



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

**Form for Dissertation/thesis/diploma/master thesis on WORLD HERITAGE
to be sent to UNESCO, wh-info@unesco.org**

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- UNESCO Archives
- World Heritage Website
- Nomination Files
- Other(s) (please provide details)

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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: (see French version below)

The 1972 world heritage convention was established exactly one hundred years after the creation of the world's first national park, Yellowstone. The world heritage convention was intended to be an international tool to preserve the world's 'most outstanding' natural and cultural heritage sites more effectively, as well as to raise awareness and encourage international cooperation. The preservation of the 'best' heritage became a responsibility of 'all humanity' rather than solely a national task. And the convention can be regarded as a success. Between 1978 and May 2004, 582 cultural, 149 natural and 23 mixed sites have been designated and 178 countries have ratified the convention. Conceptually, one may critique the world heritage convention's effectiveness. For example, heritage is by definition a contested resource: a site cannot be simultaneously claimed for (opposing) local, regional or national purposes. Furthermore, world heritage listing is awarded to sites that meet the criterion of 'outstanding universal value', but there is ambiguity in meaning. Should the site be of educational or scientific value; should it be of interest to Indonesians or Paraguayans or to both; should it be of importance at the national or international scale-level; should it be of past, contemporary or future value; and should it be exceptional or representative of a general phenomenon? Is the international community willing to support and able to act when foreign world heritage sites are threatened? Do countries supply financial means through the world heritage convention and are countries willing to receive foreign assistance? Or, are world heritage sites more threatened due to increasing visitor numbers after listing? The effectiveness of the world heritage convention to preserve the 'heritage of humanity' is analysed along three research lines. The first line of inquiry is whether the 'best' sites are selected on the list. Second, we examine whether inscription on the world heritage list raises the level of preservation. And third, the effects of tourism are analysed as to whether it poses a threat to a site after its selection on the list.

The four main conclusions that can be drawn from this research are as follows:

- 1) The implementation of the world heritage convention is mainly determined at the national level.
- 2) It can be doubted whether all sites on the world heritage list meet the criterion of outstanding universal value.
- 3) The world heritage status is a useful tool for local and national actors to achieve particular aims (reputation, preservation or tourism).
- 4) The convention's international dimension lies in the cooperation between countries.