Preserving the heritage of humanity? Obtaining world heritage status and the Impacts of listing
Aa, Bart J.M. van der

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2005

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):
Chapter 4
Deconstructing world heritage
site selection

The involvement of different organisations in nominating world heritage sites leads to a world heritage list with sites of varying quality, as the selection is country-, time- and site-dependent. In addition, there are a number of mechanisms inside the convention that favour certain sites over others on other grounds than quality. These mechanisms can be divided under two headings. First, most nominated sites meet the broad selection criteria. And second, there are five factors (other than quality) that influence what countries nominate for the world heritage list.

4.1 Broad selection criteria

People have different understandings of what constitutes heritage: “There are civilisations for which the notion of heritage is not the same as the notion of monuments” (Musitelli 2003: 330). The indigenous people of New Mexico, for instance, are often thought to see heritage as ‘a way of life’, the sum of their language and traditions that they pass on to the next generation (Interview 48).

Cultures also use different interpretations of the criterion of outstanding universal value: “Different cultures have divergent ideas as to how old, or how symbolic, the fabric of built heritage must be in order to be of world class” (Graham et al. 2000: 241). There are two flaws in the criterion of outstanding universal value. First, the scale level of outstanding universal value of a nominated site has never been defined. And second, it is unclear which arguments suffice to meet the criterion of outstanding universal value.

4.1.1 What scale level?

Countries are asked to include a ‘comparative analysis’ in the nomination document of every site that they propose (UNESCO 2004a). This analysis requires a comparison with similar sites around the world and the applicant “must make clear to the committee why the property can be accepted as being ‘of outstanding universal value’” (UNESCO 2004a). However, the comparison with similar sites in terms of type or features has been plagued by inconsistency from the beginning (Hales 1982: 747).

In addition, the World Heritage Committee has never made clear at which level a site should be of outstanding universal value. The Netherlands, United Kingdom and Mexico have performed a comparative analysis for its tentatively listed sites.
Preserving the heritage of humanity?

Tentatively listed Mexican sites are on average compared with 1.70 other sites; Dutch sites with 2.50 sites and each tentatively proposed site from the United Kingdom with 2.80 other sites. About half of the tentatively listed sites are compared at the global level (table 4-1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale-level</th>
<th>The Netherlands</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>1 (10%)</td>
<td>3 (12%)</td>
<td>5 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continental</td>
<td>2 (20%)</td>
<td>4 (16%)</td>
<td>5 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td>5 (50%)</td>
<td>16 (64%)</td>
<td>11 (48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No comparison</td>
<td>2 (20%)</td>
<td>2 (8%)</td>
<td>2 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of sites</strong></td>
<td><strong>10 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>25 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>23 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


All three countries claim to have nominated incomparable sites. These are the Wouda steam pumping station and the Rietveld-Schröderhouse in the Netherlands, Kew Royal Botanic Gardens and the Lake District in the United Kingdom and the Ahuehuete tree in Santa María del Tule and the Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Félix Candela’s industrial buildings in Mexico City. The absence of a comparison is understandable to some extent. The criterion of outstanding universal value stipulates unique sites, but how can a unique site be compared if, by definition, there is no comparable site? This was stated in the case of Edinburgh: “It would be difficult, in fact meaningless, to carry out any serious comparative study of cities sharing common characteristics with Edinburgh. There are none; Edinburgh is essentially unique, and that is part of the argument for its inclusion on the list” (Stovel 1996: 35). Likewise, the Bauhaus buildings in Dessau and Weimar (Germany) are “the birthplaces of one of the most significant movements in architecture and art… For this reason comparative analysis is both inappropriate and unnecessary” (ICOMOS 1995: 30; see also Kuipers 1998: 61). Comparisons are sometimes omitted while this would be possible at a higher scale-level. For example, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe has designed buildings in North America and Europe, but it is argued that “there is no possible comparison within the Latin American context, since this was the only work by Van der Rohe in this area” (INAH 2002: 201, italics added). The site is considered in isolation from the rest of the world and other architects, whereas a more international perspective would have been both possible and welcome.

In addition, sites are sometimes only compared with other sites in the same country, while (more impressive) sites can be found in a neighbouring country. The pre-colonial site of Cahokia Mounds (United States of America) was compared with two sites in the United States of America – Moundville (Alabama) and Ocmulgee (Georgia). The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) recommended the following inscription: “the site is the most comprehensive affirmation of the pre-Columbian civilisations in the Mississippi region” (ICOMOS 1981: 2; italics added). Pre-colonial monuments in Mexico, with arguably more impressive characteristics, were excluded from the comparative study. Cahokia Mounds was listed in 1982 and it is “the largest pre-Columbian settlement north of Mexico” (UNESCO 2004a).
4.1.2 Which arguments?
The ambiguous criterion of outstanding universal value allows countries to forward any argument to validate a world heritage listing, as ‘uniqueness’ can be argued for every place. In the Netherlands, the decision to nominate the Wouda steam-driven pumping station was based on the ground that it is the largest, fully functional, pumping station. A new pumping station will replace the present pumping station in about twenty-five years (Interview 22). Does the pumping station, which earned its world heritage listing thanks to its continued operation, still merit listing when it lies permanently idle?
The old town of Ávila (Spain) was inscribed in 1985. Today, the UNESCO description depicts the glorious past of the city by referring to, among others, the burial place of the Grand Inquisitor Torquemada (UNESCO 2004a). The reference to Torquemada suggests that this person has made a positive contribution to Ávila’s past grandeur, while leaving unmentioned that he, as head of the Spanish Inquisition for fifteen years, put about 2000 people to death (see also Peters 1989: 85). And in the United Kingdom not one unique planned textile mill community was nominated, but “the entire spectrum” (DCMS 1999: 64). Derwent Valley Mills represent the oldest textile community (eighteenth century), New Lanark still provides the institutional buildings and Saltaire is the finest surviving textile village in the United Kingdom.
Decision makers do not always start by posing the question: “Which site is unique?” Instead, they take a site and try to justify why it is unique. This enables the inscription of several sites with rather similar qualities. In the mid-1980s, the Mexican selection committee did not select the ‘best’ colonial city, but attributed unique qualities to several colonial cities. Guanajuato was selected as the prime example of a mining city, Mexico City as the largest city on earth, and Pátzcuaro as the best example of a mixture of Indian and European architecture (Interview 57).
Two arguments that are frequently used by countries to highlight a site’s uniqueness are international links and being qualitatively equal to an already listed site.

1) International links supporting universal value
Influences from a single person or a group of people in another country are much-used arguments to justify inscription on the world heritage list. Another country’s influence bestows universal importance to a site. The Mezquita in Córdoba, which combines Hispano-Islamic, Latin-Byzantine, Christian, Moslem, Roman, Greek artefacts (Davies 1997: 256), may correctly claim universal elements.
The claim of outstanding universal value, based on international links, is not always that obvious. Five listed colonial Mexican sites – Puebla, Morelia, Zacatecas, Querétaro, and the Franciscan missionaries around Querétaro – excel thanks to their fusion of European and indigenous styles (UNESCO 2004a). The UNESCO description of Zacatecas, for instance, states that, “The cathedral… is notable for its harmonious design and the Baroque profusion of its façades, where European and indigenous decorative elements are found side by side” (UNESCO 2004a, see photo 4-1). The outstanding universal value of Zacatecas’s architectural blending is contested by Segovia (1995), as better examples of this genre can be found elsewhere in Mexico: “Although Zacatecas very soon became a city whose population was strongly marked by ethnic intermingling, the indigenous influences on colonial art are far less visible here than in southern Mexico” (p. 41).
Preserving the heritage of humanity?

The two Andalusian villages of Úbeda and Baeza (Spain), which were rejected due to a lack of quality in 1989, were listed in 2003 after the autonomous community of Andalucía ‘found’ two arguments to substantiate the towns’ outstanding universal value. First, Úbeda and Baeza, it was argued, were the Spanish version of the Italian renaissance style that originated in Pienza and Urbino. And second, Úbeda and Baeza have had an impact on Latin American architecture, such as the cathedrals of Mexico City, Puebla, Mérida (Mexico), Sucre (Bolivia) and Lima (Peru) (Interview 106; ICOMOS 2003: 156). These two arguments imply that it is sufficient to make a link with the prototype, which was duly acknowledged by the inscription of Pienza and Urbino in the late 1990s (see also ICOMOS 2003: 156).

Photo 4-1: Contested world heritage sites: Zacatecas’s cathedral façade and Baeza (twice).

2) Qualitatively equal to already listed world heritage sites

Stakeholders of nominated sites often mention that ‘their’ site is qualitatively equal or even better than already listed world heritage sites. The sites on the world heritage list have shown that they meet the criterion of outstanding universal value (see also box 4-1). More than half of the tentatively listed sites in Mexico are put on a par with already listed, mostly Mexican, world heritage sites. Guanajuato and Zacatecas have already been inscribed on the world heritage list, but the historic town of San Sebastián del Oeste would qualify for listing as “the urban image of this small town in [the state of] Jalisco is more unified than in any of them” (INAH 2002: 166). The mining town of San Luis Potosí is prominent in that it – apparently in contrast to other world heritage mining cities – “lies twelve kilometres from San Pedro hill, where the mine was located” (INAH 2002: 136).

A ‘beauty contest’ on the international level concerns the comparison of the aqueducts in Padre Tembleque (Mexico) and in Segovia (Spain). The latter is a world heritage site since 1985, but the nomination claimed that the former aqueduct “has more class and exuberance than Segovia’s since it is higher, larger and more elegant” (INAH 2002: 173).
Box 4-1: The listing of the first twelve world heritage sites in 1978.

Any first listed site sets the "gold standard" (Fowler 2003: 18) that nominated sites should meet. The first world heritage list in 1978 contained twelve sites:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>World heritage site</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Park</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nahanni National Park</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 City of Quito</td>
<td>Ecuador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Galápagos Islands</td>
<td>Ecuador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Rock-hewn churches, Lalibela</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Simen National Park</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Aachen Cathedral</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Wieliczka salt mine</td>
<td>Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Kraków’s historic centre</td>
<td>Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Island of Gorée</td>
<td>Senegal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Mesa Verde National Park</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Yellowstone National Park</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It has been pointed out that the two Polish sites – Wieliczka and Kraków – were inscribed on the first world heritage list: “It [Wieliczka salt mine] was put on the first list of UNESCO. Even the Pyramids of Giza were not on this first list, but Wieliczka was” (Interview 82, translated; see also Jodłowski 1991: 1 and photo 4-2).

Photo 4-2: Flag at Wieliczka, celebrating the inscription of Kraków and Wieliczka on the first world heritage list.

The World Heritage Committee, however, has never defined the ‘gold standard’: “In the absence of an a priori conception of the ideal list, we [the world heritage actors] have let the selection machine turn, in empirical fashion, year after year… more likely to satisfy considerations of national prestige or the economic interests of states, than to design a reasonable framework for the world’s collective good” (Musitelli 2003: 329). Emphasis lay on inscribing ever more sites and on the participating countries (IUCN 1982: 7).

The inscription of sites has also facilitated other nominations. Stakeholders of nominated sites often refer to already listed sites, by arguing that their site is qualitatively at least as good as a listed site. Fifteen out of twenty-three sites on Mexico’s tentative list use the argument that they are equal to or better than another world heritage site (INAH 2002). It is argued in the nomination document of Paramaribo (Surinam) that the inner city has similar characteristics as eight (mainly Caribbean) listed world heritage sites (Urban Heritage Foundation Suriname 1998: 13-14).
At the same time, it is almost impossible to remove a site from the list. A site can only be removed from the world heritage list when it loses the qualities for which it was inscribed (UNESCO 2004a). A change in valuation (Stovel 1994: 259) or the discovery of a higher quality site (Leblanc 1984: 24) is no reason to remove a site from the list.

4.2 Factors other than the site’s quality

Factors other than quality also play a role in what a country nominates for the world heritage list. Five factors are discussed. First, a country closely follows the guidelines of UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee, as this heightens the chance that the site will be listed. Second, decision makers at the national level frequently select the most obvious sites, as any other selection is more time-consuming. Third, the number of nominations per country depends on the available heritage infrastructure, as countries are the only actor that can formally nominate sites. Fourth, countries give priority to sites that can be controlled, as the national government holds primary responsibility for looking after listed sites on their own territory. And fifth, a successful nomination depends on local circumstances, as (financial) support is necessary to produce the nomination document while local opposition can prevent a nomination.

4.2.1 Listen to the World Heritage Committee’s preferences

A world heritage listing is often viewed as an honour for the country and that is why decision makers see it as an achievement. In contrast, a site’s rejection leads to disappointment, as seen from the deferrals of Gdańsk (Poland) (Cleere 2000: 3), and the two American sites Pu’uhonua o’Honaunau (Interview 42) and Savannah (Araoz 2002: 9). Decision makers at the national level try to keep the number of rejections as low as possible by nominating sites that have a high chance of inscription. It is helpful to this end to pay close attention to the World Heritage Committee’s preferences. Over the years, the committee’s focus has moved from grand architectural ensembles such as cathedrals and historic towns towards cultural landscapes and industrial sites (Pocock 1997b: 381). National selection committees have tried to take this into account. When the United Kingdom produced a new tentative list in the late 1990s, the Secretary of State commented: “the new tentative list looks very different from the last one… [as] the World Heritage Committee… has signalled that it is looking to widen the range of sites included on the list, particularly into the areas of industrial archaeology and cultural landscapes” (DCMS 1999: 4). Likewise, the sites selected by the Dutch State Service for Archaeological Investigations (Rijksdienst Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek, ROB) in the Netherlands concerns properties that are not or under-represented on the world heritage list (Hagers 1998: 6).

The strategy to follow the preferences of the Committee is also understood at the local level. The nomination of Aranjuez (Spain) became only possible after it was nominated as a ‘cultural landscape’ (box 4-2). The nomination of the monastic island of Reichenau (Germany) includes the entire island: “Es ist bekannt, daß die UNESCO derzeit bevorzugt größere räumliche Einheiten wie Ensembles oder Kulturlandschaften unter Schutz stellt... So kommt es, daß die gesamte Insel als ‘Klosterinsel Reichenau’ in die Welterbeliste eingetragen wurde” (Overlack 2001: 64-65).

The World Heritage Committee also welcomes the nomination of transboundary sites, as this encourages international cooperation (Eidsvik 1983: 196). This allowed the
autonomous region of Catalunya to propose the Spanish-French site of La Vertiente Mediterránea de los Pirineos for Spain’s tentative list (Interview 104).

**Box 4-2: Nomination of Aranjuez cultural landscape.**

The nomination of Aranjuez cultural landscape (photo 4-3) has benefited from the World Heritage Committee’s interest in cultural landscapes. The first of in total three categories of cultural landscapes (UNESCO 2004a) – the clearly defined landscape designed and created intentionally by man – has enabled the inscription. The first category of cultural landscapes was included, while the second and third categories – the organically evolved (fossil or continuing) landscape and the associative cultural landscape – should lead to a more balanced spatial distribution of world heritage sites.

*Photo 4-3: Palace and surrounding village of Aranjuez, including town hall.*

The first category of cultural landscapes has been contested from the beginning: “ein… Expertentreffen… war der Auffassung, daß die Kategorie der gestalteten Kulturlandschaften am wenigsten Probleme bereiten würde, da bereits genügend Beispiele dieses Typs auf der Welterbeliste vorhanden seien, so zum Beispiel Schloß und Gärten von Sanssouci… oder Versailles” (Rössler 1995: 344). The world heritage nomination of the palace and gardens of Aranjuez was contested, as already similar European properties like Versailles (France), Potsdam (Germany), and Schönbrunn
Preserving the heritage of humanity?

(Austria) were already on the world heritage list (Interview 105). The nomination of Aranjuez would presumably never have been approved in the absence of the category of 'cultural landscape'. The palace and gardens of Aranjuez could only be inscribed on the world heritage list in combination with the town of Aranjuez, portraying an “evolution of concepts… [including] the urban lifestyle” (UNESCO 2004a).

The case of Aranjuez is not an exception. Most cultural landscapes are towns and villages inscribed under cultural criterion IV – “an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble or landscape” (UNESCO 2004a). As such, cultural landscapes are valued on the same grounds as many of the earlier listed architectural and monumental sites (Fowler 2003: 19-21). This ‘old wine in new bottles’ leads Fowler (2003) to conclude that: “here is a ‘new’ type of world heritage site which is… adhering to a commonly used criterion for conventional sites” (p. 19).

4.2.2 Selecting the easiest sites

Decision makers at the national level tend to select the easiest sites instead of making extensive selections that could form the basis for a ‘perfect’ list. Extensive selections have been largely prevented by a shortage of time or lack of money:

“If you really want to do it in a systematic way you have to pull together experts from a number of fields and you have to conduct a very comprehensive review of many, many sites, hundreds of sites. The world heritage program in the United States of America has never been funded at a level that would permit that the National Park Service could undertake a study like that.”

(Interview 42)

The selection of sites is often done on more pragmatic grounds. Fully developed heritage sites, heritage visitor attractions, and sites in the spotlight at the moment of selection have an advantage over other sites.

1) Fully developed heritage sites

Nationally or regionally designated heritage sites, with accompanying management and protection structures, have preference over less organised sites. The prerequisite of national recognition is most strictly adhered to in the United States of America. To be nominated sites should first be of national importance, which means that it has to be a national park (Department of Interior 1997: 371). One sees a more flexible approach in the Polish list Monuments of National History (Pomniki historii) which has been the basis for selecting cultural world heritage sites since 1995 (Pawłowski 1999: 18).

The Netherlands gave priority to the easy cases when they worked through their tentative list of the built environment (Chouchena and Van Rossum 1999: 9-10). The first nomination by the Dutch State Agency for the Preservation of Monuments (RDWZ) – the defence line of Amsterdam – could be completed in a tearing rush as the province of North Holland already had finalised arrangements for the site’s protection (De Jong 1996: 16). In contrast, the nomination of the inner city of Amsterdam was held up by the creation of a new city borough ‘centre’ and the construction of a new metro line (Interview 14). Also the nomination of the New Dutch inundation line was delayed. The nomination was complicated by factors such as private and governmental
stakeholders, the poor condition of the fortresses, discontinuity in the landscape due to expanding settlements, the less than satisfactory legal protection, and the disintegration of extensive sections of the system of defensive dikes which meant that not much of the structure was left standing (OCW et al. 2000: 96-97; Van Bolhuis and Vrijlandt 1993: 12; Van Bolhuis and Vrijlandt 1996: 372 and Doorman 2002: 4). Sites recognised under international treaties have an advantage over other sites, showing the preference for established heritage. Biosphere reserves recognised under UNESCO’s Man and Biosphere Programme are often also nominated for the world heritage list, even though the programmes select sites according to different principles. Biosphere reserves are representative of a given ecosystem, while designated world heritage sites are acknowledged areas of outstanding universal value (IUCN 1982: 7 and Plachter 1995: 349). More than one out of every five natural sites that is nominated for the world heritage list was already designated as a biosphere reserve. In February 2004, 425 biosphere reserves were located in ninety-seven countries (UNESCO 2004c). Fifty-six man and biosphere reserves were nominated for world heritage status later, while in total 252 natural sites have ever been nominated for the world heritage list. Furthermore, biosphere reserves nominated for the world heritage list are less often rejected than sites without this recognition. The World Heritage Committee has listed forty-seven of the fifty-six biosphere reserves (eighty-four percent) that have been nominated for the world heritage list, while ‘only’ sixty-nine percent of all nominated natural sites have been inscribed. Consequently, countries sometimes deliberately nominate already recognised biosphere reserves for the world heritage list. The Mexican National Commission for Natural Protected Areas (Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas, CONANP) plans to nominate some islands in the Gulf of California – a recognised biosphere reserve since 1995 – as these “are already UNESCO sites… I don’t know if this helps or not, but our Mexican representative in the Man and Biosphere Programme told us that it would be easier” (Interview 54).

2) Heritage visitor attractions
Established heritage visitor attractions are more liable to be nominated than other sites. The visitor facilities are already in place at these attractions. In the United States of America, “the opportunities afforded by the property for public visitation, interpretation, and education” (Department of Interior 1997: 372) are taken into consideration whether or not to nominate a site. Many world heritage sites were already top visitor attractions in their country before their world heritage listing. Examples of this are the windmills of Kinderdijk (Beusekom 2000a: 33), Durham Cathedral (Willis 1994: 269), Wieliczka salt mine (Hall 2000: 414), Masada (Israel) (The Biblical Archaeology 2002: 15).

3) In the spotlight at the moment of selection
Sites in the spotlight before the tentative list is drawn up have an increased chance to be included. Attention that may initiate a world heritage nomination may come from what is popular and on fashion, anniversaries and renovations, and organised conferences.

Deconstructing world heritage site selection
Preserving the heritage of humanity?

Fashion of the day

In the Netherlands, the Project Group for Industrial Heritage (PIE) was asked to make recommendations for the Dutch tentative list in 1993, as industrial heritage received much attention in those days. The Project Group was established in 1991 (Genuchten 1999: 80) and 1996 was the year of industrial heritage in the Netherlands (OCW 1996: 66). The bureau made, among others, an inventory of pumping stations (Genuchten 1999: 80), paving the road for the nomination of the Wouda steam pumping station. Likewise, the attention for the defence line of Amsterdam resulted from an inventory of monuments by the province of North Holland in the late 1980s (Interview 18, Schulte 1995: 248; Schimmel 1986: 18-19).

In 1997, ICOMOS “commissioned Great Britain’s Institute of Railway Studies to recommend guidelines about the kinds of qualities that the World Heritage Committee should look for in railroad sites” (Divall 1999: 6). The increased interest at the international level for railroads coincided with the inclusion of Brunel’s Great Western railway line from London Paddington to Bristol in United Kingdom’s 1999 tentative list.

Anniversaries and renovations

Upcoming anniversaries, combined with large-scale, nationally supported renovations can speed up a site’s nomination for the world heritage list. The Polish city of Zamość celebrated its four hundredth anniversary in 1980, which was preceded by restoration projects (Piatek et al. 1980: 341). The renovations were only partially completed (Gruszczeki 1984: 47), but Zamość’s world heritage nomination was suggested during an ICOMOS conference which it hosted on the occasion of its anniversary (Pawłowski 1999: 17). Likewise, the Statue of Liberty’s 1986 centennial anniversary spurred its world heritage nomination as demonstrated by the following quote: “I think that the centennial put it over the edge. The fact that there was a big celebration coming up has helped, but I guess that it would have happened at some point anyway” (Interview 40). These renovations are often national prestige projects. The renovations at Suomenlinna fortresses (Finland) from 1974 onwards have resulted in a world heritage nomination in 1991 (Lahdenmäki 1998: 27). ICOMOS Spain has been involved in the revitalisation of the Camino real de Tierra Adentro, which runs from Mexico City to Santa Fe. Today, this route is included in Mexico’s tentative list (INAH 2002).

Conferences

Ideas for a world heritage nomination may also result from conferences. Aranjuez’s cultural landscape was suggested as a world heritage nomination during the 1992 ICOMOS conference in that city. Mexican cities hosting the annual ICOMOS Mexico conference often received the world heritage status in the period soon after. Oaxaca (conference in 1989, listed in 1987) and Mexico City (1990/1987) hosted the conference just after their world heritage listing. Puebla (conference in 1986, listed in 1987), Zacatecas (1987/1993), Morelia (1991/1991), Querétaro (1993/1996), and Campeche (1994/1999) organised the conference before their world heritage listing. All five conferences’ recommended that the host city should be put on the world heritage list. The Querétaro conference recommended that, “En forma especial, se recomienda a las instancias competentes se acelere la formación del expediente que
Deconstructing world heritage site selection

posibilité la inclusión del centro histórico de Querétaro en la lista del patrimonio mundial, dadas las relevantas características de éste y el buen grado de conservación que se ha logrado por parte de la comunidad queretana” (ICOMOS Mexico 2000: 105).

The place and country where the World Heritage Committee holds its annual meeting has also had an impact on the number and kind of nominated sites (Cleere 1998: 31; Batisse 1992: 17). The World Heritage Committee has met twenty-one times outside Paris and the host country nominated a site in twelve instances. This included the contested nomination of the Hiroshima War Memorial (Japan). The United States of America lobbied for the 1992 World Heritage Committee in Santa Fe (New Mexico), and its chairmanship “to provide a perfect venue for listing [Pueblo de] Taos on the world heritage list” (Interview 42). The most extreme instance was the 1997 meeting in Naples. Italy nominated twelve sites, even though this country was asked to nominate fewer sites within the framework of the ‘global strategy’.

4.2.3 Available heritage infrastructure
Countries are best able to nominate sites for the list when they possess a solid heritage infrastructure. Indicators of a country’s heritage infrastructure are the availability of heritage experts that are members of the national branches of international heritage NGOs as well as the country’s seat on the World Heritage Committee.

1) National heritage NGOs
The designation of heritage sites depends on the activities of heritage actors (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 150). Heritage actors that can suggest, initiate and prepare a nomination are also important for world heritage nominations. The creation of the Foundation for the Built Cultural Heritage in Surinam in 1997 and ICOMOS Surinam in 1999 (Bakker 2002: 31) concurred with the world heritage nomination of Surinam’s capital Paramaribo in 1999. Initiators are important to jump start a nomination, as illustrated by an example concerning the Dorset and East Devon Coast:

“If Dennis Brunsden had not started it, I do not believe that the Dorset and East Devon Coast would ever have been nominated. Sites need interested parties, such as NGOs, local wildlife trusts, and councils such as at the Dorset and East Devon Coast. It needs the first spark to start the process.”

(Interview 36)

International heritage NGOs can act as a driving force to propel the heritage industry. Some ICOMOS committees have promoted the inclusion of ‘their’ kind of heritage in the list. The rock-art committee undertook action to inscribe Valcamonica’s rock drawings (Italy), the committee on vernacular architecture initiated the listing of the old town of Plovdiv (Bulgaria) and the specialised committee on wood promoted the world heritage designation of the wooden church of Petäjävesi (Finland) (Pressouyre 1993: 62).

National ICOMOS branches often play a large role when a country starts participating in the world heritage convention. The national ICOMOS organisations in Spain and Mexico ignited the awareness about the world heritage convention and were responsible for the selection and nomination of world heritage sites in their countries in the 1980s. The role of the national heritage NGO branches has become less central in later years; they remained at best an advisory body for the state party (Interview 56, 57 and 104).
Preserving the heritage of humanity?

A country has more world heritage sites of a particular kind if it also has a national branch that represents that kind of heritage. The average number of cultural, natural, geological, modern architectural or industrial world heritage sites is higher in countries that have respectively a national ICOMOS, IUCN, IUGS, DOCOMOMO or TICCIH branch (table 4-2). For example, the latest inventory by DOCOMOMO International was limited to the countries with a DOCOMOMO working party (Casciato 2000: 9; Sharp 2000: 11; DOCOMOMO ISC/Registers 1998: 48). There are sixty-three geological, thirteen modern architectural and thirty-one industrial world heritage sites. Only eight countries without an IUGS branch, two countries without a DOCOMOMO branch and three countries without a TICCIH branch have managed to obtain world heritage listing. It should be noted, however, that the causality between the availability of national branches of heritage NGOs and world heritage sites might well be the other way around. Countries may have certain heritage NGOs if they have certain types of heritage.

Table 4-2: Presence of heritage NGOs and world heritage sites (WHS) in countries (panel A) and the average number of particular kinds of world heritage sites (panel B).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>with respective NGO and WHS</th>
<th>without respective NGO and WHS</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICOMOS</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUCN</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUGS</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOCOMOMO</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TICCIH</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>with respective NGO</th>
<th>without respective NGO</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICOMOS</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUCN</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUGS</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOCOMOMO</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TICCIH</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


2) In the World Heritage Committee

The number of world heritage sites in a country depends on a country’s willingness to actively participate in the world heritage convention (Jones 1994: 316). National political opposition against world heritage listings in the United States of America has led to an abdication from nominating sites (Araoz 2002: 7). The Polish nomination of Zamość had to wait for more than ten years, as the leader of the world heritage convention in Poland, Pawlowski, fled to France after the proclamation of martial law on the 13 December 1981. And, in the United Kingdom, the world heritage programme lay idle due to a lack of interest by the Conservative government between 1988 and 1997 (Interview 32; Smith 1997: 4).
Countries that actively participate in the world heritage convention are often also represented on the World Heritage Committee. This committee, comprising twenty-one member countries, takes most decisions and formulates the policy for the upcoming years (Drost 1996: 480; see appendix 3 for the composition of the present committee). Elected countries stay in the world heritage committee for five years. ‘Only’ 69 out of 178 countries that have ratified the convention have ever been on the committee (see also Musitelli 2003: 333). A country stays on average about eight years in the committee, albeit with some variations in length of committee membership. Brazil, France, Italy and Mexico have had a representative on the committee for nineteen years. Poland, Ghana, Iran, Iraq and the former Yugoslavia have only been on the committee for one or two years.

Countries nominate more sites in the years that they sit on the World Heritage Committee. Between 1978 and 2002, the total number of years which countries have served on the committee is 522. Altogether these countries listed 335 sites, so countries that are represented on the committee get on average 0.64 sites per year on the world heritage list. In contrast, the sum total of length of membership for all signatory countries excluding duration of membership on the committee is 2352 years. These countries get on average 0.18 sites listed per year. There are eight countries that have only received sites during their own term on the committee: Egypt, Guinea, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mexico, South Africa, and Thailand.

The importance of being on the World Heritage Committee, however, is decreasing (figure 4-1). In 1979, almost seventy percent of the listed sites came from a country that was on the World Heritage Committee. This number has dropped to about thirty percent in 1999.

**Figure 4-1: Share of listed sites belonging to World Heritage Committee member countries.**

![Graph showing the percentage of listed sites from World Heritage Committee member countries from 1978 to 2002.](source: UNESCO (1978-2003), adapted data.)

---

81
**Preserving the heritage of humanity?**

Nominated sites from countries sitting on the World Heritage Committee do not necessarily receive preferential treatment. A committee member often takes its responsibility to nominate sites more seriously. The political change from Conservative to Labour in the United Kingdom led to greater commitment to the world heritage convention, a renewed tentative list, and making themselves available for committee membership.

4.2.4 *Nominating sites that can be controlled*

The responsibility for preserving listed world heritage sites lies primarily with the country in which the site is located. Countries take this responsibility into consideration when they nominate sites for the world heritage list. This is especially evident in the centralised selection of sites in the first years of a country’s participation. Countries predominantly nominate nationally owned sites, or sites managed by national heritage organisations that have a formal management structure (see photo 4-4).

*Photo 4-4: World heritage sites are often nationally owned: Auschwitz, Palenque, Aranjuez and Yellowstone.*

1) *Nationally owned sites*

The United States of America has always viewed its responsibility for listed world heritage sites very seriously (Webster-Smith 2001: 9). It is more difficult to nominate a privately owned site, as each property owner must agree in writing with the nomination (Department of Interior 1997: 371). This prerequisite “sets a very large exclusion of sites from consideration on the ground other than significance” (Interview 42). Approval of nomination is especially problematic for historic cities, as “for any site nominated to the list there must be hundred percent owner consent. Everyone knows intuitively and empirically that there is not a single historic district in the world with
Deconstructing world heritage site selection

universal agreement on this matter” (Araoz 2002: 9). Non-federal properties are underrepresented on the world heritage list. Cahokia Mounds, Pueblo de Taos, and Monticello and the University of Virginia are the only three world heritage sites in the United States of America that are not federally owned. Tentatively listed and non-federally owned sites, such as the General Electric research laboratory, the original Bell telephone laboratories and Brooklyn Bridge (all in New York) have been ignored. Federal countries predominantly select nationally owned heritage sites, as the world heritage convention text requires “the central or national government of a signatory country to have the same obligations as any other country party, even though it may not have the direct power under that country’s constitution to deal with the world heritage sites” (WTO 1994: 3). Other federal countries, such as Australia and Spain, have not taken such an extreme position as the United States of America. In Australia, the national responsibility has led to the introduction of the World Heritage Act, which allows for federal intervention in world heritage areas (Connellan 2003: 78). The practice in Spain is to follow the regulations set out in the convention less meticulously: “The implementation of the 1972 convention is the juridical responsibility of the communities, so they should… [be running] the programmes, not the state government. Sometimes the autonomous regions do not accept that, but most of them do’ (Interview 104).

2) Heritage site management
Not nationally owned sites that are nominated for the world heritage list are often run by national heritage organisations. This is another way of assuring that the site will be well managed. In the United Kingdom, English Heritage and the National Trust run three and five world heritage sites. In Spain, municipalities are primarily responsible for the heritage site, paving the road for eleven whole cities and a number of municipally owned structures on the world heritage list. In Mexico, all archaeological sites and most important elements in the cities are controlled by the national heritage organisation INAH, assuring their involvement in almost all Mexican cultural world heritage sites. CONANP only nominates natural areas with a management body, as “it is a way in which we can… [fulfil] our responsibility regarding the convention” (Interview 54). And in Poland most important urban elements in Warszawa and Kraków, the castle in Malbork, Auschwitz concentration camp and Wieliczka salt mine are state-run. There is no dominant type of ownership in the Netherlands, but potential archaeological sites worthy of nomination should already have conservation and management structures in place which will facilitate nomination (Hagers 1998: 7).

The absence of ownership right or a management body can prevent a world heritage nomination. The Delta works, a prime example of the Dutch battle against water (OCW et al. 1999: 22), have not been nominated for the world heritage list, as its primary function is defensive, with no attention given to aspects of heritage site management (Interview 15). Table Mountain (South Africa), has not been nominated, as it has no integrated management plan, insufficient legislation and lacks a responsible authority (Cowling 1995: 17). And in the United Kingdom “it is essential in every… [world heritage nomination] that there is either a body able and willing to take on the necessary work or a realistic prospect that such a body will emerge over the next few years” (DCMS 1999: 8).
Preserving the heritage of humanity?

4.2.5 Favourable local political circumstances
A successful nomination increasingly depends on a favourable local environment. Political and financial help from the local government is needed to continue with the nomination and to prepare a nomination document. The local population’s support is also needed, as the nomination can be blocked if the locals are opposed to it.

1) Local (financial) assistance
The need for financial assistance has become more important over time, in view of the increasing complexity and extensive documentation entailed by the nomination procedure. Turtinen (2000) observes that, “the amount of documentation has increased over the years. The first nomination files in 1978 and 1979 were very brief, and consisted merely of the nomination form, some black and white photos and maps. Today most of the files consist of hundreds of pages of documentation in several volumes, including detailed management plans, maps, and other material such as videotapes and slides” (p. 12; see also Leblanc 1984: 26).

The international heritage community has created a situation that necessitates the production of sophisticated nomination documents. For example, the historic centre of Rome was rejected in 1979 as “the map and books did in no way help towards the creation of a body of knowledge and information of sites of outstanding universal value” (Interview 43). It can be questioned whether it is necessary to impose such exacting demands on the supporting nomination documents. It could also be argued that a world heritage listing should depend on the outstanding universal value of a site, not the voluminous details and complexity of the nomination document.

The increase in decentralised (or non-central) nominations in combination with the need for high quality nomination documents inevitably makes local support vital. In the past, central nominations were often the consequence of a common endeavour of the national heritage organisation and the site. Today, with the increase in decentralised requests and nominations, the help of the national heritage organisation is less usual. Local governments have to replace the national heritage organisation. The world heritage nominations of Toruń (Poland) and Aranjuez could not be realised without the support and financial assistance of the local communities (Interview 88 and 105). The nomination of the Beemster polder (the Netherlands) could proceed fairly smoothly thanks to the establishment of a municipal working group that prepared the nomination (Beusekom 2000b: 4).

Sites without an obvious owner, such as the Forth Rail Bridge (Scotland), face more difficulties in preparing their nomination document (Leask and Fyall 2001: 58). Other local stakeholders do not have the means to produce a nomination document. In China, minorities have more difficulties to nominate their heritage sites, because they lack the resources as illustrated in the following quote, “Our nomination list does not reflect which sites we consider most valuable. It reflects the places where local authorities have shown they have the enthusiasm and the resources to manage and protect the sites” (Gilley 2001: 62).

2) Potential local opposition to a world heritage nomination
The ultimate power to nominate a site for the world heritage list has moved from the national to the local level. In the past, the decision to nominate a site was taken at the
Deconstructing world heritage site selection

national level, while at best the management of the site was consulted. Nowadays, local
stakeholders can prevent a world heritage nomination.
At least until 1993, UNESCO recommended that the world heritage nomination should
be done centrally, without much publicity preceding listing: “To avoid public
embarrassment to those concerned, states parties should refrain from giving undue
publicity to the fact that a property has been nominated for inscription pending the final
decision of the committee of the nomination in question (UNESCO 1993: 6). By 1998,
this recommendation was thrown out in favour of involving the local population in the
nomination process because it “is essential to make them feel a shared responsibility
with the state party in the maintenance of the site” (UNESCO 1998: 4).
The shift from local exclusion to inclusion is the consequence of two new insights.
First, there has been some controversy over nominations in which the local population
was largely ignored. This happened, for example, at some federally nominated
Australian sites (Corbett and Lane 1996: 41; Pearson and Sullivan 1995: 43). Local
consultation before nomination was introduced to avert subsequent local opposition.
Second, the preservation of heritage sites – either national parks or world heritage sites
– is best effected when the designation is locally supported (Hagers 1998: 6; Kuijper
There are, however, also reasons to omit local consultation rounds, as summed by
Streeten (2000): “It is time-consuming and requires additional resources, and there are
inherent risks of pre-emptive action by owners who may demolish a building or
obliterate a landscape fearing the likelihood of some future stationary constraint” (p.
96). Local stakeholders may be hesitant and reserved about a world heritage proposal,
as they are not entirely sure about the impacts of a world heritage listing. This
happened in the trilateral nomination of the Wadden Sea by Denmark, Germany and
the Netherlands (Van der Aa et al. 2004: 291). Consequently, sites that would qualify
for a world heritage listing – and thus deserve the attention and preservation by all
humanity – can be kept away from the world heritage list by local action.
Decision makers have differently interpretations about the expediency of local
consultations. For the nomination of the Wadden Sea, decision makers in all three
countries have consulted several local stakeholders. In the Netherlands, nine different
groups – including local residents, farmers, fishers, and the tourism industry – were
consulted and invited to give their views about the world heritage nomination. This
was because the majority was against a nomination due to fears of loss of authority and
a lack of clarity (Van der Aa et al. 2004: 295-297).
At two other sites – Dorset and East Devon Coast and Kalwaria Zebrzydowska – the
consultation took on the character of information dissemination (personal attendance
Seaton 2001; Interview 84). The interested public was informed about the likely
consequences of a listing, without any opportunity to stop the nomination. One also
notes that local consultation has been largely absent in most of the recently listed sites
(see also Hitchcock 2002: 165 on the stone town of Zanzibar, Tanzania).
Aplin (2002) mentions that it is “only rarely, and because for reasons of cultural or
spiritual sensitivity,… a group or community [will] not be pleased to have an element
of their heritage recognised as significant at higher levels” (p. 352). Local opposition,
however, has obstructed a few world heritage nominations over the years, especially
when the initiative comes from the national level. Local proprietors stopped the
nomination by the Swedish National Heritage Board of the cultural landscape of Markim Orkesta (Sweden), as “they had no desire of being… [commanded] from Paris” (Turtinen 2000: 21). The state of Missouri opposed the planned world heritage nomination of the Wainwright building (United States of America) by the National Park Service (Interview 42). And the province of Flevoland and the municipality Noordoostpolder have opposed the possible nomination of the Noordoostpolder by the RDMZ, as this would limit their opportunities for economic development (Interview 15; Chouchena and Van Rossum 1999: 8).

4.3 Concluding remarks
The quality of potential world heritage sites is mostly taken into consideration by countries, but this does not lead to a qualitatively coherent world heritage list. On the one hand, countries interpret the selection criterion of outstanding universal value differently. On the other hand, five factors other than the site’s quality, apply. The heritage site that best fits the guidelines of the World Heritage Committee, receives most attention, is located in a country with a solid heritage infrastructure, which can be controlled by the national scale-level and which does not meet local opposition has most chance of a nomination. Consequently, some of the world’s ‘best’ heritage sites are denied universal recognition and the accompanying level of preservation.