the best', 'the oldest', and 'the worst'. Yet in reality, superlative characteristics… may not by themselves be sufficient or even necessary. Not all world heritage sites are superlative in nature but may be of a global importance because they are representative of a genre" (p. 361). Should one only inscribe the exceptional or also more general heritage sites? And how many sites of each genre should be inscribed? Today, several European royal castles grace the world heritage list: Drottningholm (Sweden), Schönbrunn (Austria), Potsdam (Germany), Aranjuez (Spain), Versailles (France), and the Winter palace (Russia). In contrast, Auschwitz concentration camp will remain the only concentration camp ever admitted on the list (Lewin 1998: 682-683). The World Heritage Committee has made a distinction between sites related to positive themes (such as castles and cathedrals) and negative events (like concentration camps).

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The World Heritage Committee entered Auschwitz on the world heritage list as a "symbol of humanity's cruelty to its fellow humans" (UNESCO 2004a). Would the Aral Sea (Kazakhstan/Uzbekistan) also deserve listing, as it represents an example of human-inflicted destruction described as "one of the worst human-made ecological disasters of the 20th century" (Glantz and Figueroa 1997: 371)? How has the world heritage convention been shaped to warrant a highly selective list?

1.2.2 The criterion of outstanding universal value
The criterion of 'outstanding universal value' is the prime principle behind site selection, but its exact meaning has not been defined in the convention text (Cleere 1998: 23). The World Heritage Committee should have operationalised this criterion, but "amazing as it may seem, the concept… has never been the object of a truly operational definition" (Musitelli 2003: 329). Fontein (2000: 33) even questions whether such an operationalisation is possible. Nonetheless, some indications of what may be understood by 'outstanding universal value' have been given in the course of time. The specified natural and cultural criteria (see also box 1-1) and the 'operational guidelines' give indications of *which* values should be of interest to *whom*, whether the list should only include *unique* sites or *general* sites, as well, at what *scale level* the site should distinguish itself and *when* this valuation takes place.

A world heritage site can be of aesthetic, historic and scientific value (Von Droste 1995b: 337-338). The educated public should be able to judge whether the sites merit the label 'outstanding universal value', as the list includes sites "that the educated public anywhere, without need for esoteric explanations, would be willing to accept as such" (Batisse 1992: 28-31). Cultural properties must be the best representative of their own culture (UNESCO 1978: 3), but the extent of a 'culture' has not been defined. The 'operational guidelines' state that sites should be compared with similar sites inside and outside that country. Both unique sites and best examples are allowed on the list (Layton and Titchen 1995: 177). And, it is only possible to remove a site from the list once it has lost its qualities due to human intervention or natural disasters. A site's devaluation as a consequence of new knowledge about other sites is no reason to remove a site from the list.

Photo 1-1: Two geological sites: Grand Canyon and Dorset and East Devon Coast.

This meaning of the criterion of outstanding universal value leads to contestations. For example, the three identified functional values – aesthetic, historic and scientific –

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should be of importance for all educated world citizens. However, scientifically interesting sites are mainly of interest to scientists, while the educated public has most interest for historically and aesthetically appealing sites. A comparison between geological sites – the Grand Canyon (United States of America) and the Dorset and East Devon Coast (United Kingdom) – clarifies this. The Grand Canyon is arguably the world's best-known geological site for its aesthetic scenery. Experts may also value the Dorset and East Devon Coast for its scientific qualities, but the educated public may not agree that both sites are put on the list (see photo 1-1).

The World Heritage Committee can easily change the criteria as formulated in the 'operational guidelines'. In contrast, the world heritage convention text can only be amended after all countries have been consulted. The text has been slightly altered over the years, facilitating among others the inscription of modern architectural ensembles (Kuipers 1998: 55) and geological sites (Cowie and Wimbledon 1994: 72).

Box 1-1: Modifications to cultural and natural world heritage criteria since 1980.
Note: Amendments and modifications to the text are indicated in italic or are struck through with a line, with the year given in brackets.

Cultural sites should:	Natural sites should:
i. represent a unique artistic achievement, [1995] a masterpiece of the [1994] human creative genius or;	i. be outstanding examples representing the [1994] major stages of the [1994] earth's evolutionary [1994] history, *including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features* [1994] or;
ii. have exerted great *considerable* [1980] influence *exhibit an important interchange of human values* [1997], *over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology* [1997], monumental arts, town-planning and landscaping *or landscape design* [1994] or;	ii. be outstanding examples representing significant on-going geological processes *ecological* [1994] and biological *processes in the* [1994] evolution and man's interaction with his natural environment *development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals* [1994] or;
iii. bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony *to a cultural tradition or* [1994] to a civilisation *which is living or* [1997] which has disappeared or;	iii. contain superlative natural phenomena, formations or features, for instance, outstanding examples of the most important ecosystems [1994] or areas of exceptional natural beauty or exceptional combinations of natural and cultural elements *and aesthetic importance* [1994] or;
iv. be an outstanding example of a type of structure *building* [1984] *or architectural* [1984] *or technological ensemble* [1997] *or landscape* [1994] which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in *human* [1994] history or;	iv. contain the most important and significant natural habitats *for in-situ conservation of biological diversity,*
v. be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement *or land-use* [1994] which is representative of a culture *(or cultures),* [1994] which *especially when it* [1994] has become vulnerable under the impact of	

irreversible change or;
vi. be directly or tangibly associated with events or *living traditions,* [1994] with ideas, or with beliefs, *with artistic and literary works* [1994] of outstanding ~~historical~~ *universal* [1980] significance.

Additional prerequisites
Cultural sites should:
 a. meet the test of authenticity in design, material, workmanship or setting and in the case of cultural landscapes their distinctive character and components and;
 b. *have adequate legal and/or traditional protection and management mechanisms to ensure the conservation of the nominated cultural properties or cultural landscapes* [1988].

[1994] including those containing threatened species ~~of animals and plants~~ [1994] of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

Additional prerequisites
Natural sites should:
a. fulfil the criterion of integrity, contain all or most of the key interrelated and interdependent elements;
b. have sufficient size;
c. *include areas that are essential for maintaining the beauty of the site* [1994];
d. contain habitats for maintaining the most diverse fauna and flora;
e. *have a management plan* [1988];
f. *have adequate long-term legislative, regulatory, institutional or traditional protection* [1988] and;
g. *be the most important sites for the conservation of biological diversity* [1994].

Source: UNESCO *(2004a), adapted data.*

1.3 World heritage listings
The World Heritage Committee has put sites on the world heritage list since 1978. In May 2004, 754 sites had been designated, comprising 582 cultural, 149 natural and 23 mixed sites in 129 countries. Figure 1-1 shows the spatial distribution of the different kinds of sites over the world. For the moment it is sufficient to note that the majority of cultural sites are located in Europe; natural sites are not really concentrated in particular regions. This spatial pattern will be further elaborated in chapter two.

1.3.1 Fulfilled natural and cultural criteria
Cultural world heritage sites must meet at least one of the six cultural criteria, natural world heritage sites at least one of the four natural criteria. Figure 1-2 shows the number of fulfilled criteria, which has remained rather stable over time. In general cultural and natural sites fulfil somewhere between two and three criteria, with a rather constant standard deviation of about one.
Cultural sites, however, seem to go through less stringent selection criteria than natural sites. They only meet 2.42 of the six criteria (forty percent), whereas natural sites satisfy 2.16 of the four criteria (fifty-four percent). There are also far more natural sites that meet all four criteria than there are cultural sites that meet all six cultural criteria (in absolute terms sixteen versus three sites).

Figure 1-1: Spatial distribution of world heritage sites.

Source: UNESCO *(2004a), adapted data.*

Figure 1-2: Average number of met criteria, 3-year average, 1978-2003.
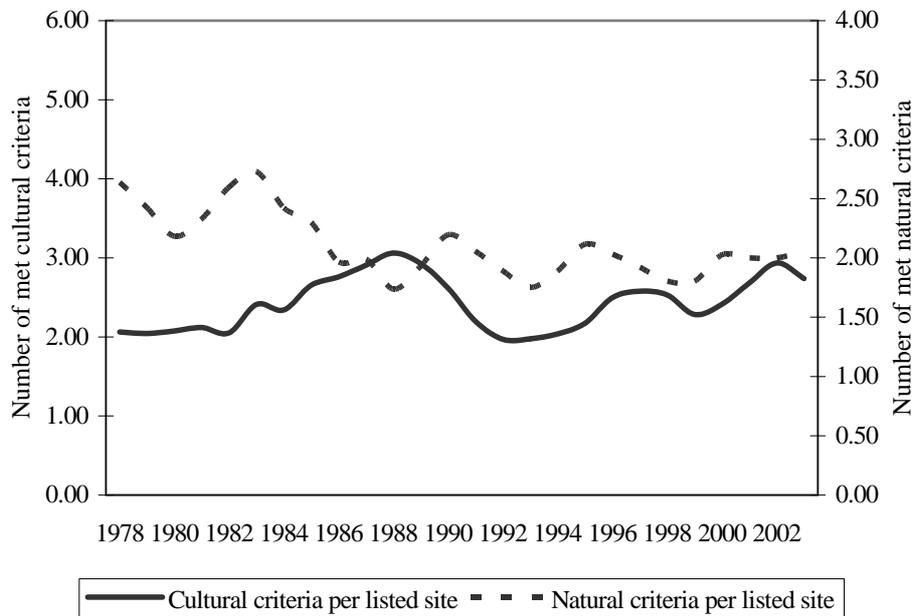
Source: UNESCO *(2004a), adapted data.*

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There are differences between continents and the kind of criterion met. The quality of *natural* sites is arguably lowest in Europe. The number of fulfilled natural criteria is the lowest in Europe (1.83). Almost half of the natural sites that meet only one criterion lie in Europe. The quality of natural sites is highest in Oceania (2.53), just ahead of North America (2.50). Five of the sixteen natural world heritage sites that meet all four criteria are located on the former. About sixty percent of the natural sites fulfil the last three named criteria. Relatively few sites satisfy criterion I, which means that the world heritage list contains few sites that show the earth's history.

The three *cultural* world heritage sites that meet all six criteria are Mogao Caves and Mount Taishan (China) and Venice. All three sites were inscribed in 1987. Ninety-four cultural sites meet only one criterion, and about half of them are located in Europe. This is equivalent to Europe's share in the number of listed sites. Cultural criterion IV – dealing with buildings and architectural assemblages – is the most commonly met criterion (sixty-nine percent, see also Jennings 2003: 45). There are some differences in the average number of met cultural criteria among continents. Cultural sites in North America are arguably of the lowest quality, as they met the lowest number of criteria (1.46), while Europe scores 2.44. The value of Asian sites scores the highest (2.64).

1.3.2 Fame of listed world heritage sites
The present world heritage list contains both well-known and less well-known sites. In the early 1980s, Douglas (1982) came to the conclusion that "not all world heritage sites are well known, and one's parochial notion of nature and culture can be quickly disabused by an encounter with such names as the fourth century tomb of Kazanlak (Bulgaria), the Moenjodaro archaeological ruins, and Ichkeul national park (Senegal)" (p. 6). These three sites meet three and two cultural criteria and one natural criterion, respectively. Stovel (1994) puts Ironbridge Gorge (four criteria), Boyana Church in Sofia (two) and the Roman theatre in Orange (two) under the header of "less obvious worth" (p. 255). Van Galen and Den Outer (2000: 31) distinguish the Chinese sites on the world heritage list between 'very famous' and 'less famous'. Besides the Great Wall of China (five criteria), only heritage sites in Beijing are judged to be 'very famous': the Forbidden City (two), the Summer Palace (three), and the Temple of Heaven (three). The national park of Wulingyuan (one criterion) is considered a 'less famous' site. Finally, the Australian Minister of Environment and Heritage, Kemp (2002: v), has pointed out that the list includes some famous Australian sites, such as Kakadu (three natural, two cultural criteria), Uluru Kata Tjuta (Ayers rock) (two natural and cultural criteria), the Great Barrier Reef (four natural), and the Blue Mountains (two natural). These 'most famous' Australian sites, except the last one, have been listed first, in the first years of Australia's participation in the convention.

Not the number of fulfilled criteria but the number of sites has been a recurring point of debate in the last couple of years. The list may cease to have its high standing if too many sites are inscribed (Batisse 1992: 30; Thorsell 2001: 34). Annually, a whole reservoir of potential world heritage sites clamour for inclusion into the world heritage list. Some years ago – when the number of listed sites totalled just over five hundred – Pocock (1997a: 266) contended that a total of more than one thousand sites would be realistic. He based his estimation on the large number of sites that each country wants to nominate and the number of countries that have no world heritage site yet.

Sites have been inscribed on the list since 1978. On average, about thirty sites are inscribed each year. There are, however, a number of deviations (figure 1-3). The years 1978, 1989 and 2002 are noteworthy for the low number of listed sites. The number of sites put on the list was high in 1979, 1987, in the late 1990s and 2000. Batisse (1992) has argued that regular inscriptions are important, as a static "list would probably lose its stature in public opinion over time" (p. 30). It is unclear, however, how the world heritage list can maintain a high standard with an ever-continuing influx of sites.

Figure 1-3: Number of designated sites per year, 1978-2003.
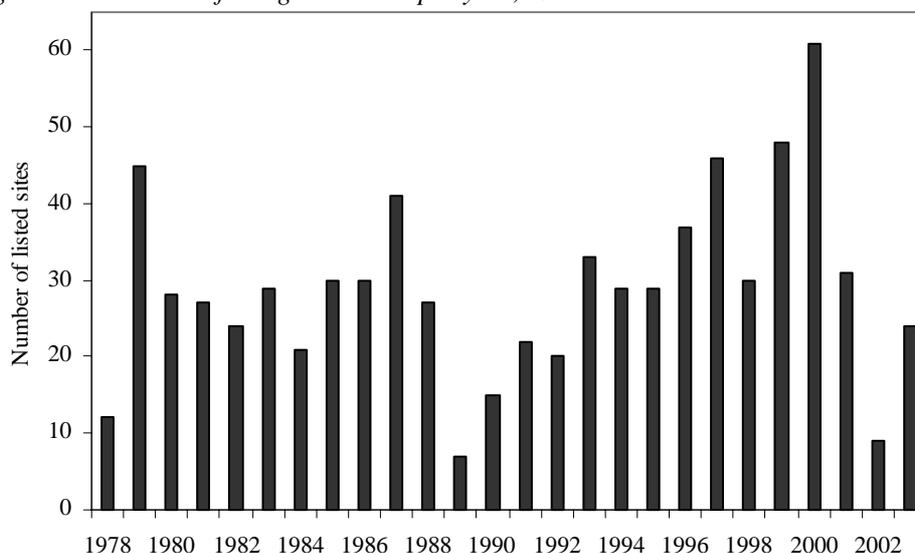
Source: UNESCO *(2004a), adapted data.*

1.4 World heritage convention is much celebrated

The world heritage convention is much celebrated. This is apparent from the various superlatives that have been used to describe the list, from its unique combination of both natural and cultural sites and from the large number of countries that are party to the convention as well as the high number of designated sites.

The world heritage list has been widely acclaimed. It has been described as an 'honours list', a list of 'three-star laureates', the best of the best... a stamp of approval, the equivalent of a Michelin Guide 5-star rating, a 'prize list', and the Nobel Prize (Batisse 1992: 16; O'Neill 2002: 60; Evans 2002b: 2; Keating and Kelly 1992: 7; Pressouyre 1993: 27). The list combines both natural and cultural sites, which makes it a unique convention (IUCN 1982: 3), especially as these were considered two distinct categories until the 1970s. The number of countries that have ratified the convention substantiates the convention's success (Cleere 1998: 22; Batisse 1992: 28; Cameron 1992b: 18). The 176 out of 191 UN member countries (ninety-two percent) have ratified the convention, making it UN's most popular convention. Two non-UN members – the Holy See and the island of Niue – have also ratified the convention, making it a total of 178 signatories. The high number of countries that ratified the convention is significant as it gives the convention legitimacy and an assured future (Cowie and Wimbledon 1994: 72).

Preserving the heritage of humanity?

As a result, Dutt (1999: 221) refers to the convention as one of the few vital UNESCO instruments and Pocock (1997a) describes the convention as "one of humankind's most successful examples of international co-operation" (p. 268). These superlatives and achievements, however, do not say much about the primary aim of the list – the preservation of the 'heritage of humanity'. It is relevant to examine whether the convention accomplishes this aim, as one has expectations about the convention.

1.4.1 Expectations about the world heritage convention
The world heritage list creates hope among scientists, NGOs and site managers alike. Scientists regard a listing as an important step towards a site's preservation, especially for natural sites (Van Heijnsbergen 1991: 684; Kunich 2003: 635). There are plenty of *national* laws that deal with the preservation of biodiversity, but none of these are enough to protect the natural areas with much biodiversity (Kunich 2003: 634).
NGOs often expect the convention to help preserve the heritage that they promote. The IUCN – engaged in forest biodiversity – contends that "the world heritage convention has greater potential to achieve this [biodiversity] goal than any of the other international forest conservation initiatives either in existence or under discussion" (Sayer *et al.* 2000: 306). The International Committee for Underwater Cultural Heritage (ICUHC) believes that the protection of underwater heritage can be secured if UNESCO would list these sites (Smith and Couper 2003: 32). Lobby groups such as Friends of the Earth - Middle East and Expertise '90 have done their best to preserve sites like the Dead Sea (Palestine, Israel, and Jordan) and Lake Baikal (Russia). Both groups firmly believe that a listing will contribute to the preservation of these sites and have actively promoted their listing (Bromberg and Sultan 2003: 25; Brower 1990: 15). Site managers often have high expectations about a world heritage listing. Stoddart and Ferrari (1983: 28) assert that worldwide recognition would provide increased financial means and improved national legislation to better preserve Aldabra Atoll. Similar expectations have been raised in Bruges (Belgium) (Beernaert and Desimpelaere 2001: 28) and Paramaribo (Surinam) (Sjin Tjoe 1998: 46). Visitors to world heritage sites often have higher expectations (Carter *et al.* 2000: 72).

1.4.2 Unknown impacts of a world heritage listing
Not everything is known about the impacts of a listing. The impact of a listing, for example on cities, is under-researched (Jones 1994: 316). Consequently, stakeholders at potential world heritage sites are not completely aware of the advantages and disadvantages ensuing from such a listing. Dutch, German and Danish decision makers involved in the Wadden Sea trilateral nomination were not fully informed about what to expect (WAR 2000: 38; Van der Aa *et al.* 2004: 297).
According to Parent (1992), "the establishment of the world heritage list is not an academic exercise" (p. 11). Musitelli (2003), however, has taken the opposite stand and finds that in order "to have a fair appreciation of the local impact of world heritage, it is better to consider the sites themselves rather than the number of listings" (p. 335). A critical assessment of the contributions of the world heritage convention more than thirty years after its inception to better preserve the world's most outstanding heritage sites is timely. It is necessary to evaluate the impacts of listing beyond the number of listed sites or the number of countries that have ratified the convention.

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1.5 Research questions

This research tries to answer the question of whether or not the convention has been an effective tool to preserve the world's 'most important' natural and cultural heritage sites. Two aspects will be considered. On the one hand, the *selection* of sites is studied. Does the system assure that the 'most valuable' sites are selected, while less impressive sites are excluded? On the other hand, the research explores the possible *impacts* of a listing. Do sites with more 'heritage value' but without the international recognition miss certain opportunities to be better preserved? Or, are sites more threatened, in view of increased visitor numbers following conferment of world heritage status?

The research will focus on whether the world as a whole and its constituent parts feel committed to preserve listed sites. A world heritage site is the heritage of all humanity, so its geographical location should not have any impact on how well it is preserved. All 'heritage of humanity' should be accorded equal opportunity for inscription, be they located in Peru or Poland. By the same token, preservation of all listed sites, whether situated in China or Chad, should be undertaken without discrimination.

In summary, this study comprises three research questions:
1) Are the 'best' heritage sites selected?
2) Does inscription on the world heritage list raise the level of preservation?
3) Does tourism endanger the site after its selection on the world heritage list?

Figure 1-4: An outline of the research.
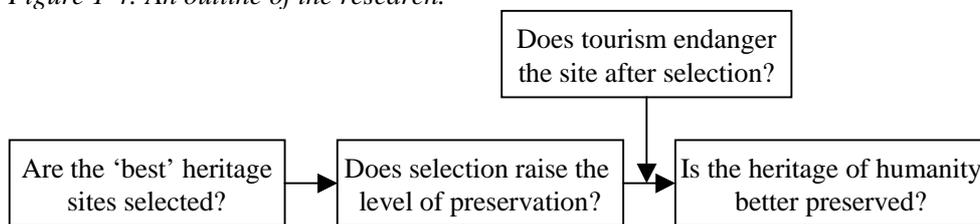
Research question 1: Are the 'best' heritage sites selected?

A heritage collection – at every scale level – is always a *selection* of the properties of the past (Ashworth 1994: 18; Hewison 1987: 47). Often, pragmatic reasons apply for making selections, for example to keep the maintenance costs at a reasonable level (Herbert 1995: 8; Daifuku 1979: 20-21). From the outset, one of the pragmatic decisions was to include only immoveable heritage sites in the world heritage convention. For this reason, the nomination of the mid-nineteenth-century-built SS Great Britain (United Kingdom) – the largest iron ship in its time and designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel – was rejected in 1988. An important reason to exclude moveable properties was due to the wide range of laws in force over these objects (Pressouyre 1993: 30).

More recently, UNESCO has been critiqued about certain kinds of heritage being omitted from the world heritage list. This would especially concern important sites in non-Western parts of the world, such as "art heritage, in terms of literature, music or painting" (Pocock 1997a: 261). Subsequently, UNESCO drew up a complementary world heritage programme entitled "Proclamation of masterpieces of the oral and

intangible heritage of humanity" (UNESCO 2004b) in 1998. This programme includes oral traditions; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship (UNESCO 2004b). This research, however, only focuses on immoveable heritage.

Uniqueness or representativeness
The first research question is an attempt to explain the composition of the present UNESCO world heritage list, for example why there are famous and less famous sites on the list. The question can be approached with two arguments. First, the world heritage list is only open to unique sites with universal importance. Second, the world heritage list is also open to less impressive sites to guarantee that all regions and cultures will be represented on the world heritage list.

One could argue that the world heritage list requires, more than heritage lists at other scale levels, a very strict selection to only include the world's 'very best' sites. Such stringency allows – from a worldwide perspective – only the 'undisputedly best' sites to be listed. For example, the committee for the founding of a world heritage trust recommended in 1965 the following sites to be included: "the Grand Canyon of the Colorado; the Serengeti Plains; Angel Falls; the ruins of Inca, Mayan and Aztec cities; historic structures such as the pyramids, the Acropolis or Stonehenge. Also important but in a somewhat different way are the areas whose main value lies in the spectacular animal species they support – the Indian rhinoceros, mountain gorilla and the orang utan, for example… the trust include[s] only those areas and sites that are absolutely superb, unique, and irreplaceable" (Train 1973: 3). Most, if not all of these sites, can be considered well known to the general public.

However, one could argue that descriptions such as 'heritage for all mankind' and 'common heritage of humanity' must lead to a world heritage list that is not restricted to the 'best' heritage sites. The manner of phrasing stresses inclusiveness instead of exclusiveness. The selection of world heritage sites should contain the sites from all possible (ethnic) population groups, countries, cultures, and time eras.

These two contradictory positions affect whether the world heritage list only consists of universally, unique sites that are spatially concentrated in specific regions or whether the list will also include lower quality sites from all regions. Thorsell (2001) has summarised this issue as follows: "Is the world heritage list meant to be an inventory of all the important heritage places around the world, or a select list of the 'best of the best'?" (p. 34). In other words, has the quality criterion been sustained to assure a list of only the 'best' sites? Parent (1992: 11) stated that "there should be no question of inscribing unworthy properties on the list". Does Parent's value judgement that "fortunately this is not the case" still apply?

The decision *what* to nominate is influenced by *who* takes the decision (Aitchison *et al.* 2000: 95). Also within the world heritage convention much power resides with the participating countries, as will be discussed in the next chapter. These countries, however, can both over- and underestimate the value of their heritage in an international perspective. On the one hand, countries may overestimate the quality of their sites, as a unique site at the national level is not necessarily exceptional at the international level. On the other hand, common features in one's country without seemingly much value may be a unique phenomenon from a global perspective. These

contradictory positions have been labelled as "geographical nearsightedness" and "geographical bias" (RLG 1999: 23).

Research question 2: Does selection raise the level of preservation?
The aim of listing natural and cultural sites under the world heritage convention is to give these sites the preservation they deserve, if necessary, for all humanity. These sites merit attention, as humanity has made a commitment to prevent the loss of outstanding quality inherent in the identified world heritage sites. Hoffman (1993), however, poses the following question: "… does the world heritage convention really have an impact on the future of the earth's most important, often threatened, monuments, natural habitats, and cultural sites?" (p. 58).
The maintenance of a listed world heritage site remains the responsibility of the country in which it is located. This country undertakes to take care of the site after its world heritage inscription. The world heritage convention text is "designed to incite action rather then to prescribe action" (Musitelli 2003: 324). The world heritage convention primarily "provides an important symbolic protection" (Wilson 1992: 259). National attention can increase voluntarily or under pressure from other countries. The listing can lead to more or strengthened legal protection or more financial or human resources to manage the site. Furthermore, countries that are not able to preserve the world heritage sites within their borders may ask for international assistance. Glantz and Figueroa (1997: 364) rightly suggest that all world citizens will become legatees of the Aral Sea if it would be designated as world heritage site.
This research also looks into the question of whether or not countries that ratified the convention feel committed to their obligations (Keating and Kelly 1992: 7). Do listed sites receive special attention from their own government and the international community (Leblanc 1984: 29)? Are world heritage sites not affected by the internal political situation (Kunich 2003: 638)? Does it lead to more legal protection at the national, regional and local level (Van Dockum *et al.* 1997: 27)? Do countries really feel responsible for foreign world heritage sites in peril (Leblanc 1984: 29; Lowenthal 1994: 45)? And are countries willing to receive help from abroad or do they view this as a humiliation? In other words, are world heritage sites indeed showcases of best practice (Parent 1992: 11)?

Research question 3: Does tourism endanger the site after selection?
The number of visitors might increase after world heritage designation. For example, tour operators may use the world heritage list to draw up tourist itineraries. However, does the number of visitors really increase? Is this numerical increase registered at all kinds of sites? And which visitors are attracted to internationally recognised sites?
It can be questioned whether increasing visitor numbers should be regarded as a success (Burns and Holden 1995: 183). It can be argued that the heritage of all humanity should be accessible to the public (Van der Aa and Ashworth 2002: 7), but the number and kind of visitors may also endanger the prime aim of the convention, which is to preserve the internationally most important sites because it is "essential that the values which put it [a site] on the list are not dangerously eroded" (Bennett 1977: 28). Von Droste *et al.* (1992) properly illustrated this by expressing the hope that "tourist buses do not turn into Trojan horses" (p. 8). Damage as a result of tourism is

most likely at sites that apply in the first place for the world heritage status to promote tourism, despite awareness of the potential damage resulting from tourism (Boniface and Fowler 1993: 154; Boniface 1995: 4). Do short-term economic benefits dominate over the long-term preservation needs of these sites?

The equivocality of heritage may be the same at the national and international level. Abrahamse and Van der Wal (1989: 141-142) and Sellars (1997: 38) mentioned this ambivalent character with the creation of national parks in the Netherlands and the United States of America alike. National parks are established to further the preservation of the environment. Their new park status, however, often leads to more visitors with deleterious effects on the quality of the site. It might be better to exclude the 'best' heritage sites from the world heritage list to prevent the most outstanding sites from being 'loved to death'.

1.5.1 Research design

This research tries to answer the three research questions by performing both quantitative analyses for all ever-nominated world heritage sites as well as case studies. The first method, quantitative analysis, is used to get a first impression of the dynamics in the world heritage nomination process. Which sites are listed? And where are they located? This quantitative research, however, is not the most appropriate method to answer the formulated research questions.

The second method, case studies, is used to get a better insight in the reasons for nominating certain sites and the impacts of a world heritage listing. This method, predominantly executed by conducting interviews with key stakeholders at the local and national level, allows for more precise information gathering to answer questions such as: Who has taken the initiative to propose the site for the world heritage list and what were the reasons for doing so? Does the level of preservation increase after listing? And how have the number and kind of visitors changed after inscription?

Interviews allow room for asking new questions to deepen the lines of inquiry of the research, an opportunity not offered by quantitative research or surveys. In-depth interviews afford more leeway to ascertain the nature of the relationship between changes in the preservation of or visitation to the site and the world heritage listing. At the same time, however, the labour-intensive method of case studies has limited the number of researched sites.

1.5.2 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is guided by three research questions. The first research question of whether or not the criterion of outstanding universal value has been sustained is discussed over two chapters. Chapter three deals with the factors that have influenced countries' nominations for the world heritage list and countries' selection mechanisms are closely examined in chapter four. Chapter five deals with the preservation of sites. Chapter six discusses the impacts of a world heritage listing on the number of visitors. The last chapter, seven, will discuss the benefits of preserving important heritage sites at the international level in an attempt to sketch the future of the world heritage convention. But first, in chapter two, it will be explained in more detail how the world heritage convention works and how this research is framed.