

LmunA 2025

Research report

Forum: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Issue: Safeguarding the authenticity of heritage sites in developing regions from the impact of mass tourism

Student Officer: Santiago Fattoruso

Olivia Hehenkamp

Position: Main Chair

Deputy Chair



LMUNA

Lorentz Lyceum
Model United Nations
Arnhem

Introduction

Our history and our culture and traditions are without a doubt one of the most important things for us humans. Our cultures and traditions are one of the main factors that separate civilizations and countries for others, and our history and culture can tell a lot about who we are now. It is crucial to not lose our heritage and make sure that the heritage we do have is as authentic and true to the past as possible. A big part of our heritage lies in buildings, monuments and landscapes with cultural significance. These heritage sites, if not preserved and protected sufficiently, could lose their credibility and be destroyed, and our culture and history destroyed with it.

The main threat to heritage sites all over the world is tourism. With the tourism industry growing at an exponential rate, there are more and more tourists visiting heritage sites. This leads to several downsides, making the authenticity and state of these properties deteriorate rapidly. What makes the situation more complicated is the unique relation in between tourism and heritage sites, due to heritage sites indirectly having a negative effect on themselves when attracting tourists. All this makes the situation very hard to deal with, all while being extremely important.

It is the task of the delegates to solve this issue by working together to find effective and innovative answers to this issue. This research report will further elaborate on the exact situations regarding tourism and heritage sites, the impact and interesting relation in between tourism and heritage sites and will help delegates understand and tackle this issue to the best of their ability.

LmunA 2025

Definitions of key terms

Heritage sites

A historical site, a building, or an area of the unspoiled natural environment, considered to be important to a country or area's heritage.

Mass tourism

A form of tourism that involves the movement of large numbers.

SDG11

Sustainable development goal 11, focusing on sustainable cities and communities

Overtourism

The phenomenon whereby certain places of interest are visited by excessive numbers of tourists, causing undesirable effects for the places visited.

Tangible heritage

Refers to physical artifacts and structures that hold cultural significance, including monuments, buildings, artifacts, and landscapes.

Intangible heritage

All non-physical types of heritage. For example: music, language, tradition and stories.

LmunA 2025

General overview

Tourism and Heritage

Tourism is one of the most impactful factors influencing the modern world. Not only does tourism have a big effect on our ecological state, with it being one of the biggest contributors to the total emission of greenhouse gasses (6,5%), but tourism also has a big impact on landscapes and heritage sites. And global tourism is expected to keep growing at a massive rate, with a growth rate of 3,5% annually being forecasted by the World Tourism and Travel Council. Therefore, if solutions aren't found to this issue, we can expect our culture and heritage to continue to be damaged and affected by the growing tourism industry.

In order to fully understand heritage sites and the relation in between them and mass tourism, it's important to understand the different types of heritage sites that exist.

Firstly, without talking about heritage sites, you can make a distinction in between tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Tangible heritage includes all physical aspects of culture, such as buildings, monuments, and art, whereas intangible heritage underlines non-physical heritage, such as traditions, language and music. If we're purely looking at heritage sites, the first important aspects are the geographical and cultural landscapes, which are significant for the inhabitants of the area due to them being home to cultural practices. Furthermore, there is a difference in between historical sites and World Heritage Sites. A historical site is any location with historical importance, and protected by law, while a World Heritage Site is a part of these historical sites which are officially recognized and protected by UNESCO. World Heritage Sites tend to be more popular and have more historical importance, although both types are still very important.

Impact of tourism

The impact of tourism on heritage sites is extensive. The catch is that tourism regarding heritage sites is that these sites and culture in general has a great ability to attract tourists and this has great benefits for the economy. This means that not only does it boost the region's wealth, but it also provides more funds for the local area to protect their culture and heritage. Although the economical factor is a benefit, excessive tourist numbers lead to several downsides.

Overcrowding around the sites, deterioration of the sites and damage to the authenticity of it.

This means that it's harder for everyone to access the historical locations, the sites suffer from the tourists making the area filthier and dealing damage to the buildings/monuments, which then leads to the locations being less authentic. Another downside that is often not looked upon is the economical demand these sites have, since as the tourism in an area grows, the quality of the infrastructure and maintenance in the area must also grow, leading higher costs in the region.

That's why the situation around tourism and heritage sites is so interesting. Cultural heritage sites attracts tourists, which results in tourist damaging the cultural heritage. The same concept works

LmunA 2025

for the economic side of it; Tourism makes the economy grow, whoever it costs much more to keep the location up to standard.

There are many examples of heritage sites suffering from this exact issue. One of the biggest examples is Barcelona. To put it into perspective, Barcelona has around 1.6 million local inhabitants, while 32 million people choose it as a holiday. The city is well known across the globe as an amazing tourist location, with cultural sites such as La Sagrada Familia, La Casa Mila, amazing landscapes, a great climate, and of course the incredible FC Barcelona football team, attracting millions of fans each year. What makes Barcelona even more plausible to tourists, is that Barcelona has the biggest port of the Mediterranean. With this mix of cultural value and tourism, it's clear that the city's history and heritage is suffering. Especially overcrowding is the biggest issue with Barcelona. Anyone who has ever visited Barcelona (like me), will know that there are some moments, especially on the famous La Rambla pedestrian street, where you can barely move. This also leads to heritage sites being very hard to reach for visitors and locals. There's a very clear reason behind this overtourism. Half of the annual 32 million visitors are day trippers, meaning that these visitors just go for a few hours and always go to the same few places. This leads to overcrowding in the same places, always near heritage sites, and this is why this form of overtourism is such a problem.

Existing initiatives

One of the main initiatives that confronts this issue is the 1972 World Heritage Convention. This is the convention that, under many features, links the concepts of nature conservation and the preservation of cultural properties. It recognizes the way in which people act with nature, and the fundamental need to preserve the balance between the two. The convention also defines what kind of cultural and natural site can be considered for the World Heritage Site List, and how the World Heritage Fund should be distributed and used. More recently, the World Heritage Committee adopted the "Five C's" as objectives for this issue. The first is Credibility, with the objective of improving the credibility of the World Heritage List, as it is the number one representative of heritage sites and therefore must be as strong as possible. The second, Conservation, has the goal of ensuring the effective conservation of World Heritage properties. Capacity-building promotes the need to develop knowledge and skills in order to improve our understanding, management and conservation. The fourth objective, Communication, underlines the need to increase public awareness and support for World Heritage, and the final objective is named Communities, enhancing the role of communities in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. These five C's, along with Sustainable development goal 11, are the core of the roadmap the World Heritage Committee has set in front of them. Understanding these objectives are a great way to understanding the issue and what can be done about it.

LmunA 2025

Major parties involved

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

UNESCO has created the List of World Heritage and the List of World Heritage in Danger. This clarified a lot of confusion of the actual definition of a heritage site, and gave them more protection. It also made sites increase in popularity and therefore contradicts the function of the establishment of these lists. A famous example is Machu Picchu, a place in Peru that attracted thousands of tourists when put on the list.

Italy

Since the 1970s the city of Venice has gotten a lot of attention by tourists. It started to affect the population, which decreased rapidly when the cost of living increased, and a lack of space for the youth and job opportunities created. Without citizens, Venice loses the mastery and the know-how that keeps and kept Venice alive for thousands of years. But the mass tourism stays an issue, the year 2019 alone counted over 1,5 billion international arrivals.

France

One of the nations with the most heritage sites on the list, is France. France hold a lot of famous places, such as: The Palace and Park of Versailles, The Banks of the Seine in Paris and a part of the Pyrenees. Although none of its sites is labelled as in danger, France puts a lot of effort in the issue of mass tourism affecting heritage sites. They hosted the first convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in Paris, where the treaty was adopted. Ever since, 196 nations have ratified it. Also, the last convention in 2025 was held in Paris.

The continent of Africa

Africa is home to an extraordinary wealth of natural and cultural heritage, encompassing stunning historical sites and places, vibrant traditions, iconic landscapes, and globally significant sites that shape its identity and inspire the world. Yet, the continent faces numerous challenges – from identification of these heritages to their effective protection, conservation and presentation. In this regard, the adoption of the Strategy for World Heritage in Africa (2022-2029) by the World Heritage Committee in 2021 marked a significant milestone. Notable progress has since been made, particularly in increasing Africa's representation on the World Heritage List and mentoring the next generation of heritage professionals. This has been achieved thanks to a number of targeted actions aimed at empowering African countries to manage and promote their heritage and support from partners, including the African World Heritage Fund (AWHF) and the Advisory Bodies (ICOMOS, ICCROM and IUCN).

LmunA 2025

Timeline of Key Events

16 th Nov. 1972	UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage
1980	Venice started to register damage done by tourists
2010	Overtourism turned into a globally used term
2021	Establishment of the Strategy for World Heritage in Africa

Possible solutions

To limit the amount the dangerous tourists entering the sites, governments try certain methods to prevent worsening the issue. Some heritage sites own a larger area with multiple buildings/monuments which are harder to monitor with a lot of people around.

With ideas like restricted access are strategies that can help moderate the negative impact of tourism on cultural sites, but they require planning, and a governmental organization, that keeps track of everything.

On the other hand, you could restrict the amount of tourists visiting the site. Creating a limit helps organization, and prevention of further damage made by mass tourism. In some cases it also increases popularity, making it harder to visit a monument.

Entry fees are also frequently used to prevent overtourism, but they reduce the popularity of such sites. Demanding visitors pay more, makes them hesitate their decision of going. This could prevent the issue from growing, or backfire and decrease the demand.

Putting a heritage site on the List of World Heritage in Danger makes the site more able to get funds. It forces governments to act or risk global criticism and potential loss of status. Spreading awareness with this lists educates the visitors and teaches them to pay more respect to the buildings or monuments and encourages them to behave responsibly.

LmunA 2025

Bibliography

- The UNESCO List of World Heritage. (n.d.). *UNESCO*. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>
- The World Heritage Convention. (n.d.). *UNESCO*. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/convention>
- Inemesit, & Inemesit. (2025, March 31). Is over tourism impacting cultural heritage? *Fair Tourism - duurzaam toerisme*
-. <https://www.fairtourism.nl/en/is-over-tourism-impacting-cultural-heritage/>
- The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2025, August 27). *World Heritage site | Criteria, Definition, History, & List*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/World-Heritage-site>
- Sebastian. (2022, March 28). *The impact of mass tourism in Venice - Venezia autentica*. Venezia Autentica | Discover and Support the Authentic Venice. <https://veneziaautentica.com/impact-tourism-venice/>
- Nainsnl. (2024, November 8). Mass Tourism: History, Types, Advantages & Disadvantages, Destinations and Its Impacts - Tourism Notes. *Tourism Notes*. <https://tourismnotes.com/mass-tourism/>
- Safeguarding World Heritage in Africa. (n.d.). *World Heritage Center / UNESCO*. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/strategy-africa/>
- World Travel & Tourism Council. (2025, April 9). *Global Travel & Tourism is Strong Despite Economic Headwinds*. WTTC. <https://wttc.org/news/global-travel-and-tourism-is-strong-despite-economic-headwinds>
- Fontana, A. (2024, October 29). *THE CONTROVERSIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HERITAGE TOURISM AND LOCAL PROSPERITY: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES*. ACEI. <https://culturaleconomics.org/the-controversial-relationship-between-heritage-tourism-and-local-prosperity-an-empirical-analysis-of-benefits-and-challenges/>
- Overtourism in Barcelona*. (n.d.). Responsible Travel. <https://www.responsibletravel.com/holidays/catalonia/travel-guide/overtourism-in-barcelona>
- World Heritage Capacity-Building. (n.d.). *World Heritage Center / UNESCO*. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/capacity-building/>
- Tangible Heritage - (Intro to Cultural Anthropology) - Vocab, definition, Explanations* | Fiveable. (n.d.). Fiveable. <https://library.fiveable.me/key-terms/introduction-cultural-anthropology/tangible-heritage>