

50 Years World Heritage Convention: Shared Responsibility – Conflict & Reconciliation, edited by Marie-Theres Albert et al., Springer Open Access Publication, 2022, 504 pp. EUR42.79 Softcover, EUR53.49 Hardcover (Open Access-Link to the book: link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-05660-4)

This book has been published on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the “Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage”, adopted by the UNESCO General Conference on 16 November 1972. Until 2022, the Convention has been ratified by 194 States Parties – a number which is higher than the size of UNESCO membership. Furthermore, the number of currently inscribed properties reached 1.154, and over 1.700 sites are on the Tentative List. No doubt, these activities belong to the most successful ones of UNESCO. Nevertheless, increasing criticism occurs related to the inflationary growth of inscriptions, the lack of financial resources and the regional imbalance in favour of Europe and North America.

The book which is volume 9 of the Heritage Studies Series initiated by the Institute Heritage Studies (IHS) in Berlin contains 38 contributions written by 56 authors under the guidance of five editors. It consists of three parts: Part I begins with an introduction written by the editors. They claim as an overall message of the book that “destruction of heritage is destroying identity” and “shared responsibility is therefore our common task for the future”. The second article deals with the historical development of the work of the World Heritage Committee. The author draws the attention to the impact of ignoring the fact of colonial looting and also demands an urgent involvement of civil society.

Part II is by far the largest one. It contains 30 articles which cannot be individually reviewed. This Part claims that the destruction of heritage is multidimensional; it contains articles covering theoretical reflections as well as case studies which are subdivided into the following sections: 1. global governance, 2. urban transformation, 3. war and terrorism, 4. climate change, 5. technological change, and 6. commodification of heritage. This Part reflects a broad range of measures which are necessary to protect heritage. At the same time, many different theoretical approaches are used which indicate the underlying multidisciplinary basis intended by the editors.

The final Part III contains six articles which attempt to forecast “the day after tomorrow”. Several issues are again taken up such as shared responsibility, reconciliation, sustainability, and education. This Part III ends with two articles. One is an outlook of young professionals who demand the “transformation from an expert-dominated concept to a project for the people”. The other and final article deals with an outlook of the editors who summarize the following main messages of the book: a more balanced distribution of World Heritage properties as well as of the decision-making bodies, the reconciliation of economic interests with conservation and development needs, and a closer cooperation between experts and civil society to solve forthcoming climate and biodiversity crises.

The book starts with detailed curricula vitae of the editors and contributors. Each article begins with an abstract and ends with detailed references. Almost all articles contain concluding remarks. The book also includes a detailed index. Therefore, study and reading strategies of exploiting this open access publication can be easily developed.

The authors undertake an extremely detailed constructive-critical reflection of the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. Basically, they “believe” in the power of the UNESCO Convention. Although often critical of the increasing politicization, alternative political-institutional solutions are

not discussed which would either imply an institutional reform of UNESCO or even a complete decoupling of the World Heritage decision-making bodies. However, a related research project of the IHS reached already the planning stage.

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