



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Paper

Paper 169/12

03 October 2012

NIAR 513-2012

Eóin Murphy

World Heritage Sites – Developments and Delistings

1 Introduction

The following paper discusses World Heritage Sites which have undergone development and delisting.

2 Key Points

- The *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* was adopted by UNESCO in 1972 and allowed Member States to nominate sites of local or national pride to be listed as World Heritage Sites (WHS);
- There are currently 962 properties worldwide that meet the necessary criteria, with a further 1,561 tentative sites nominated by UN Member Nations;
- Benefits to WHS status includes access to the World Heritage Fund, stimulus to awareness raising and educational initiatives and an enhanced tourism image and profile;
- However, there are also costs such as ongoing management costs of up to €173,000 (£150,000) per annum;

- The impact of WHS status varies from site to site, with the pre-WHS socio-economic profile of the site having a particular effect. Variables such as pre-inscription status and branding also influence post-inscription success;
- A site can be listed in danger of losing its WHS with the World Heritage Committee (WHC) able to intervene to address the situation. Interventions can occur for a number of reasons, including restoring sites following natural disasters or wars;
- Initially a site which is in danger of losing its WHS status is identified by UNESCO and placed on the “List of World Heritage in Danger”. There are currently 39 WHS on the list. Please note, the Giants Causeway is not on this List;
- Intervention can take a number of forms including allowing access to the World Heritage Fund and the development and adoption of a programme for corrective measures, and subsequently to monitor the situation of the site;
- It is possible for a WHS to be delisted;
- This can occur if activity at the site results in it no longer meeting the necessary criteria to be a WHS and attempts to restore it to these standards by the WHC and the State fail. A State can also request that the status be removed;
- To date only two WHS have been delisted;
- The Arabian Oryx Sanctuary was listed as a WHS in 1994 as a result of the State reducing a protected area by 90% in order to facilitate oil exploration; and
- The Dresden Elbe Valley was delisted as a result of the construction of a four lane bridge in order to reduce traffic congestion.

3 UNESCO World Heritage Sites

In 1972 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) adopted the *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*. The Convention allowed Member States to nominate sites of local or national pride to be listed as World Heritage Sites (WHS). To be included in the list a site must be:¹

Of outstanding universal value and meet at least one out of ten selection criteria.

The criteria sites must meet to be listed include:

- Must represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- Must exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
- Must be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance; and

¹ UNESCO, World Heritage, The Criteria for Selection <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria>

- Must contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance.

There are currently 962 properties worldwide that meet these criteria, with a further 1,561 tentative sites nominated by UN Member Nations.

3.1 Benefits and Costs of WHS status

Direct benefits associated with WHS status include:²

- Belonging to an international community of appreciation and concern for universally significant properties that embody a world of outstanding examples of cultural diversity and natural wealth;
- Access to the World Heritage Fund - Annually, about \$4 million is made available to assist State Parties in identifying, preserving and promoting World Heritage sites. Emergency assistance may also be made available for urgent action to repair damage caused by human-made or natural disasters;
- Sites on the List are a magnet for international cooperation and may thus receive financial assistance for heritage conservation projects from a variety of sources.
- Sites inscribed on the World Heritage List also benefit from the elaboration and implementation of a comprehensive management plan that sets out adequate preservation measures and monitoring mechanisms; and
- Increase public awareness of the site and of its outstanding values, thus also increasing the tourist activities at the site. When these are well planned for and organised respecting sustainable tourism principles, they can bring important funds to the site and to the local economy.

A report for Scottish Natural Heritage (2007) found that there were four main advantages that sites shared:³

- Enhanced leverage to pull in funding for a wide range of purposes;
- Stimulus to awareness raising and educational initiatives;
- Enhanced tourism image and profile; and
- Enhanced opportunities for niche branding of local products and services.

There are some costs associated with WHS. Research undertaken for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport identified that the average cost of inscription is €462,000 (£400,000) with additional ongoing management costs of up to €173,000 (£150,000) per annum.⁴

² UNESCO WHS, The World Heritage Convention, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/>

³ Scottish Natural Heritage, 2007, Social, economic and environmental benefits of World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves and Geoparks http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/Report%20No248.pdf

⁴ Lake District World Heritage Project, World Heritage Status: Is there opportunity for Economic Gain <http://www.lakeswhs.co.uk/documents/WHSEconomicGainSupplement.pdf>

In a study carried out on the Lake District (which included a Literature Review), it was found that whilst WHS status has a number of advantages regarding conservation, education and social capital:

...the tourism and economic development impacts are limited or that the existing evidence base does not justify some of the claims made of WHS status.⁵

It goes on to state that the impact of WHS status varies from site to site, with the pre-WHS socio-economic profile of the site having a particular effect. Variables such as pre-inscription status and branding also influence post-inscription success. The study goes on to state that:⁶

The impact on tourism footfall also appears to be negligible for most sites (in the region of 0–3% additional visitors) with established and large scale tourism destinations registering little impact on numbers.

The Spiderweb diagrams below highlight the benefits achieved from two WHS with the same designation.⁷

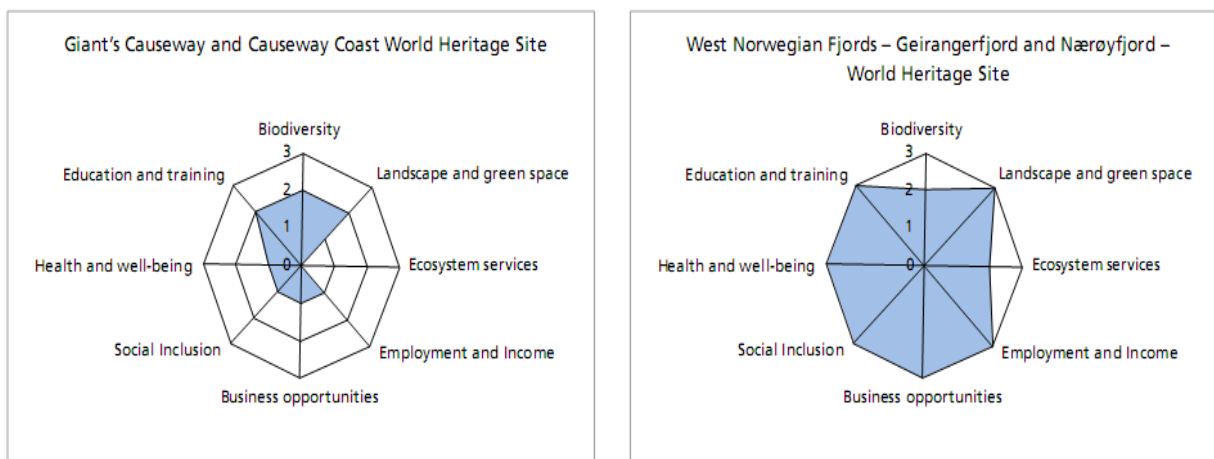


Figure 1: Same Designation, Different Impacts

As can be seen the focus of the Giants Causeway has been around Biodiversity, with some emphasis on Education and Training. The West Norwegian Fjords, however have had a much wider impact. It should of course be noted that the information on the Giants Causeway was compiled prior to the completion of the Visitor Centre.

The study concludes that a number of WHS receive significant socio-economic impacts. However, this can largely be shaped by the inputs prior to its WHS designation and the work done after in order to promote the site. Just having WHS status is not in itself does not result in significant benefits such as increased tourist footfall.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

4 Developments at World Heritage Sites

A site can be listed in danger of losing its WHS status with the World Heritage Committee (WHC) able to intervene to address the situation.

The Committee can also intervene if there is a proposal to develop a WHS which may result in damage to it.

Initially a site which is in danger of losing its WHS status is identified by UNESCO and placed on the “List of World Heritage in Danger”. There are currently 39 WHS on the list, with one site in the UK (the Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City, added to the list in 2012).⁸ Please see Appendix 1 for a full list of the WHS on the List.

Reasons for WHS being added to the Danger list include:

- Armed conflict and war;
- Earthquakes and other natural disasters;
- Pollution;
- Poaching;
- Uncontrolled urbanization; and
- Unchecked tourist development.

Once a site is identified as in danger of losing its WHS, it:⁹

...allows the World Heritage Committee to allocate immediate assistance from the World Heritage Fund to the endangered property

This intervention can take a number of forms. A site listed as in danger allows the WHC to allocate immediate assistance from the World Heritage Fund to the endangered property.¹⁰

The listing also requires the WHC to:¹¹

...develop and adopt, in consultation with the State Party concerned, a programme for corrective measures, and subsequently to monitor the situation of the site.

In some cases the WHC is invited by the State to intervene, such as Bamiyan Valley in Afghanistan. The property has suffered a number of incidents including abandonment, military action and explosions. UNESCO was invited by the Afghanistan Government to coordinate all international efforts to safeguard and enhance Afghanistan’s cultural heritage, especially in the Bamiyan Valley.

⁸ UNESCO, World Heritage in Danger, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/158>

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ UNESCO, World Heritage in Danger, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/158>

¹¹ Ibid

Some sites are also placed at risk as a result of proposed developments. For example, the pyramids at Giza are well known and considered for centuries as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. In 1995, the pyramids were threatened by a highway project near Cairo which, it was argued, would have seriously damaged the values of the archaeological site. The project also included the construction of 3,000 houses, military camps and two large dumps within the WHS.

The WHC commenced discussions with the Egyptian Government in order to discuss alternatives to the proposed scheme.

These negotiations were successful and resulted in a number of alternative solutions which replaced the disputed project, including an alternative route for the proposed highway.

Other interventions by the WHC in the case of building projects include:¹²

- **Royal Chitwan National Park, Nepal:** this involved a River Diversion Project which, WHC argued, would have impacted on the habitat of Rhinos. Following WHC intervention the project was withdrawn;
- **The Archaeological site of Delphi, Greece:** Prior to its listing as a WHC, an Aluminium plant was proposed to be built near the site of Delphi. Following discussions with the WHC an alternative site was found for the plant and Delphi received WHS status; and
- **Whale Sanctuary of El Vizcaino, Mexico:** A plan to enlarge a salt factory was withdrawn following concerns regarding its impact on rare species.

5 The Delisting of World Heritage Sites

It is possible for a WHS to be delisted. This can occur if activity at the site results in it no longer meeting the necessary criteria to be a WHS and attempts to restore it to these standards by the WHC and the State fail to do so. A State can also request that the status be removed.

To date only two WHS have been delisted:¹³

- The Arabian Oryx Sanctuary, Oman 2007; and
- Dresden Elbe Valley, Germany, 2009.

5.1 The Arabian Oryx Sanctuary, Oman 2007

The Arabian Oryx Sanctuary was listed as a WHS in 1994. The area was the home to a rare antelope breed.

It was delisted in 2007 as a result of:¹⁴

¹² UNESCO, Success Stories <http://whc.unesco.org/en/107>

¹³ Ibid

Oman's decision to reduce the size of the protected area by 90%, in contravention of the Operational Guidelines of the Convention. This was seen by the Committee as destroying the outstanding universal value of the site which was inscribed in 1994.

The state had decided on this reduction in protection in order to explore the area for oil reserves. In addition, the population of Oryx has fallen, from 450 in 1996 to 65 in 2007, with only four breeding pairs at this point in time. The decline was a result of poaching and habitat degradation.

5.2 Dresden Elbe Valley, Germany, 2009

The Dresden Elbe Valley was listed in 2004 based on:

- **Criterion (ii):** The Dresden Elbe Valley has been the crossroads in Europe, in culture, science and technology;
- **Criterion (iii):** The Dresden Elbe Valley contains exceptional testimonies of court architecture and festivities, as well as renowned examples of middle-class architecture and industrial heritage representing European urban development into the modern industrial era;
- **Criterion (iv):** The Dresden Elbe Valley is an outstanding cultural landscape; and
- **Criterion (v):** The Dresden Elbe Valley is an outstanding example of land use, representing an exceptional development of a major Central-European city.

It was delisted as a result of the construction of a four lane bridge that crossed the valley. The site was placed on the danger list in 2006, with bridge construction beginning in 2007. The construction began as a result of a need to alleviate traffic congestion, with 67.9% of the City of Dresden's residents voting in favour of its construction.¹⁵

UNESCO proposed that the city build a tunnel rather than a bridge but this was rejected.

The construction went ahead and as a result it failed to keep its *"outstanding universal value."*¹⁶

As stated in Spiegel:¹⁷

The decision means that Dresden will no longer be eligible for money from a €150 million pot set aside for the maintenance of Germany's UNESCO sites.

¹⁴ UNESCO, Arabian Oryx Sanctuary, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/654>

¹⁵ Spiegel, June 2009, Germany's Elbe Valley Loses UNESCO Status <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/world-heritage-revocation-germany-s-elbe-valley-loses-unesco-status-a-632637.html>

¹⁶ UNESCO, June 2009, Dresden is deleted from UNESCO's World Heritage List, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/522>

¹⁷ Spiegel, June 2009, Germany's Elbe Valley Loses UNESCO Status <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/world-heritage-revocation-germany-s-elbe-valley-loses-unesco-status-a-632637.html>

It should be noted that the Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City is currently on the list of in danger sites.

This is a result of a proposed development along the waterfront of the city. The proposed £5.5 billion development would result in the construction of a 55-storey skyscraper, around 9,000 homes, a cruise terminal, a hotel, shops and restaurants to be built over 60 hectares.¹⁸

UNESCO has warned that if the construction goes ahead, Liverpool would lose its WHS status. The City Council has since given its go ahead for the development, with the Mayor of the City citing the need for regeneration in the area taking precedence over WHS status.

Similar developments have occurred in Vienna, Austria and Lubeck, Germany, although in both these cases planning ceased following a public outcry.¹⁹

6 Summary

Review of UNESCO information regarding World Heritage Sites has identified that the status is rarely revoked, with extensive efforts made by the WHC to ensure a location is restored and preserved as needed. No examples were found where a development on a site went ahead and WHS status was retained, although it should be noted that Liverpool's Mercantile City is currently undergoing a development which may see its status revoked. This is against a backdrop of a proposed £5.5 billion investment in the area and the need to regenerate a run-down locality in order to encourage economic growth in the city.

¹⁸ Planning, September 2012, UNESCO's waterfront warning: an empty threat?

<http://planningblog.planningresource.co.uk/2012/09/21/unescos-waterfront-warning-an-empty-threat/>

¹⁹ The Geographic Review, January 2010, Alberts, C and Hazen H Maintaining authenticity and integrity at cultural world heritage sites

Appendix 1: World Heritage in Danger List

| Country | Site |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Afghanistan | Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley (2003) |
| Afghanistan | Minaret and Archaeological Remains of Jam (2002) |
| Belize | Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System (2009) |
| Central African Republic | Manovo-Gounda St Floris National Park (1997) |
| Chile | Humberstone and Santa Laura Saltpeter Works (2005) |
| Colombia | Los Katíos National Park (2009) |
| Côte d'Ivoire | Comoé National Park (2003) |
| Côte d'Ivoire | Mount Nimba Strict Nature Reserve (1992) * |
| Democratic Republic of the Congo | Garamba National Park (1996) |
| Democratic Republic of the Congo | Kahuzi-Biega National Park (1997) |
| Democratic Republic of the Congo | Okapi Wildlife Reserve (1997) |
| Democratic Republic of the Congo | Salonga National Park (1999) |
| Democratic Republic of the Congo | Virunga National Park (1994) |
| Egypt | Abu Mena (2001) |
| Ethiopia | Simien National Park (1996) |
| Georgia | Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery (2010) |
| Georgia | Historical Monuments of Mtskheta (2009) |
| Guinea | Mount Nimba Strict Nature Reserve (1992) * |
| Honduras | Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve (2011) |
| Indonesia | Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra (2011) |
| Iran (Islamic Republic of) | Bam and its Cultural Landscape (2004) |

| Country | Site |
|--|--|
| Iraq | Ashur (Qal'at Sherqat) (2003) |
| Iraq | Samarra Archaeological City (2007) |
| Jerusalem (Site proposed by Jordan) | Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls (1982) |
| Madagascar | Rainforests of the Atsinanana (2010) |
| Mali | Timbuktu (2012) |
| Mali | Tomb of Askia (2012) |
| Niger | Air and Ténéré Natural Reserves (1992) |
| Palestine | Birthplace of Jesus: Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route, Bethlehem (2012) |
| Panama | Fortifications on the Caribbean Side of Panama: Portobelo-San Lorenzo (2012) |
| Peru | Chan Chan Archaeological Zone (1986) |
| Senegal | Niokolo-Koba National Park (2007) |
| Serbia | Medieval Monuments in Kosovo (2006) |
| Tanzania, United Republic of | Ruins of Kilwa Kisiwani and Ruins of Songo Mnara (2004) |
| Uganda | Tombs of Buganda Kings at Kasubi (2010) |
| United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Liverpool – Maritime Mercantile City (2012) |
| United States of America | Everglades National Park (2010) |
| Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) | Coro and its Port (2005) |
| Yemen | Historic Town of Zabid (2000) |