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Multilateralism and UNESCO World Heritage: Decision Making, States Parties and Political Processes

L. Meskell,[a] C. Liuzza,[a] E. Bertacchini,[b] D, Saccone[b]

Abstract

Why have deliberations over World Heritage sites become such a volatile arena for the performance of international tensions, new political alliances and challenges to global cooperation? Across UN platforms the failures of multilateralism are increasingly evident. We suggest that decision making within the World Heritage Committee is no different given that politicization is now rife throughout their deliberations. Specifically we ask how has multi-polarity and fragmentation developed within UNESCO's World Heritage program, an organization dedicated to peace building, tolerance and mutual understanding, and international co-operation?

This paper examines trends from the last decade of UNESCO World Heritage Committee meetings, specifically the nominations of sites for inscription on the World Heritage List. Our findings suggest that the decisions presented by UNESCO's Advisory Bodies are increasingly at odds with the final decisions adopted by the World Heritage Committee. The process by which evaluations are formulated by these experts is also being questioned, opening up larger debates about the validity and transparency of the evaluation criteria and process. We go on to outline the regional and geopolitical trends at work in the Committee and to question whether site inscription is affected by a State Party's presence on the Committee. While once considered the realm of European States Parties and their particular style of properties, our analysis reveals that the demographics of the Committee and types of sites inscribed in the last decade has gradually shifted. Finally, this leads us to question whether the older-style polarization of 'the West and the Rest' remains the most salient divide today.

[a] Stanford Archaeology Center, Stanford University, USA.
[b] Department of Economics and Statistics "Cognetti de Martiis," University of Torino, Italy.

UNESCO's World Heritage Program

In 1945 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was created with a constitution mandating 'the conservation and protection of the world's inheritance of books, works of art and monuments of history and science.' Soon after this commitment transformed into proactive international assistance: the first mission was launched in 1959 for the Nubian monuments of Egypt, threatened by the construction of the Aswan Dam. In 1965 the idea of a World Heritage Trust was first proposed during the White House Conference in the US and the term 'world heritage' was coined (Allais 2013: 7; Bandarin 2007). In 1972 the General Conference of UNESCO adopted The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO 1972). It established a new provision for the international and collective protection of heritage with 'outstanding universal value' (Jokilehto and Cameron 2008; see Labadi 2013; Titchen 1996).[i] While there were originally only a handful of nations at the time of ratification, today there are 190 signatories. The Convention created a set of obligations to protect the past for future generations, an aspiration for a shared sense of belonging, and a global solidarity (Choay 2001: 140).

The World Heritage Centre (WHC) was established in 1992 to act as the Secretariat and coordinator within UNESCO for all matters related to the Convention. The Centre organizes the annual sessions of the World Heritage Committee (the Committee) and provides advice to States Parties in the preparation of site nominations. The World Heritage Centre along with the Advisory Bodies also organizes international assistance from the World Heritage Fund and coordinates both the reporting on the condition of sites and the emergency action undertaken when a site is threatened.

The Advisory Bodies are comprised of international experts who conduct monitoring missions and evaluations: the International Centre for the Study of Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).[ii] For example, individual evaluators from ICOMOS might include archaeologists, structural engineers or mud-brick conservators, each with their own disciplinary, national and personal priorities and attachments (Lafrenz Samuels 2009; Turtinen 2000). ICOMOS and the IUCN communicate their findings in lengthy reports and presentations at international meetings, although their technical approaches and priorities are being

increasingly challenged. Recently ICOMOS has been subject to extensive criticism from States Parties, especially those from non-Western nations (Claudi 2011: 36), ranging from their factual errors to Eurocentric bias (see Meskell 2012; 2013b; Rico 2008). Unlike the IUCN that has partnerships and donors, ICOMOS relies heavily on UNESCO's contributions[iii] and has subsequently faced a funding crisis of late. Their 'lack of funding is major and permanent problem in the World Heritage system, and even more so for ICOMOS, whose voluntary real and in-kind contributions to the World Heritage process for 2012 totaled more than 500,000 Euros, an amount that is unsustainable' (ICOMOS 2012: 11).

As an inter-governmental agency and part of the UN family, States Parties that are signatories to the Convention are in fact the most powerful decision makers in World Heritage (Askew 2010; Meskell 2013b), particularly those that have representation on the Committee. The Committee is made up of 21 States Parties, elected at a General Assembly, that serve a four-year term.[iv] The Committee's mandate is to develop policies and overarching framework for the implementation of the Convention, to decide on new nominations to the World Heritage List, oversee monitoring and managing of sites already on that List, and consider the need for special measures regarding World Heritage in Danger, including allocating funds from the World Heritage Fund. In recent years Committee representatives have shifted from being archaeological and environmental experts in favor of state appointed ambassadors and politicians. The Committee has the final say on whether a property is inscribed on the World Heritage List or on the World Heritage in Danger List (http://whc.unesco.org/en/list). By signing the Convention, each country pledges to conserve not only World Heritage properties situated on its territory, but also its broader national heritage. States Parties with World Heritage sites garner international and national prestige, have access to the World Heritage Fund for monetary assistance, and can tap the potential benefits of heightened public awareness, tourism and economic development.

Auditing Cultures

UNESCO regularly commissions internal reports and audits, as do other agencies and national delegations on the World Heritage program and since 2010 there have been some startling findings. A Norwegian Report to the 34th session of the Committee (2010) found that over the previous 10-15 years an increasing politicization has developed

whereby policy has trumped technical expertise. Reporting on the meetings in Brasilia, The Economist (2010) signaled that 'the UN agency (was) bending its own rules under pressure from member states.' During the General Assembly in 2010 half the exiting Committee was replaced by new delegations, among those Brazil, China and Egypt that played high profile roles in term of frequency of interventions during the sessions. France, Switzerland, Mali, Barbados, and South Africa closely followed in the number of times they took the floor. Some of our informants, including senior officials and delegates, attribute the changed dynamics in the Committee we trace through our analyses to new geo-political configuration of the Committee. For example, the Norwegian report claimed (2010: 3) that China put pressure on other members to secure their own nominated sites for inscription before formal Committee discussions, with several State Parties expressing concern. Brazil, as host nation and chair of the Committee, also advocated that the Committee itself could take decisions beyond the guidelines of the Convention since they were the highest decision making body. When interviewed, some of the key delegates in Brazil agree that their actions were central in creating this new arena of self-interest and overt politicization. Brazil desperately needed to secure the inscription of São Francisco Square in São Cristóvão on the List because of upcoming national elections. Chart 1 below demonstrates the concordance factor depending on whether a site is nominated by one of the 21 State Parties represented on the Committee.

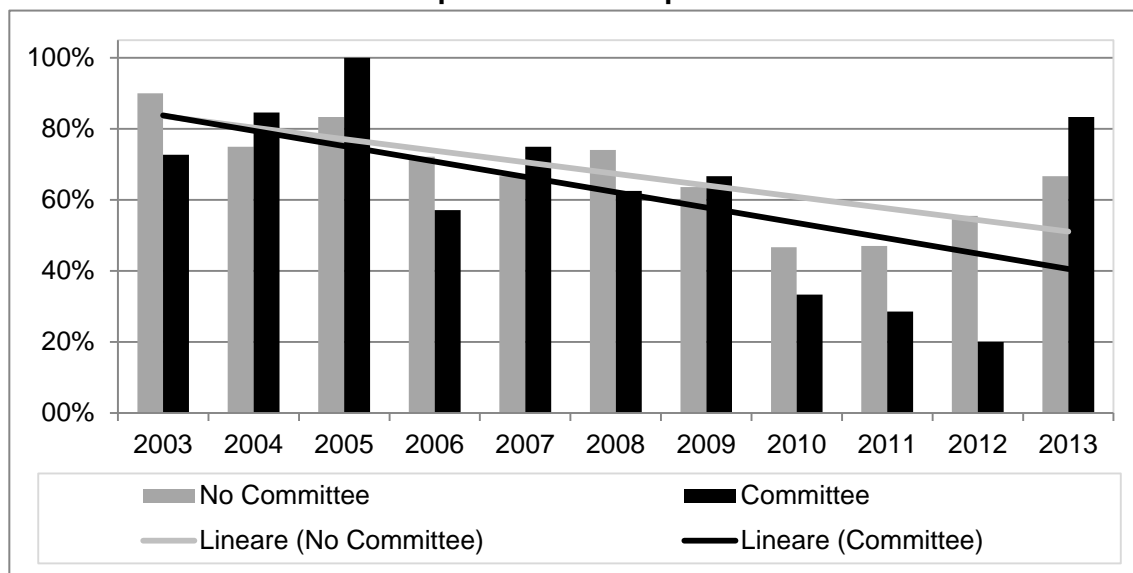**Chart 1: Committee Membership and Site Inscription Concordance**

Some so-called 'neutral' nations like Estonia and Switzerland continue to argue for scientific and expert-based decision making. In general, however, the report suggests that decisions were taken behind the scenes rather than through public debate, including controversial territorial cases such as Jerusalem (Palestine and Israel) and Preah Vihear (Cambodia and Thailand).

The Norwegian report also described the World Heritage in Danger List as increasingly ignoring expert advice from the IUCN in favor of political agreements between States Parties. This, they argued in the controversial case of extraction and export of forest products from the Madagascan site of Atsinanana, reduced the Convention to a type of environmental agreement. In the case of the Old City of Jerusalem politics were at a premium: it was reported that the 2007 Action Plan was not supported by Israel and Palestinian and Jordanian experts were excluded while illegal Israeli excavations continued. This situation has continued, unabated, to the present.

In 2010 an external auditor was tasked with assessing UNESCO's priority initiative, the 'Global Strategy for a Credible, Representative and Balanced World Heritage List' (UNESCO 2011a). This audit reinforced that Committee decisions increasingly diverge from the scientific opinions of the Advisory Bodies, contributing to a drift towards a more 'political' rather than 'heritage' approach to the Convention. Contrary to Article 9-3 of the Convention, sufficient representation is not being given to heritage experts within the national delegations and these are now largely political appointments. Moreover, amendments are being made to draft decisions even before a site is publicly presented and several delegations lodged official complaints (UNESCO 2011a: 6).

Chart 2: Advisory Body Recommendation and Committee Decision Concordance
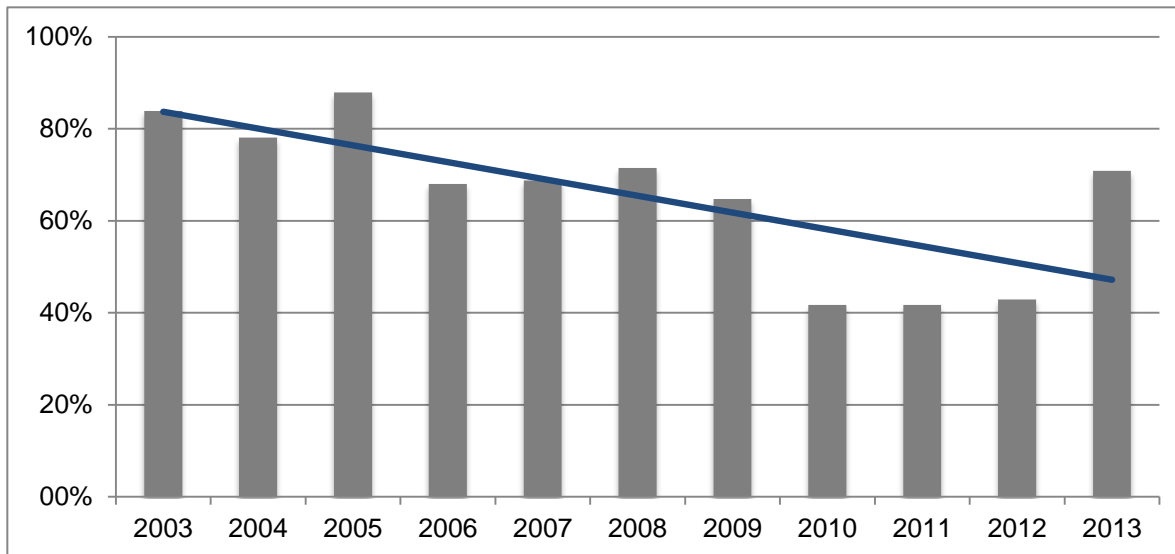
Chart 2: Concordance Factor between Advisory Body recommendations and World Heritage Committee final decisions per year for all sites.

UNESCO claims that the impact of the Convention has grown over time, inspiring greater involvement by governments, communities and individuals, universities, foundations, and the private sector (Bandarin 2007). Yet inscription has become a political tool for nations to bolster their sovereign interests, using global patrimony as a pawn. Collective decision making and the over-arching responsibility for the conservation of sites, once the remit of national delegates with heritage expertise, has been replaced by excessive backstage lobbying by politicians (Cassel and Pashkevich 2013; Hoggart 2011: 86) and the bargaining power of nations with geo-political alliances based on geography, religion, trade partnerships or anti-Western sentiment. Thus the ideal of collective responsibility, both ethical and fiscal, once so central to the ideals of the Convention, is losing ground. Concern for local and indigenous community involvement is similarly being curtailed by powerful nation states (Logan 2013; Meskell 2013a), despite UNESCO's own attempts to recognize indigenous expertise. Irrespective of scholarly debate about global heritage regimes, the statist desire to participate in the World Heritage arena continues to expand and therefore it is critical to examine the institutional political economies and capillary networks of power that underlie its processes on the ground.

We argue that state agendas have come to eclipse substantive discussions of the merits of site nominations during World Heritage Committee sessions as well as the attendant issues of community benefits, the participation of indigenous stakeholders, or threats

from mining and exploitation (see also Askew 2010; Logan 2012; Meskell 2011; 2014; 2012). We suggest that the specificities of cultural and natural sites during their inscription, protection or even destruction have become largely irrelevant in substance, yet highly valued in state-to-state negotiations and transactions. Site specificity seems largely irrelevant to the States Parties, one could say that sites have lost their heritage value.[v] Instead they operate as transactional devices whereby cultural, and thus political, recognition both masks and enables a multifarious network of economic values (Di Giovine 2008; Salazar 2010a; 2010b).

With the growing dominance of strategic political alliances within the Committee of 21 states, the recommendations of the Advisory Bodies have been increasingly overturned and publicly derided (Jokilehto 2011; The Economist 2010). Vinay Sheel Oberoi, then Indian Ambassador to UNESCO, consistently launched the most vocal attacks on ICOMOS throughout the ten-day meeting in St Petersburg in 2012. During discussion over damming the Portuguese Alto Douro Wine Region, Oberoi imputed that the 'pyramids would never have been built if ICOMOS and the World Heritage Committee had been there.' On visual integrity from French wind farms, he reiterated that if World Heritage had existed in the 19th century the Eiffel Tower – Europe's most well known symbol – would not exist because of burdensome regulations.

This can be demonstrated by comparing the Advisory Bodies recommendations and final World heritage Committee decisions in 295 cases from 2003-2013. It is worth noting that in only seven cases (highlighted in grey) the final Committee decision is lower than Advisory Bodies. The overall trend has been to push all final decisions toward the category of Inscription, so from Referral to Inscription, from Deferral to Referral or even Inscription and so on.[vi] In almost every case there is complete agreement between the Advisory Bodies and the Committee when the recommendation is to inscribe a property.

Table 1:

		Final Decision				
		I	R	D	N	Total
AB Rec	I	170	3	2	0	175
	R	27	5	1	0	33
	D	33	23	27	1	84
	N	1	3	9	9	22
Total		231	34	39	10	314

When we examine decision making over the past decade more closely it is clear that during the later period the final decisions taken by the World Heritage Committee have been more divergent than in the previous one. This pattern is also evident with the concordance factor analysis above. From our interviews we found that, given the negative trend observed and the tensions expressed, some members of the Advisory Bodies were advised to present more favorable recommendations to the Committee in 2013.

Table 2: Period 2003-2007

2003-2007		Final Decision			
		I	R	D	N
AB Rec	I	97,06%	0,98%	1,96%	0,00%
	R	55,56%	33,33%	11,11%	0,00%
	D	29,73%	21,62%	45,95%	2,70%
	N	0,00%	0,00%	50,00%	50,00%

Table 3: Period 2008-2013

2008-2013		Final Decision			
		I	R	D	N
AB Rec	I	97,26%	2,74%	0,00%	0,00%
	R	91,67%	8,33%	0,00%	0,00%
	D	46,81%	31,91%	21,28%	0,00%
	N	12,50%	37,50%	25,00%	25,00%

Our work highlights that different bodies conceive of the problems in very different ways. Director of the World Heritage Center, Kishore Rao (2010), believes there are systemic problems underlying the Committee's criticism of the Advisory Bodies. These can be glossed as failures in the World Heritage system to fully communicate and work with States Parties rather than simply evaluate them. Rao (2010: 164) considers the 'conflict of interest' argument one of the greatest ironies of the World Heritage process and one that runs counter to the spirit of the Convention. Wealthy nations such as China can spend millions of dollars on nominations and thus expect that their investment will guarantee site inscription. More than US$5 million has been offered in preparatory assistance for some 360 nominations, and ultimately only 18.5% resulted in site inscription (Rao 2010: 165). In his view, this vast expenditure of time, effort and money would be better channeled into a system of cooperation and mentoring. The Advisory Bodies have other suggestions. The IUCN, for example, that the credibility of the Convention is in jeopardy and that the World Heritage Centre must provide consistent advice to the Committee on the observation of the Operational Guidelines and the Rules

of Procedure (IUCN 2012). They suggest a greater role for the Advisory Bodies and other technical partners, better dialogue with States Parties, a focus on increased capacity at the site and state level, and a raft of other measures. Outspoken delegates during the 2013 meeting from Brazil and India suggested changing the Operational Guidelines, bringing in independent evaluators, reducing the role of the Advisory Bodies, inscribing a larger quota of sites per country and so on. Ideally, they would see the World Heritage process as enabling and collaborative rather than competitive or rule-bound. Others like the Estonian Ambassador expressed their gratitude to the Advisory Bodies but remained concerned about political pressures from national governments and the dwindling heritage expertise within the delegations.

UNESCO and Multilaterialism

Given the developments outlined above we might well ask if UNESCO diplomacy is faltering? Why have deliberations over World Heritage sites become such a volatile arena for the performance of international tensions, new political alliances and challenges to global cooperation to protect sites? Some high profile examples include the 2011 recognition of Palestine that precipitated the crippling U.S. financial withdrawal from UNESCO (Kersel and Luke 2012; Meskell 2013b), continued Russian support of Syria despite calls for recognizing Syrian sites as endangered and the refusal to curtail the infrastructural developments threatening properties like Old Panama despite pleas from civil society (Meskell 2014). Over the past few years the World Heritage Committee has become increasingly politicized and confrontational (Bertacchini and Saccone 2012; Brumann 2012; The Economist 2010; UNESCO 2011b). Transgovernmental networks comprised of informal horizontal peer-to-peer interactions, including vote exchanges, have become *de rigeur*. However, across the UN the state is not receding, rather it is changing the way sovereignty is exercised (Slaughter 2004) leading to new forms of negotiation and governance. Disaggregation effectively enables states to remain the central force in transnational governance. Further blurring the boundaries of *domestic* and *international*, pressures from private interests whether individuals, companies and NGOs are also becoming more common, especially regarding World Heritage properties.

From this perspective, the politics around designating World Heritage are not dissimilar from those fraught international deliberations over nuclear disarmament or climate

change. Changes in technology, mobility and security have rendered domestic issues more global in scope. In this section we draw heavily from the work of Thomas Hale and David Held (2011; Hale, et al. 2013), specifically their analysis of failing multilateral cooperation across the UN system. Specifically we ask how has this situation arisen in UNESCO, an organization dedicated to peace building, tolerance and mutual understanding, and international co-operation? It is a truism that we now face an ever more interconnected world and that our problems are more global and require solutions that traverse nation states and require them to work effectively together. On the other hand, more complex issues even in the heritage realm, including conflict, development and climate change, also lead to multi-polarity and fragmentation. The failures of multilateralism can be seen across the UN and the seemingly neutral and inconsequential sphere of World Heritage is not exempt. This is not simply the result of plodding negotiations, insufficient enforcement or the power imbalances between states that we are all familiar with in the intergovernmental sphere (Hale and Held 2011: 3). Moreover, since institutions like UNESCO rely on the consent and participation of sovereign nations, their decisions often mirror the very lowest level of ambition to prevail. This lack of cooperation has serious consequences for sovereign nations, indigenous and minority communities as well as heritage places themselves.

After WW2 there was both growing institutionalization and inter-reliance leading to what has been termed a cycle of 'self-reinforcing interdependence' (Hale, et al. 2013: 4). However, economic globalization and the rise of new players such as China, India and Brazil, have altered the ability for states to always effectively cooperate multi-laterally. As the chart below demonstrates regions like Europe and North America and Asia and Pacific score the highest concordance factor with the decisions of the Advisory Bodies, while the Arab States and Africa reveal the greatest divergence and hence one could posit dissatisfaction. The victors of the post-war era and the architects of the UN system, the United States and Europe, have faced increasing difficulty in securing international agreements. They too have more often become the targets in forums like World Heritage, being regularly criticized for their historical dominance, elitism and outmoded priorities. Indeed, our own observations at world Heritage Committee meetings confirms that emerging nations want to increasingly set the agenda and control negotiations and have, in recent years, been extremely effective (Meskell 2011; 2012). This rising multi-polarity increases the number of nations whose support must be garnered for

cooperation, while the leverage of individual players like the United States is concomitantly diminished.

Thomas Weiss argues that as new countries emerged to become economic forces in the global economy they sought new forms of political influence and voice, including in the sphere of World Heritage. Throughout annual World Heritage Committee sessions we have witnessed how emerging countries not only want a larger stake in agenda setting, they increasingly have the power and connections to secure it (Weiss 2012: 8). With the end of colonialism in Africa for example new regimes have become suspicious of Western power. In the World Heritage arena we can see widespread regional dissatisfaction with the recommendations by ICOMOS and the IUCN decisions as opposed to the subsequent Committee decisions adopted over the past decade. Euro-American economic and institutional hegemony similarly came into question and their ability to coerce other states into a system of global order was subsequently reduced (Weiss 2012: 22).

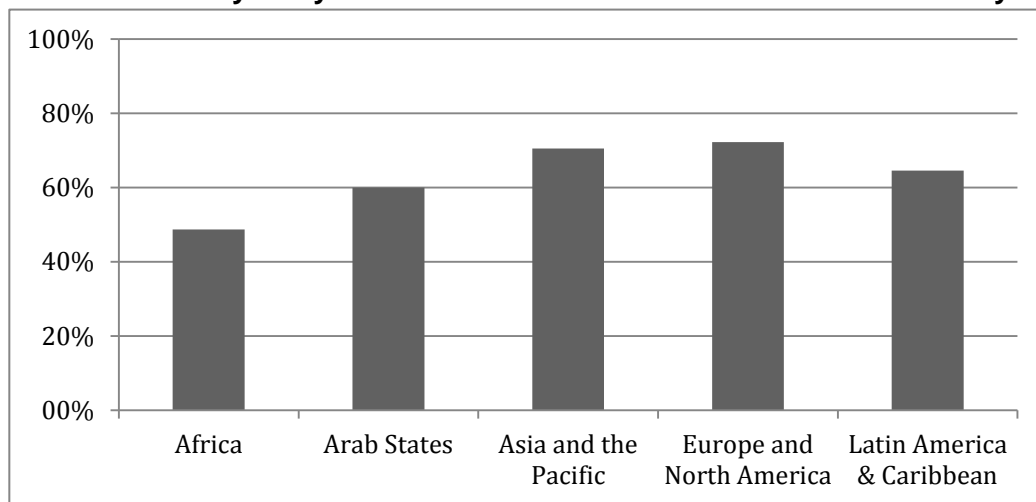**Chart 3: Advisory Body Recommendations and Committee Decisions by Region**

Chart 3: The concordance factor between Advisory Body recommendation and final Committee decision during the period 2003-2013 according to the geographical origin of the nominated site.

David Held and his colleagues (2013: 16) posit four reasons behind the current impasse. First, the number of international actors has vastly increased due to the success of emerging economies and with that has come diverse interests that require accommodation. The number of UN member states has grown from 51 in 1946 to 193 in 2013. Within the World Heritage Committee one can witness the influence of the BRICS

coalition of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (Claudi 2011; Meskell 2013b; 2014). These new powers have economies that are likely to rival and then surpass those of Japan, European countries, and even the United Sates in the medium term. 'This rising multipolarity, combined with globalization' according to Hale and Held (2011: 30-31) 'is a powerful driver of interdependence, because it increases the number of powerful countries whose consent is required or cooperation, while simultaneously decreasing the leverage of any one country – even the most powerful – to compel a certain outcome.' This also means that the number of "veto players" in global governance has increased.

Second, policy making processes inherited from the post-war era are now dysfunctional. For World Heritage this can be seen by the failures to achieve viable funding, to create new revenues or to recover from the fiscal withdrawal of the US. Third, the easier issues of cooperation have been achieved, while deeper interdependence requires more sophisticated and powerful institutions that are themselves harder to create. An example of this might be the admission of Palestine and management of sites like Jerusalem and the polarization and backlash that follows. Fourth, the proliferation of institutions has led to a fragmentation that can restrict rather than assist cooperation. In 1951 there were 123 intergovernmental organizations and 832 NGOs: by 2011 that number had dramatically risen to 7,608 and 56,834 respectively (Hale, et al. 2013: 45). Such situations should not be surprising, however, as they are in essence endemic to the process of cooperation and in some ways reflect the successes of the UN system of inclusion and democracy.

These new modalities lead to cross-sectoral alliances and arrangements and such developments can be observed across international organizations such as the UN, or the World Bank and IMF. Several studies reveal that a developing country with a seat on the UN Security Council significantly enhances flows of aid from the U.S. as well as credits from the IMF and World Bank: the driving effect being vote buying (Flues, et al.: 2). In terms of World Heritage we question whether technical aspects like conservation or management are still paramount or whether member countries' special interests and their lobby groups have major influence.

Some of the most active and high profile nations within the World Heritage arena from 2002 to 2013 in terms of site nominations are China (17), Iran (14), India and Italy (12), Germany (11), Mexico and Russian Federation (10) and France and Israel (9). Already political at this stage, we can see with the case study Israel, that despite the many nominations, proportionately few have been inscribed and we attribute this to a general failure in international support.

In our analysis related to the composition of the World Heritage committee from 2003 to 2013, we have noticed that 6 nations served on the Committee for a total of 7 years: India, Egypt, China, South Africa, Nigeria and the Russian Federation. The BRICS countries have thus dominated the debate over the past 11 years.[vii] However, our analysis also traces the number of verbal interventions made by States Parties in the plenary sessions for inscription of new properties, to determine who is most vocal and influential in the World Heritage process. India (158) and Egypt (132) have the highest number of interventions, whereas China (87) and South Africa (78) ranked much lower. Yet as underscored in the Norwegian report regarding China, some nations employ a different system of lobbying such as "corridor diplomacy" rather than formal debate during the Committee sessions. Significantly, China has the largest state presence with an average of 29 official delegates per meeting, while South Africa and the Russian Federation an average of 20 per year. Moreover, China had a 94% success rate for inscribing their properties.[viii]

Increasingly, successful nominations of State Parties are linked not just to the support of one or two neighbors, but to a wide array of countries spanning the globe. Moreover, these interdependencies are no longer confined to a single group of countries (e.g. the West, or industrialized democracies) but to a diverse range of economic regime types, religions and cultures (Hale and Held 2011: 30). One example of this was with Palestine's first site inscription in 2012, the Church of the Nativity, which was vocally supported by primarily Christian nations including Russia and France, rather than strictly Middle Eastern delegations. Vocal support of Panama was offered in 2013 by Qatar and South Africa, that have no obvious regional or religious connections, but have economic ties and soon after trade agreements with those nations was announced in Panama (see Meskell 2014). One intriguing case is the nomination of Bolgar in the Russian Federation, whose fate over the past decade or more offers a lens through which we

acutely observe changing relations between the Advisory Bodies and the Committee, geopolitical pacting and dwindling concern for conservation and the principles of the Convention.

Gridlocked Heritage: The Bolgar historical-architectural complex

The Bolgar Historical and Architectural Complex[ix] is located in the Russian Federation Republic of Tatarstan. In 1999 its justification for World Heritage inscription included its importance as an archaeological site; its relevance for medieval Islamic architecture; as the first capital of the Golden Horde; and as a place of religion and pilgrimage for Islam. In 2000 ICOMOS expressed concern over the planning on a new industrial zone and the reconstruction of the collapsed Great Minaret. ICOMOS evaluators stated that the reconstruction 'would give an inaccurate impression of Bolgar: at no time in history did the minaret and the church stand side by side as functioning buildings.' The site was referred back to the State Party to clarify the issues. However, ICOMOS noted that given a satisfactory response, the property could be inscribed on the basis of criteria iii: unique testimony to the history and culture of the Tatars and to the empires that they founded, in particular the empire of the Golden Horde.[x]

In June 2000 during the 24th session of the Bureau in Paris the ICOMOS evaluation was upheld and the property was Referred: but they also recognized that the property fulfilled the requirements of Outstanding Universal Value.[xi] Some months later during the 24th World Heritage sessions the Committee decided to move for a Deferral indicating that the nomination required more substantial revision than the term Referral implied.[xii] The dossier was re-submitted in 2001 and addressed outright the concerns. Regarding the Great Minaret, Russia explained that the reconstruction 'was done in accordance with the ICOMOS Venice Charter with account for materials and based on the original documents' and that the reconstruction improved the visual perception of the complex. Russia denied that any industrial project (nuclear power plants) was planned nearby and that this was simply a misunderstanding. Hence at its 25th Extraordinary session, the Bureau recommended the inscription of Bolgar on the basis of criterion iii.[xiii]

However, during the 25th session of the Committee (2001), the Bureau recommendation was questioned. Specifically the Committee argued Russia's guarantees over the authenticity of the reconstruction. They requested further historical evidence of a nomadic empire and asked Russia to resubmit a revised nomination that might refocus

the justification for inscription.[xiv] With the Committee's decision there followed a hiatus of 10 years when the site's name was subsequently changed from the Bolgar Historical and Architectural Complex to Bolgar Historical and Archaeological Complex. This change also reflected a new justification: Bolgar was now a sacred place for all Russian Muslims, while the medieval architecture and archaeological features was downplayed. The site was recast as an exceptional testimony to the Bulgarian-Tatar civilization during the 10th-15th centuries AD.[xv] This accords well with Russia's continued Soviet-style understanding and assimilation of ethnic minorities and President Putin's own interest in archaeology and origins (Shnirelman 2012). Language, culture and heritage have all been deployed as soft power pawns to colonize, stabilize and integrate diverse separatist communities into the Russian Federation, just as Stalin did in the Soviet era (Shnirelman 1996).

In 2012 ICOMOS recommended that Bolgar not be inscribed arguing that "significant changes to the historic substance in both consolidation and reconstruction measures as well as the construction of new developments had reduced the capacity of the site to provide credible testimony to the historic periods it is affiliated with".[xvi] ICOMOS explained that those changes over the past decade had adversely affected the site's authenticity. Moreover, plans to develop the site for religious tourism would further compromise the Outstanding Universal Value.[xvii] During the World Heritage meeting in St Petersburg Russia flew delegates to the nearby city of Kazan where it hosted UNESCO's Youth Day,[xviii] attempting to secure multilateral support for Bolgar's nomination.

In 2013 Bolgar again became a political flashpoint during the 37th World Heritage Committee sessions in Cambodia. For an entire week 'corridor diplomacy' (Cassel and Pashkevich 2013; Hoggart 2011: 86) was intense while Russian delegates lobbied with other national representatives, in particular with the Palestinians. Private meetings sought to arrive at a consensual solution to stave off the ICOMOS recommendation of non-inscription, ultimately preventing any future proposals. But ICOMOS had neither the power nor intention to change a recommendation taken by its World Heritage panel. Russia countered that ICOMOS has made factual errors, was misinformed about site preservation and reconstruction, and the site boundaries.[xix] A working group chaired by Senegal failed to achieve a unanimous solution, deciding instead to Refer the dossier back to the State Party until the 2014 Committee Session in Qatar.[xx] During that time

Russia could take the necessary steps, with the support of ICOMOS, to consolidate the requirements for inscription on the base of criterion iii. But it was criterion vi, the association with events or living traditions, that was to provide most leverage for Russia during the deliberations.

Reframing Bolgar as a Muslim pilgrimage site strategically ensured the support of many Islamic nations on the World Heritage Committee. Arguing against the ICOMOS recommendation, Iraq described the site as 'cradle of Islam in Russia' and even considered it 'complementary to the pilgrimage to Mecca.' Qatar stated that the site's value was a 'symbol of peaceful coexistence' and a 'meeting place between the North, South, East and West.' The UAE said the site provided 'testimony of interfaith dialogue.' Bolgar's religious dimension was further highlighted by Algeria, while Malaysia underlined its 'relevance for spirituality as a living tradition.' In terms of the conservation, Estonia countered that accepting Bolgar's extensive reconstruction would be tantamount to the Committee rebelling against its own principles instead of adhering to the highest conservation standards. Theirs was a solitary voice.

Conclusions

The case of Bolgar underscores the current gridlock that the World Heritage arena increasingly faces. The authority of the Advisory Bodies has been eroded and there is less concordance with Committee decisions. Consensual, much less unanimous solutions are thus more difficult to achieve. States Parties are exerting increasing influence over voting with more overt strategies of influence, international pressure and soft power diplomacy (Luke and Kersel 2012). The substance of heritage and its protection matters less and less, even in conflict situations (Meskell 2014), and can be manipulated for economic, political or religious advantage by politicians and ambassadors. Delegations are now largely comprised of political appointments rather than heritage experts. And the key international players have changed, with smaller, once marginal nations securing seats on the Committee and gaining greater influence so that multi-polarity is *de rigueur*. The victors of the post-war global arena are all but invisible, which might signal greater inclusion and tolerance, but frequently serves the goals of emergent nations like BRICS (Meskell 2013). The old divide of 'the West and the Rest' seems to fall short of the complex machinations we witness today, built on an ever-shifting terrain of regional, religious, social, economic and political alliances. Finally, in this gridlocked system decisions concerning the fate of World Heritage now mirror the

very lowest level of ambition rather than aspiring to the highest principles of conservation or community involvement.

Since the end of WW2 the world community has sought to establish and maintain institutions that govern its common affairs. The arena of global heritage is no different. While such institutions take many forms, by far the most important have been formal international agreements through which countries bind themselves, under international law, to negotiated commitments. We suggest that the competing political and economic interests we witness over issues as broad as climate change or nuclear proliferation are no different from those of the 1972 World Heritage Convention for the nations of the world. Yet such institutions have their roots in a much earlier age and now locked in dysfunctional decision making procedures, while the proliferation of different organizations render the institutional architecture ever more fragmented (Hale, et al. 2013: 3). Together these procedures have blocked global cooperation within intergovernmental organizations like UNESCO.

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i UNESCO defines Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) as cultural and/or natural significance that is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity. Statements of Outstanding Universal Value are made up of several elements: a brief description of the property, a Statement of Significance, a Statement of Authenticity, a Statement of Integrity and a section describing how the World Heritage Site (WHS) is protected and managed. The concept of OUV has long received significant scholarly attention and critique.

ii ICCROM was set up in 1959 as an intergovernmental organization dedicated to the conservation of cultural heritage and is only involved in State of Conservation reporting in a limited manner. ICOMOS was founded in 1965 and provides evaluations of cultural properties including cultural landscapes proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List. Both ICOMOS and the IUCN are international, non-governmental organizations. The IUCN was established in 1948 and provides technical evaluations of natural heritage properties and mixed properties and, through its worldwide network of specialists, reports on the State of Conservation of listed properties.

iii WHC-10/34.COM/5A INF, p. 16. The IUCN is vastly better-resourced: they are supported by 1,200 member organizations including more than 200 government and 900 non-government organizations and some 11,000 voluntary scientists. The IUCN's work is supported by over 1,000 staff in 45 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world.

iv Officially the term has been set at six years: however, there has been a voluntary self-imposed limitation to four years. This decision was intended to give more countries the chance to participate. In reality, an examination of Committee members over the years reveals that a group of no more than 15-20 countries constantly rotates on and off of the Committee (Meskell 2012). In 2013 the Committee was comprised of Algeria, Cambodia, Colombia, Estonia, Ethiopia, France, Germany, India, Iraq, Japan, Malaysia, Mali, Mexico, Qatar, Russian Federation, Senegal, Serbia, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates.

v The List can no longer be critiqued solely for its prioritization of European churches and palaces. In 2013 newly inscribed sites included two Polish salt mines, Chinese rice terraces, a Canadian whaling station and a Fijian port town. In 2012 it included the slag heaps of Nord-Pas de Calais, the Cultural Landscape of Bali, mercury mines in Slovenia and Spain and Bassari landscapes in Senegal.

vi Site referral occurs when some minor additional information is needed from a State Party to supplement the original nomination. This can be provided in a short period of time and does not need to be assessed by sending a new expert mission to the property. Deferral entails additional information from, or actions needed by, the State Party that is more major. This would lead to a substantial revision of the nomination and thus a new or substantially revised nomination dossier, and would need to be assessed by sending a new mission to the property.

vii Brazil has only served on the committee for 4 years although its number of intervention is 52, thus ranking quite high in comparison to other nations for the same period.

viii 17 nominations were proposed in the last 11 years 16 were inscribed

ix http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/1110/

x WHC-2000/CONF.204/inf6e, p.203-206 available at http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2000/whc-00-conf204-inf6e.pdf

xi WHC-2000/CONF.204/2, p.48 available at: http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2000/whc-00-conf204-2e.pdf

xii CONF 204 X.C.3 available at http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/2510

xiii WHC-01/CONF.208/4, p. 43, http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2001/whc-01-conf208-4e.pdf

xiv http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2001/whc-01-conf208-24e.pdf

xv http://whc.unesco.org/en/nominations/1901/documents/

xvi According to the Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention 2013 : "If the Committee decides that a property should not be inscribed on the World Heritage List, the nomination may not again be presented to the Committee except in exceptional circumstances." (para 158, p.40) . Thus if the Committee would have endorsed ICOMOS recommendation, Bolgar could not have been proposed again for inscription. However, it is important to note that there is a specific provision that limit this

prohibition. In fact in the case of "exceptional circumstances". Those "include new discoveries, new scientific information about the property, or different criteria not presented in the original nomination. In these cases, a new nomination shall be submitted." (para 158, p.40). See Operational Guidelines 2013, paragraph 158, p.40. Available at http://whc.unesco.org/archive/opguide13-en.pdf

[xvii] http://whc.unesco.org/archive/advisory_body_evaluation/deferred/981rev.pdf

[xviii] http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/888

[xix] WHC-13/37.COM/INF.8B.4 available at http://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/37COM/documents/

[xx] There have only been two other cases in which the Committee overturned an ICOMOS recommendation of Non Inscription to a Referral. These both occurred during the 36th session of the Committee in 2012 in St. Petersburg, Russia. One was the nomination of the Hill Forts of Rajasthan in India, later inscribed in 2013. The second one was the Russian Kremlins, which has not being brought back to the Committee at the time of writing.