

UNESCO World Heritage List - Does it make sense?

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Abstract

The UNESCO World Heritage List contains the 900 most treasured Sites of humanity's culture and landscapes. The officially stated intention of the World Heritage List is the protection of global heritage. We present an empirical overview of the List according to various characteristics. It turns out that the World Heritage List is highly unbalanced with respect to a distribution of Sites according to population and area. Surprisingly, economic and political factors, such as per capita income or membership on the UN Security Council, which should be unrelated to the value of a country's heritage, are shown to have a systematic impact on the composition of the World Heritage List. The unbalanced distribution and questionable selection of Sites raises question about potential alternatives to the World Heritage List. A comparative analysis is conducted to identify the conditions under which the World Heritage List is beneficial and the conditions under which alternatives, such as the market and national conservation lists, are more beneficial. This paper wants to reveal facts about the existing distribution, and is designed to help a reasoned discussion of potential alternatives to emerge.