



United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural Organization

# World Heritage / Patrimoine Mondial

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**Nationality of author:** German

**Language of thesis:** English

**Title of thesis:** From National to Global Memory Culture?  
UNESCO's World. Heritage Concept

**Type of thesis:** Ph. D.

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**Please provide a 500 words abstract outlining your thesis; you may wish to attach a table of contents or any other relevant material:**

Since the 1990s the preservation of the past has gained importance throughout the world. In particular, the international competition for UNESCO *World Heritage* titles emphasizes this trend. The term *cultural heritage* has become well-known and the number of cultural and natural properties under the protection of the global concept of *World Heritage* is rising continuously. Despite the omnipresent phenomenon of globalization, this development should by no means be taken for granted. Cultural and memorial politics are usually practiced on a national level, and this is done with good cause: The upvaluation of cultural assets to national symbols shall contribute to the formation of a common identity and strengthen the so-called collective memory. However, through the establishment of UNESCO *World Heritage* in 1972, cultural politics as well as the protection of sites which are considered to be of outstanding universal value to mankind have gone global. Thus, this thesis aims to uncover and link the various factors which have motivated the construction of UNESCO *World Heritage*.

As it is expected that first ideas of *World Heritage* emerged from early efforts of international intellectual cooperation, the starting point of this research project are the intellectual debates in times of the League of Nations. Alongside the identification of the main protagonists and arguments of these hitherto fairly neglected debates, it is essential to ascertain which further developments have triggered the genesis of this unique concept of global cultural relations. It is expected that these include the cognition after two World Wars, during which numerous cultural sites had been destroyed. This awareness and the will to avert future wars resulted in the renewal of international relations and their manifestation through the foundation of international organizations. Furthermore, it is assumed that proceeding decolonization contributed significantly: on the one hand, because European competitiveness decreased and thus facilitated the coalescence of former rivals, on the other, because former colonies, their societies, and cultures were gradually assigned self-contained value. Eventually, first international campaigns for the rescue of imperiled cultural sites which have been organized by UNESCO since the late 1950s, have played a decisive role. Undertakings like the Nubia Campaign constituted a new field of international cultural cooperation and hence a vantage point for the concept of *World Heritage*.

The investigation of the genesis of UNESCO *World Heritage* is followed by an interpretive part, focusing on the implementation of the concept and the question, whether a new, global form of memory culture has emerged from it. In this context the question arises, how national identity constructions interact with a universal frame of identity and where they clash. Tensions are predetermined where national interests collide with the authority of a superordinate organization like UNESCO and thus are expected to deliver insights into the memory culture created through *World Heritage* – be it global or not.