General Assembly 3 - Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural

Measures to protect World Heritage Sites in areas of conflict

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Introduction

Heritage represents much more to a country and its population than ruins, ecosystems, traditions or artifacts. It is a part of a legacy, which allows us to understand in the present days of our globalizing society the history and cultural identity of each nation. It is our duty to ensure that this legacy is passed to the future generations as well. Furthermore, the cultural and natural heritage of countries all around the world, are not only of great importance and significance nationally but also internationally. Heritage contributes vastly to a better future of our world, as it can have an influence on all three dimensions of a sustainable development, which are the economic, social and environmental dimensions. Well-preserved heritage sites play very often an important role to the economy, as they attract investments, tourists and create jobs for the local population. Issues such as poverty can also be combated with the help of these sites, as many of them can provide shelter, water, food and other important resources. With regards to the environment, the protection of natural sites is ensuring a long lasting environmental sustainability.

In order to ensure the preservation of such invaluable sites a programme, the international World Heritage Program, administered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Committee, has been created on the 16th of November 1972. Since then, as of July 2015, 1031 unique sites, such the Great Wall in China, the Great Barrier Reef in Australia and the Old City of Dubrovnik have been selected to be a part of the World Heritage.

Unfortunately, there are currently 48 World Heritage Sites all around the world, which are in great danger of being harmed or completely destroyed. Some of them find themselves in this situation due to the fact that they are placed in areas of conflict, such as the sites in Syria or Iraq. The sites in areas of conflict are in desperate need of effective measures, as the risk of being destroyed in the matter of a very short period of time is even greater compared to other World Heritage Sites.

Definition of Key Terms

World Heritage Site

According to the Oxford Dictionaries, a World Heritage Site is a natural or man-made site, area or structure recognized as being of outstanding international importance and therefore as deserving special protection. Such sites include the Old City of Dubrovnik in Croatia, the Old Bridge Area of the Old City of Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina or the Taj Mahal in India.

Natural Heritage

All natural features, including physical and biological formations and other groups of such formations, which are of outstanding universal value from the aesthetic or scientific point of view. Well-known examples for natural heritage sites are the Great Barrier Reef in Australia or the Delta Danube in Romania.

Cultural Heritage

UNESCO defines the Cultural Heritage as the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations.

Intangible Cultural Heritage

All practices, representations, expressions, as well as the knowledge and skills (including instruments, objects, artifacts, cultural spaces), that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. These include the Wititi dance of the Colca Valley in Peru, the tradition of carpet-making in Chiprovts, Bulgaria, and the Mongolian calligraphy.

World Heritage List

This list comprises all sites that have been recognized by UNESCO as being of outstanding international importance and therefore as deserving special protection. To be included on the World Heritage List a site has to meet at least one of the ten selection criteria stated in the revised Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

World Heritage in Danger List

The World Heritage Committee includes on this list all World Heritage sites, which are considered to be in danger of being harmed or destroyed by natural or human activity, such as earthquakes, floods, pollution, tourist development projects or armed conflicts.

Buffer zone

A peripheral area to a protected one created to enhance the conservation value of the protected area. In order to fulfill it purpose, restrictions on resource use and special development measures are undertaken.

General Overview

Historical background

The creation of the Hague Convention from1954 came in fact as a response to the immense loss of heritage during the 2nd World War. The international community wanted to make sure that such losses would never occur again in areas of conflict. Unfortunately, as time passed by, other armed conflicts arose and the World Heritage was under threat once again. This made many wondered how effective the Hague Convention actually was.

Bosnian War

The armed conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which took place between 1992 and 1995 was the result of the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. One of the main features of this war was the widespread of ethnic cleansing. Bosnian Serb forces sought to eradicate all traces of the Bosnian historic and ethnic diversity, as well traditions. In order to achieve this goal, Bosnian Serbs planned a large number of attacks on religious and cultural heritage sites of Muslim Bosnians and Croatian Bosnians.

Iconic structures as the National Library in Sarajevo and Mostar's Old Bridge (Stari Most were damaged brutally during the war. Furthermore, hundreds of historic mosques, such as the domed sixteenth-century Aladža Mosque in Foča and the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka were razed to the ground.Orthodox and Catholic churches and monasteries were assaulted, too. The neo-Baroque Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Mostar was dynamited, the Franciscan Monastery at Plehan shelled, then blown up by explosives.

Fortunately, some of the sites, such as the Mostar Old Bridge could be rebuilt with the help of UNESCO.

Afghanistan

During war time, Afghanistan has faced tremendous cultural heritage losses under the ruling of the Soviet Union and the Taliban. Most of the Afghan national

museum's riches were looted and were deliberately destroyed, as the supreme leader Mullah Mohammed Omar had issued a decree, which stated that all statues in Afghanistan including ancient pre-Islamic figures had to be destroyed. A total number of 2,500 destroyed works of arts has been speculated for the past years. Probably the most shocking destruction was that of two huge standing Buddha statues carved into a mountainside at Bamiyan in 2001.

Another affected part of the heritage of Afghanistan was and still is the Bamiyan Valley, which was put on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2003 simultaneously with its inscription on the World Heritage List. This site was not conserved at all, as it has faced military actions, explosions, and abandonment. Currently, UNESCO, at the request of the Afghan Government, coordinates all international efforts to safeguard and enhance Afghanistan's cultural heritage, notably in Bamiyan.

Current World Heritage Sites in areas of conflict: Syria and Iraq

48 World Heritage Sites are still being present on the list of sites in danger, two countries on the list with endangered heritage being Syria and Iraq, due to the conflict situation in each one of them.

For the past years, Syria's and Iraq's World Heritage Sites have been mostly damaged and destroyed deliberately by the Islamic State (IS). Even though the international community condemns all acts taken by the terrorist organization against the World Heritage Sites, the issue is very delicate and hard to tackle, as the international community has to deal with terrorists, who are unpredictable and very powerful in the region. Therefore, the planning of safeguarding cultural heritage or trying to predict IS's next moves with regards to the destruction of heritage sites are very difficult.

The cultural heritages that have been damaged or destroyed in these regions are some of the oldest sites in the world and were very well preserved, therefore of outstanding value to all of us. The cultural heritages found in Hatra, Mosul, Nimrud or Khorsabad (Iraq) were mainly bulldozed, smashed with hammers or burned by IS. Some sites in Syria, such as the Temple of Baalshamin or Mar Elian Monastery have been completely destroyed with explosives and bulldozers. Importantly, almost every action of destruction in which the terrorist organization has been involved was shared with the world through videos or images.

Endangered sites by other means

Despite many World Heritage Sites being put at risk in areas of conflict, one cannot forget that heritage sites can be endangered by other means. Some of these means are human development, natural hazards, the lack of proper conservatory conditions and other human activities.

The Everglades National Park in the United States is one example of a very valuable site put under threat mainly due to human development. The site has suffered tremendously over the years because of the drainage of wetlands, building of farms, roads and canals, as well as water control systems in South Florida. This is why, development projects aiming either urbanization or the creation infrastructures associated with tourists in areas that can impact a heritage site negatively, represent a threat to ecosystems, indigenous populations etc.

Another example of a World Heritage Site in danger, but not located in an area of conflict, is the Archaeological Zone of Chan Chan in Peru. Storms from El Niño have been triggering heavy rains, flooding, and strong winds. These changes in the weather pattern caused erosion, process that threatens the Archaeological Zone of Chan Chan. Furthermore, another reason why this site was placed on the UNESCO World Heritage in Danger List was the lack of measures taken to preserve the ancient structures of the city.

Other human activities and reasons why World Heritage Sites are being put at risk are vandalism, theft, constructions, as well as pollution caused by oil spill, industrial waste etc. and many more.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views
UNESCO

This specialized agency of the UN, which was created in 1945, has managed to convince 192 states to join the agency and cooperate with one another, in order to achieve various goals such as the eradication of poverty, gender equality or sustainable development.

 In 1972 UNESCO adopted the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, which was a major step for the protection and preservation of heritage all around the world. UNESCO seeks to encourage all nations to sign the Convention, the development of new plans and mechanisms to keep a better track of the conservation of each site, as well as international cooperation in order to ensure the protection of World Heritage Sites. The agency provides technical assistance and professional training, as well as emergency assistance for World Heritage Sites, which face immediate danger.

Furthermore, UNESCO tries to raise awareness about the importance of heritage sites through multiple methods, such as workshops or the publication of the World Heritage List. UNESCO also supports member states in their attempts to raise awareness on protecting heritage sites, just as local populations are encouraged to participate in the preservation of their cultural and natural heritage.

The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS)

ICBS is a professional committee, as well as an international and independent organization, which works to protect the World's Cultural Heritage threatened by war and natural disasters. Its activity consists of coordinating preparations to meet and respond to emergency situations as well as post-crisis support. Furthermore, the ICBS is an advisor to other organizations involved in the protection of heritage, such as UNESCO, and an advocate for raising awareness about the threats to the World Cultural Heritage.

Importantly, there are numerous Blue Shield Committees around the world, each gathering local professionals, which work towards improving possible emergency responses to threatened heritages, promoting the implementation of the Hague Convention and raising awareness about the threats to cultural heritages.

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)

This professional association is one of the three formal advisory bodies to the World Heritage Committee and has the duty of evaluating all nominations of cultural properties made to the World Heritage List. Additionally, ICOMOS contributes to the making of reports concerning the conservation of sites on World Heritage List and advises the UNESCO World Heritage Center on technical assistance requests.

The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM)

The ICCROM is an IGO and the only institution of its kind, which has a worldwide mandate to promote the conservation of all types of cultural heritage. Some of its activities include the development of conservation training methods and their spread all around the world, as well as the organization of events and public activities meant to raise awareness and support for conservation. Importantly, the ICCROM is also one of the three formal advisory bodies to the World Heritage Committee.

The Islamic State (IS)

This terrorist organization has been deliberately destroying and damaging World Heritage Sites and many more other heritage areas over the course of the past years, in countries such as Syria and Iraq. For instance, very valuable ruins of ancient cities, which are part of the World Heritage Sites, such as Palmyra in Syria and Hatra in Iraq have been damaged by IS.

The reasoning behind the destruction of heritage sites by IS is believed to be the wish to eradicate the cultural identity of these countries, as well as gain international attention and use artifacts to fund their activities.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
November 16th, 1945	Creation of UNESCO
May 14th, 1954	The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict is adopted. It is the first treaty focusing exclusively on the protection of cultural heritage in the event of armed conflict.
November 16th, 1972	General Conference of UNESCO takes place. The Convention concerning the Protection of Cultural Property and Natural Heritage, which has been ratified by 191 states so far, is signed and with it, the international World Heritage Program under the administration of the World Heritage Committee are established.
July 17th, 1998	The treaty called the Rome Statue establishes the International Criminal Court (ICC). Article 8 grants its jurisdiction in respect to war crimes, including the destruction of historic, religious, scientific, or artistic buildings. Syria and Iraq are not parties to the Rome Statue.
March 26th, 1999	A second protocol to the Hague Convention is adopted. This protocol provides greater protection than before. Furthermore, it also creates an intergovernmental committee with the main task of supervising the implementation of the protocol.
May 22nd, 2003	Security Council resolution 143 imposes a ban on trafficking cultural objects illegally removed from Iraq since its invasion of Kuwait.

February 12th, 2015   Security Council resolution is adopted unanimously. It condemns the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage by terrorists in Iraq and Syria, and the looting and smuggling of heritage artifacts to finance terrorist activities.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, 14 May 1954
- Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 16 November 1972 **(WHC-2004/WS/2)**
- The Rome Statue, 17 July 1998
- Second Protocol to the Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, 26 March 1999 **(HC/1999/7)**
- Security Council Resolution, 22 May 2003**(S/RES/1483)**
- Security Council Resolution, 12 February 2015 **(S/RES/2199)**

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Treaties and Committees

There have been some treaties and with them, some committees that have been created in order to safeguard World Heritage Sites in areas of conflict as showed in the report. Even though, all of this has proven to offer a good fundamental concept to safeguard heritage in conflict areas internationally, negative outcomes of armed conflicts on heritage sites could not be avoided in all places, such as Iraq, Syria or DR Congo, where huge amounts of cultural heritage have been destroyed. One reason for the failure of the treaties was their poor implementation.

#Unite4Heritage

This was a campaign launched by the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Baghdad in Iraq, on 28 March 2015. It came as a response to the destruction of heritage sites by extremists. The purpose of this movement is to raise awareness and support for the protection of heritage in areas where they are threatened by extremist violence. #Unite4Heritage uses social networks to encourage global movement with young people. This campaign also organizes various events, where people

can celebrate cultural heritage and make their voice be heard in the fight against extremism and radicalization, which have caused the destruction of many important heritage sites.

#Unite4Heritage is a good example of a mean to raise awareness about the issue globally and motivate young people to also be a part of a movement which fights for the protection of something that concerns everyone.

ICC

Bringing those who deliberately destroy or damage World Heritage Sites is of great importance, as the cleansing of cultural heritage is a horrific act against humanity. As of the 17th of July 1998, the ICC was granted jurisdiction in respect to war crimes, including the destruction of historic, religious, scientific, or artistic buildings.

Very recently, the ICC has managed to charge Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi for the destruction of historical and religious monuments in Timbuktu, which shows that those who get involved in the harming of World Heritage Sites can be brought to justice.Unfortunately, the ICC cannot charge all individuals committing such horrific acts, in places such as Syria and Iraq, as the ICC does not have jurisdiction there.

Possible Solutions

Our society changes continuously and with it the dangers that threaten the loss of World Heritage Sites and other valuable natural and cultural sites. This is why we cannot rely only on measures created decades ago and have to try to improve them and adapt them to current situations, as well as find new effective and innovative solutions for the time before, during and after an armed conflict.

Support for a proper implementation of treaties

At this point in time, countries do not only need the encouragement to ratify certain treaties, but also support to implement them properly into their own system. There are currently different committees and organizations, which try to oversee the implementation of treaties, however, it has been proven that it is not enough, as countries such as Syria, Libya, and Iraq ratified the Hague Convention, but did not manage to enforce it. Therefore, the existing support should be strengthened and new methods that would help countries implement treaties effectively need to be found.

Negotiation & Collaboration

It has been proven in many situations that a good collaboration between states, NGO's, IGO' and other bodies is vital to finding new suitable solutions. States should be encouraged to be open to dialogue and negotiation, as well as to collaboration with other states and organizations at all times in order to create a more effective emergency response to situations in areas of conflict. Moreover, with the help of stronger relations amongst states and organizations, the countries with threatened heritage sites would feel and be more supported by the international community throughout the time of the conflict, before and after. This, of course, would ensure a better chance for the natural and cultural heritage sites to be protected.

Prevention

Another idea to prevent the destruction of cultural heritage in areas of conflict, while the conflict has not escalated yet, would be the establishment of agreements between states concerning the movement of movable cultural heritage to another country, in order to ensure a better security of it. These agreements should include all conditions for both sides and the steps that are taken during this process.

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Appendix I

Very good overview for the topic:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/579081/EPRS_BRI(2016)579081_EN.pdf

Appendix II

Cases of sites in danger:

http://whc.unesco.org/en/158/

Appendix III

Interactive map of different types of heritage sites:

http://whc.unesco.org/?cid=31&l=en&&&&&&&