

We are IntechOpen, the world's leading publisher of Open Access books Built by scientists, for scientists

6,900

Open access books available

186,000

International authors and editors

200M

Downloads

Our authors are among the

154

Countries delivered to

TOP 1%

most cited scientists

12.2%

Contributors from top 500 universities



WEB OF SCIENCE™

Selection of our books indexed in the Book Citation Index
in Web of Science™ Core Collection (BKCI)

Interested in publishing with us?
Contact book.department@intechopen.com

Numbers displayed above are based on latest data collected.
For more information visit www.intechopen.com



Tackling Eurocentric Perspectives on Cultural World Heritage: Suggestions for Including Postcolonial Approaches in World Heritage Education

Verena Röhl and Christiane Meyer

Abstract

The chapter analyses and discusses the perspectives of young people on cultural World Heritage and its imbalanced global distribution. The qualitative study is based upon focus groups and hermeneutic photography conducted with 43 secondary school students aged 14–17 years from Lower Saxony, Germany. The findings of the focus groups, which are presented in this chapter, reveal deeply rooted Eurocentric thinking patterns, that structure the understanding of cultural World Heritage in general and are used to justify the dominance of European cultural World Heritage sites. Due to these results, the authors call for including post- and decolonial approaches in World Heritage Education to foster the adoption of critical and reflexive thinking.

Keywords: World Heritage, cultural heritage, students' perceptions, World Heritage Education, Eurocentrism, postcolonial education

1. Introduction

Since its adoption in 1972, UNESCO's World Heritage (WH) Programme has become the most influential framework for the protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the globe. The WH list is made up of diverse sites such as Robben Island, South Africa, Machu Picchu, Peru or Zollverein Coal Mine Industrial Complex, Germany and is set up to represent the heritage of all humankind. However, the WH statistics tell a different story. The global distribution of WH is highly imbalanced and currently 47.2% of all 1121 WH sites (status: June 2021, World Heritage properties inscribed between 1978 and 2019) are located in Europe and North America. With cultural WH the imbalance is even more drastic: 52% of all 869 sites are located in Europe and North America [1]. The UNESCO is aware of these disparities and already in 1994 a study identified Eurocentric and elitist approaches towards cultural heritage as the main reasons for the imbalanced global distribution [2]. Critics have argued since then that the UNESCO is at the center of a so called 'authorised heritage discourse' (AHD) [3] which presents "heritage as complete, untouchable and 'in the past', and embodied within tangible

things such as buildings and artefacts.” [4]. Due to continuous debates and rising influence from voices from the Global South, cultural heritage has experienced a shift from a narrow to a more complex conceptualization [5, 6]. The Eurocentric roots of WH are one, but not the only cause of the global imbalance. Other reasons include unequal financial capacities of national states, national interests and international relations of states nominating a site [7–9].

While these issues are widely discussed within the UNESCO and the scientific community, they have not reached World Heritage Education (WHE). This educational blind spot (see next section) is accompanied by a research gap concerning WHE [10]. In Germany, members of the working group World Heritage Education have generated studies on the educational potential of WH in general [11] and the interpretation activities at specific World Heritage sites (WHs) [12, 13]. But although many of the educational activities and learning resources provided by the UNESCO, National Commissions or WHs are targeted at a young audience, the perspectives of young people towards WH have not been explored yet.

The aim of this chapter is thus to present perceptions of 14–17 year old secondary school students from Lower Saxony, Germany towards cultural WH. Due to the identified gaps, the participants’ criteria for cultural WH and their presumed reasons for the imbalanced global distribution of cultural WH are focused.

This chapter will first discuss the aims of WHE and its current blind spots. Secondly, it will present selected perspectives of secondary school students on specific aspects of cultural WH. These results reveal Eurocentric thinking patterns, hence, underlining the necessity for decolonising heritage [14]. To conclude, the authors provide suggestions to foster the adoption of critical and reflexive thinking in WHE.

2. World Heritage Education: objectives and blind spots

With the adoption of the World Heritage Convention, State Parties acknowledge “that parts of the cultural or natural heritage are of outstanding interest and therefore need to be preserved as part of the world heritage of mankind as a whole.” [15]. For the purpose of safeguarding WH, State Parties commit to instal “educational and information programmes, to strengthen appreciation and respect by their peoples of the cultural and natural heritage” [ibid.].

In its first decades, the discourse on WH was clearly focused on conservation and restoration. With rising tourism numbers, the economic advantages as well as the diverse challenges caused by tourism attracted the attention of UNESCO experts and scholars [11]. But with the launch of the World Heritage Education Programme in 1994, educational aspects started to gain importance.

On a general level, the programme aims to integrate WHE in the school curricula [16]. In the case of Germany, the National Commission for UNESCO supports the integration [17]. In Germany, Federal States are responsible for developing the curricula, but so far none has implemented the suggestion. Nonetheless, there are a wide range of actors in the field of WHE, ranging from WHs, heritage institutions and individual scholars, that provide educational activities on site and/or classroom resources. Examples include the classroom resources offered by the WHs Water Management System of Augsburg and the Upper Middle Rhine Valley or by the preservation foundation Deutsche Stiftung Denkmalschutz. References to WH can also be found in textbooks, for example when discussing deindustrialisation or tourism [18, 19].

When looking at the proclaimed objectives of WHE, different intentions of the UNESCO, National Commissions for UNESCO, scientific scholars and other

actors in the field of heritage education become apparent. The educational aim of UNESCO's World Heritage Education Programme is to promote awareness for the World Heritage Convention and "a better understanding of the interdependence of cultures" [16]. Further, young people should be made aware of the various challenges threatening WH and be encouraged to engage in its protection. In line with these aims, the German, Austrian, Swiss and Luxembourg Commission for UNESCO have jointly stated that WHE fosters the awareness for identity, respect, global solidarity and the positive exchange among different cultures [20].

By solely focusing on the seemingly unifying aspects of WH, the National Commissions apply an instrumental approach that is limited to creating attachment and fostering awareness [21, 22]. At the same time, this approach lacks a critical examination of the criteria, definitions, procedures and of the underlying intentions and values of the involved stakeholders. This is further underlined by the recommendation of the German Commission for UNESCO [23] "that a consistent narrative is employed by all stakeholders" at WHs. This approach can be traced back to Tilden's [24] famous appeal: "Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection." This interpretation model has been accused for being "disempowering" [25] as the visitor experience is reduced to passively accepting the given narrative. In order to meet the needs of today's diverse communities, Silberman [26] refers to heritage interpretation as a public discourse, that needs to integrate divergent and conflicting understandings and values.

The fact that WH is the result of a national and international negotiation process, requires reflections on (global) political hierarchies, Eurocentrism and repression of minorities [27]. WH criteria, the nomination process or the involved stakeholders are common topics of learning resources but are usually conveyed as given facts. (e.g. [28–30]) None of the learning resources known to the authors critically discuss the imbalanced global distribution of WH. De Cesari's [31] observation that "World Heritage not only builds upon the tradition of national heritages but in fact reproduces, amplifies and expands this tradition's logic and its infrastructure" can thus be transferred to WHE.

This interim conclusion points to the necessity to specifically address the shown blind spots in order to path the way for critical and reflexive thinking in WHE. But at first, the perspectives of young people on WH need to be explored in order to develop educational resources and methods, that explicitly integrate their attitudes and perceptions and possibly challenge existing stereotypes.

3. Empirical study: methods and sampling

The diverse perspectives of young people on cultural WH were the focus of the research project "Cultural World Heritage from the perspective of young people – perceptions, meanings, attitudes and values in the context of cultural awareness and societal transformation". The three-year project consisted of a qualitative and a quantitative study (see acknowledgements), the former being the subject of this chapter. The qualitative study explored perspectives of secondary school students aged 14–17 years on cultural WH using first focus groups and in a second step hermeneutic photography (site visit) [32]. It has to be stressed, that the focus was purely on cultural WH, while perceptions on natural WH were not part of the study. For the purpose of this chapter, selected results of the focus groups will be discussed. The data was collected between May 2017 and September 2018. In total, 43 students (12 groups) from Lower Saxony, Germany, participated in the study (**Table 1**). Six groups were from Hanover, a city without a WHs, while two groups

Group	City	Participants			Destination of site-visit
		Total	Female	Male	
(Pretest)	(Hanover)	(4)	(4)	(—)	(Historic Town of Goslar)
G1	Hanover	3	2	1	Historic Town of Goslar
G2	Hanover	4	4	—	St Mary's Cathedral and St Michael's Church at Hildesheim
G3	Hanover	4	4	—	Fagus Factory, Alfeld
G4	Hanover	3	3	—	Historic Town of Goslar
G5	Hanover	4	4	—	Historic Town of Goslar
G6	Hanover	4	2	2	Mines of Rammelsberg
G7	Alfeld	5	2	3	Fagus Factory, Alfeld
G8	Hildesheim	3	2	1	St Mary's Cathedral and St Michael's Church at Hildesheim
G9	Alfeld	3	—	3	Fagus Factory, Alfeld
G10	Goslar	3	—	3	Historic Town of Goslar
G11	Goslar	3	2	1	Historic Town of Goslar
G12	Hildesheim	4	2	2	St Mary's Cathedral and St Michael's Church at Hildesheim
Total		43	27	16	

Table 1.
Overview of the sample.

each came from the WH cities Alfeld, Goslar and Hildesheim. 27 students identified as female, 16 as male. Each group of students participated in two focus groups. The second focus group was conducted one week after the first one. The length of the sessions varied between 18 and 60 minutes, depending on the participants willingness to discuss. The focus groups were recorded by video and audio. Afterwards the material was transcribed and analysed by qualitative text analysis [33]. For the purpose of this chapter, selected quotes of the participants were translated by the authors.

Focus groups are group discussions that are structured by questions and pre-selected stimuli, such as newspaper articles, video clips, diagrams or photos [34]. In this study, the focus groups were divided into different phases. **Table 2** shows the structure of the focus groups and lists the topic and stimuli of each phase.

The aim of the focus groups was to investigate the perceptions, meanings, attitudes and values towards cultural WH. In the following, we will first present the results of phase 1.a (associations and perceptions regarding cultural WH) and secondly focus on phase 2.c (global distribution of cultural WH/reasons for the global imbalance) and 2.d (personal attitudes towards the global distribution/nomination process).

In phase 1.a the participants first stated their associations with cultural WH and described their previous experience with cultural WH. In the following phase they discussed possible characteristics of cultural WH. This question served to uncover their perceptions regarding the criteria of cultural WH. To avoid biased answers, the official criteria were not shown to the participants. The characteristics were recorded in writing. In the course of the following discussions, the participants could in turn refer to them and make adjustments.

The imbalanced global distribution of cultural WH was one of the main topics of the second focus group. At first, the participants were asked to make assumptions

Phase	Topic	Stimuli
First Round		
1.a	Associations and perceptions regarding cultural WH	—
1.b	Meanings and values of cultural WH	Information sheets on selected cultural WHs
1.c	Destruction of cultural WH/meaning of cultural identity	Video clip (1:15 min) by Deutsche Welle (2014) on the destruction of the Ancient City of Aleppo [35]
1.d	Retrospective reflection of the first focus group	—
Second Round		
2.a	Review of the first focus group	—
2.b	Assumptions regarding the global distribution of cultural WH	—
2.c	Global distribution of cultural WH/ reasons for the global imbalance	Map and diagram showing the global distribution of cultural WH
2.d	Personal attitudes towards the global distribution/nomination process	Information sheet on the nomination process
2.e	Consequences of the WH title	—
2.f	Retrospective reflection of the second focus group	—
2.g	Selection of a destination for the site-visit (groups from Hanover only)	Information sheet on the cultural WHs in Lower Saxony

Table 2.
Structure of the focus groups.

regarding the global distribution of cultural WH. Afterwards they received an information sheet showing the current statistics (as of May 2017) and discussed possible reasons for the imbalance (phase 2.c). In phase 2.d they were provided with information on the nomination process. To conclude the topic, they were asked to discuss the necessity of actions aiming for a more balanced global distribution of cultural WH.

4. Participants’ associations regarding cultural World Heritage

In summary, most participants described cultural WH as monumental buildings and focused on the past. When stating their first associations, the participants listed different types of cultural WH, mainly naming ancient buildings and monuments. Correspondingly, the most mentioned WHs include the Pyramid Fields from Giza (7 groups), the Colosseum as part of the Historic Centre of Rome (5 groups) and the Cologne Cathedral (4 groups). In contrast, cultural WHs representing modern heritage of the 20th century, industrial heritage, archaeological sites or cultural landscapes are rarely referred to.

The characteristics for cultural WH (**Figure 1**) support this first impression. While all groups assign a historical significance to cultural WH, only three groups demand a relevance for the future. In six groups it is agreed upon, that cultural WH has to be somehow connected to culture. However, the discussion within the groups uncovers different conceptualizations of culture. In group 2, participant G2_4 argues that cultural WH does not represent a whole nation but only certain

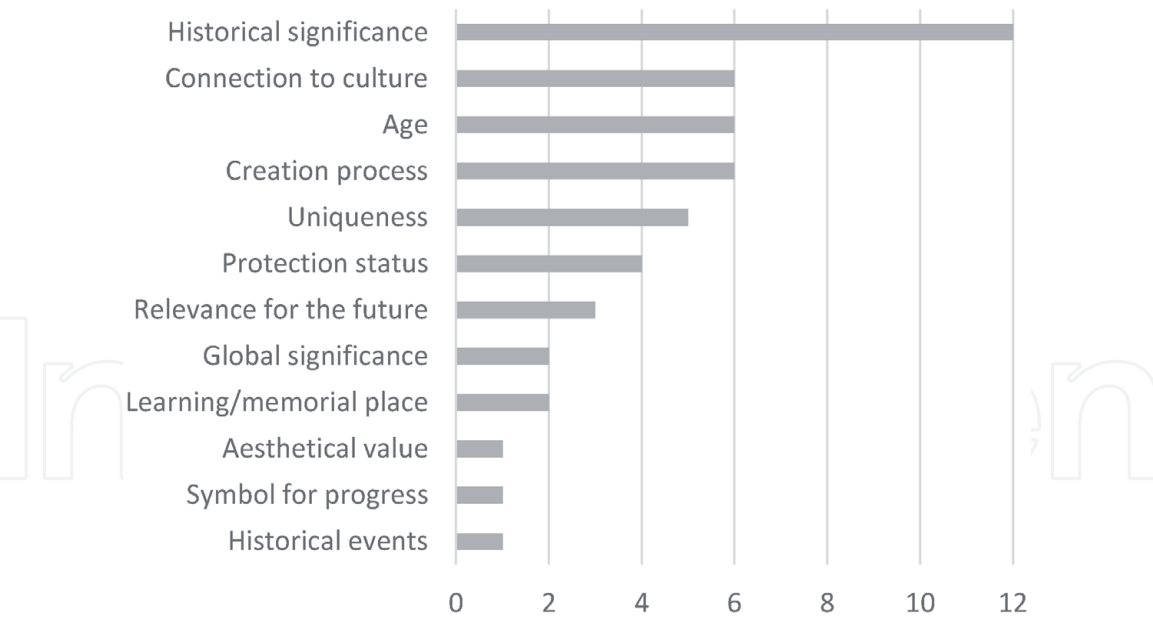


Figure 1.
Characteristics of cultural World Heritage sites mentioned by the participants.

communities since “not all people of a country share the same culture.” On the contrary, the argumentation of G12_2 reflects an essentialistic conceptualization of culture that fixes different cultures to different geographical spaces: “If I’m in an ancient German town, e.g. in Trier, it is rather unlikely, that I’ll find a World Heritage, that is a mosque. On the other hand, if you are in Istanbul, where you basically had the Islam forever, it is very likely to find one.”

According to six groups, cultural WHs have to be of a certain age. Here the reasoning includes that WHs need to be “very old” (G1_2) or at least “not recently built” (G8_2). However, other groups question the importance of age as a relevant factor. By referring to the Elbphilharmonie, a landmark concert hall in Hamburg opened in 2017, one group discusses the possibility of contemporary cultural artefacts gaining WH status in the future.

Six groups take the creation process of cultural WH into consideration, but only two of them assume that WHs can be the combined work of nature and humans. In the other four groups it is argued, that WHs have to be made by humans.

When comparing the characteristics mentioned by the participants with the criteria and requirements by UNESCO obvious differences become apparent. In order to be listed on the WH list, sites have to be of ‘Outstanding Universal Value’ (OUV) [36]. The participants on the other hand rarely name characteristics that can be equated with the OUV. Only five groups mention uniqueness as a necessary characteristic and even less groups (2) agree upon global significance. One group explicitly decided to not list the global significance as a factor, because they perceive it as a consequence and not a requirement of the WH status. According to the Operational Guidelines, WHs also need to meet the conditions of integrity (wholeness and intactness) and authenticity (credibility or truthfulness) [ibid.]. But only one participant demands cultural WHs to be well conserved.

5. Participants’ reasons for the imbalanced global distribution of cultural World Heritage

Aside from few exceptions, the presumed reasons for the imbalanced global distribution of cultural WH mentioned by the participants are backed by Eurocentric

lines of reasoning. The arguments of most participants are based on the presumption of Europe as the outstanding center of culture, world history and progress, which is contrasted with ideas about Africa, South America and parts of Asia.

Figure 2 shows, that the groups predominantly refer to demographical, historical and environmental reasons, while reasons related to imbalanced global power relations (interests of nation states, social and financial inequalities) are neglected by most groups.

Demographical reasons mentioned by the participants include time of settlement, population density, ethnical diversity and immigration. According to G10_1, there are less WHs located in Australia and America “because humans haven’t lived there as long as in Europe or Asia.” Participants mostly place cultural WH in large cities and justify the comparatively small amount of WHs in countries such as Russia and Canada with the low population density.

Ten groups refer to historical reasons when explaining the imbalanced global distribution. It is important to note, that in the discussions history is merely reduced to events that took place in the past, while the consequences that last up until today are not taken into account. As shown in **Figure 1**, for the participants the historical significance of a given site is the most important characteristic of cultural WH. Consequently, participants argue that the global distribution is the result of “historic facts” (G10_2). Historical importance is ascribed to the civilizations of Egypt, China and the Osman Empire, the Aztecs and Incas, Europe and particularly Greece and Germany. As a contrast, G7_4 claims that “not much happened” in Africa. Similarly, G8_2 reduces cultural achievements in Africa to the influence of colonialization and expects cultural WHs to be built by “the British and French”. These lines of reasoning are exemplary for many statements, that understand colonisation as a positive stimulus for development, neglect Africas pre-colonial history and put Europe in the centre of world history.

The stated environmental reasons include climatic conditions, the natural environment and available natural resources. According to the participants, climatic parameters such as temperature and precipitation influence the creation and preservation of cultural heritage as well as the possibilities for archaeological excavations. Countries such as Russia, Canada and Greenland are thus perceived as “bad living habitats” (G6_4), where low temperatures, heavy snowfall and permafrost reduce the possibility to construct something “special” (G3_3). Similarly, G12_2 refers to desert climate to explain the low amount of cultural WHs in Africa. According to her, the desert makes it impossible to built “many buildings”. At his point it becomes obvious, that the stated reasons for the imbalanced global distribution (‘no buildings in the desert’) are influenced by the participants’ preassumptions regarding cultural WH (‘cultural WH equals buildings’).

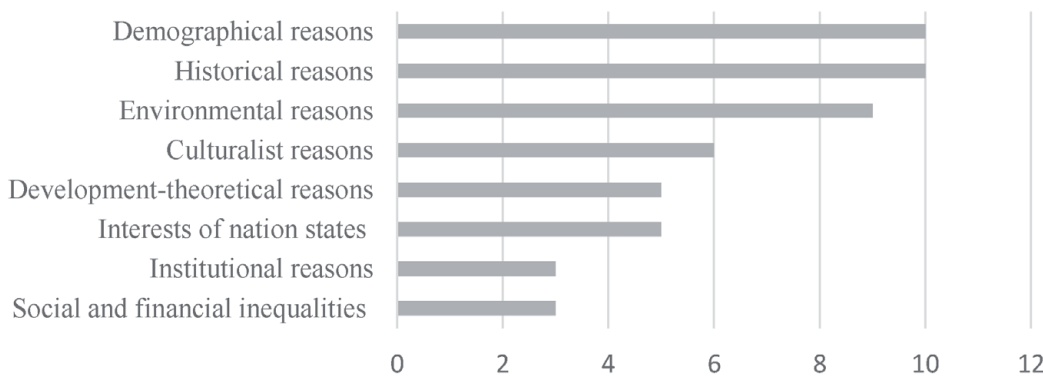


Figure 2.
Reasons for the imbalanced global distribution mentioned by the participants.

Culturalist approaches explain the global imbalance with different ways of life, values and attitudes towards the preservation of cultural heritage. Indigenous Peoples of Australia, Alaska, Siberia and Latin America are repeatedly referred to as “nomadic tribes” (G5_4) or “primitive tribes” (G3_2) and assigned a nature-oriented culture. G3_2 presumes that they “did not have the leisure to build cultural World Heritage.” It is assumed, that many WHs in Africa, Asia and Latin America are related to religion and belief systems. Further it is argued, that Europeans pay more attention to preservation and conservation. G11_1 compares Europe to China, where “it doesn’t matter if something is torn down. Well, maybe it matters, but there will be less resistance than in Europe.”

Development-theoretical lines of reasoning use the Global North as a benchmark and explain the comparatively low number of cultural WHs in the Global South with an allegedly lagging economic and cultural development. For G2_4 lacking financial means are the “obvious” reason why communities in Central Africa “do not just build something like the Cologne Cathedral”. Further, education, technical and industrial progress in the past are considered as relevant factors that influence the development of cultural artefacts and traditions, their preservation and appreciation. In their discussions, most participants place technical and cultural achievements in Europe, East Asia and the Middle East. In this context, G9_3 compares ancient Greece to the Indigenous Peoples of North America. While “advanced mathematical skills” are ascribed to ancient Greeks, she assumes that Native Americans only had “limited resources”.

Five groups take the interests of nation states into account. According to the participants, national interests influence the intensity of searching for cultural heritage, the willingness to nominate sites as well as the commitment to the values represented by UNESCO. G8_2 ascribes a historically grounded lack of interest to Russia, “because they have always been separating themselves. Just like they did with the wall in Germany.”

Institutional reasons are considered by three groups. According to group 4, the decision-making processes that evolve around WH have to be taken into account when discussing the global imbalance. While G4_2 suspects the European Member States to misuse their power to enforce national interests, G4_1 believes that the UNESCO ensures neutral decision-making.

Insufficient financial means as an expression of social inequality are debated in two groups. Group 5 expresses the opinion, that high cost prevent financially weak countries from submitting nominations, not the lack of potential sites. Similarly, G4_2 suspects that especially European countries have the financial capacities to carry out the required conservation and preservation measures. Furthermore, G12_2 refers to the discrimination of the North American Indigenous Peoples in the past and the consequences for the current appreciation of their heritage.

6. Participants’ attitudes towards the imbalanced global distribution of cultural World Heritage

32 of 43 participants express a personal attitude towards countering the imbalanced global distribution of cultural WH.

Of those 32 participants, 15 are against taking actions to counter the disparities. To back their argument, the participants mainly refer to the required outstanding significance of cultural WH. For example, participant G9_1 recognises the global imbalance but does not consider it necessary to reduce it. He argues that the number of cultural WHs are a justified reflection of the achievements of different cultures. G4_2 acknowledges that some countries might not have the financial resources or

cannot fulfil all the necessary requirements. However, she concludes that a balanced distribution is unfeasible, since the UNESCO is a “big institution” that does not yield to protests. Similarly, G4_1 is against taking measures, since a country just might “not have anything worth a nomination”. According to her, achieving a balanced global distribution would decrease the standard and the WH title in turn lose its prestige. G1_3 holds the individual countries accountable for the disparities, since it is their decision to submit a nomination. If a state refrains from nominating WHs, it is considered their “own fault”.

Similar arguments prevail among the 12 participants who have ambivalent attitudes towards countering the imbalance. G11_2 is not generally opposed to taking actions, but stresses that “it depends what a country has to offer. Europe has a lot cultural World Heritage because of religion, but Africa is more or less just prairie, there is not much to find.” G12_2 suspects that some countries might lack the capacities for a successful nomination and suggests direct nominations by the UNESCO. In contrast, G4_3 refers to the sovereignty of every national state. According to her, the WH list should not be perceived as a “competition”. But since some countries might feel disadvantaged, she proposes public protests.

Five participants support actions that contribute to a more balanced global distribution of cultural WH. For example, participant G5_4 argues that the WH list might confirm stereotypes and nurture prejudices by directing the attention to selected “things, places and regions”. According to her, every region should receive the same attention.

Overall, most of the proposed actions to reduce the global imbalance involve the support of the Member States. Of the eight groups discussing these actions, most focus on financial help. G12_2 suggests to directly support Member States with little financial means, while G9_2 prefers the “communist idea” of an equal distribution of all financial resources. Six groups propose changes in the decision-making process. One suggestion is to transfer power from the Member States to the UNESCO or to even install a new overarching committee that is responsible for preparing the nominations. Opposed to this centralization approach, two groups propose the enlargement of the World Heritage Committee. Further, four groups suggest public participation in order to increase the transparency and legitimacy of the nomination process. G3_2 proposes an online vote which would allow everyone to participate, since the public “is the culture and it might be interesting for them to be involved in the decision.”

7. Discussion

The selected results suggest that the perceptions of the participants regarding cultural WH and its global distribution are predominantly grounded in Eurocentric ways of thinking. The argumentation of many participants resembles the conceptualization of cultural heritage in the early days of the WH Programme. Although the understanding of heritage within the international scientific community as well as the UNESCO has since then become more complex and open to diverse approaches, it can be argued that in the case of Germany, the different heritage concepts have yet to reach the general public discourse [37]. The observation, that most participants express an understanding of cultural WH that focuses on historic monuments and buildings can thus be explained with the argument that nowadays heritage scholars cannot enter a local community “to assess the social significance of an old place without finding that the community’s expression of that significance is not in some way influenced or structured by received concepts of heritage.” [21]. Possibly, this not only holds true for specific heritage sites, but also for general associations with cultural heritage. The positionality of the participants thus needs to be taken

into account. It can be assumed that the participants are already influenced by the AHD narrative due to media, education or sightseeing tours, even if they have never consciously dealt with the term WH.

Eurocentric thinking patterns became apparent throughout different phases of the focus groups, but specifically during the discussion of possible reasons for the imbalanced global distribution of cultural WH. In the argumentation of most participants, Europe appears as an exceptional 'haven' of culture, history and progress. Parts of Asia, Latin America and particularly Africa on the other hand are mostly associated with contrary characteristics. The use of binary opposites such as undeveloped/developed, primitivism/progress, nature/culture is considered a key concept for the understanding of the relations between the Global South and the Global North. As they suppress any ambiguity, complexity and overlap between the allegedly opposing terms hierarchies are reinforced [38]. Binarism is strongly linked to othering, first introduced by Spivak [39], which describes how the self-identity (of the colonisers) is defined in opposition to the alien Other (the colonised). In the context of contemporary heritage and museum practice, Dixon [40] has shown how the process of othering occurs in the representation of Africa and its diasporas in European museums.

In neocolonial narratives, terms such as "primitive, savage, pre-Colombian, tribal, third world, undeveloped, developing, archaic, traditional, exotic" [41] are used to degrade the Global South. Similar terms can be found in the participants' perceptions of "African tribes living in outdated huts" (G7_3), which stand in contrast to descriptions of technical progress in Europe or the achievements of ancient civilizations.

These descriptions uncover a linear understanding of development. They can be traced back to a central idea of the European understanding of modernity, that assigns different geographical areas to different stages of development (e.g. 'developing countries', 'emerging markets', 'developed countries') [42]. As a result, the 'developed way of life' is used as a benchmark. Deviations to this standard are commonly problematised and can seemingly only be overcome by technical solutions and external help. This understanding perceives global disparities as the result of lagging 'development' instead of unequal global power relations [43]. This depoliticising approach can also be found in the development-theoretical reasons of the participants which refer to lacking knowledge and skills as well as in the marginal consideration of institutional reasons.

Further mechanisms that reproduce existing hierarchies include exoticism, neglect of (precolonial) history and essentialism [38]. Frequently, statements concerning the Global South or Indigenous Peoples of North America and Australia mention tribes, religion and belief, connection to nature and rural areas. The precolonial history tends to be ignored, whereas colonialism is perceived as a positive cultural influence. From the participants' view, this is especially true for Africa, which is mostly described as historically insignificant, the only exceptions being ancient Egypt and references to Africa as the origin of humanity. The negation of African history, the simultaneous exoticism of the continent and the discrimination of its people cannot be reduced to the work of past European philosophers (e.g. [44]) but continue to shape today's representations of Africa [45–47]. The results of this study also support previous research that has pointed out the stereotypes and prejudices of German secondary school students regarding Africa [48, 49].

Moreover, many explanations for the imbalanced distribution of cultural WH have their roots in environmental determinism. This dominating paradigm of 'western' geography in the late 19th and early 20th century relied on climate parameters and the natural environment to explain differences in human behaviour,

cultural practices or the “race temperament” [50]. The resulting classification of human-beings into groups of different characters, abilities and intellects in turn justified repression, exploitation and colonialism [51].

The imbalanced global distribution of cultural WH is considered a minor issue by most participants and counter-actions are thus only demanded by a minority. This is consistent with the observation, that the legitimacy of the decision-making processes concerning WH is mostly unquestioned. The nomination process as well as the final decision by the WH Committee are largely considered indisputable. Most of the participants see the committee’s decision as a mere formality and expect a confirmation of the OUV. As the legitimacy of the UNESCO and the WH Committee is taken for granted by most participants, only little adaptations to the existing institutional framework are suggested. This includes offering financial help to poorer Member States, which feeds from a paternalistic division in donor and receiving countries [43]. Similar observations have been made by Fischer et al. [52] in a study that explored perceptions of globalisation among secondary school students in Lower Saxony, Germany. The participants also rarely challenged existing global political hierarchies and international decision-making processes and saw little need for changing the status quo.

It has to be taken into account, that the participants of the study presented in this chapter were not aware of the public and scientific debate concerning the global imbalance of WH. They could only argue on the grounds of the basic information they received as well as their own assumptions.

Across the participants’ associations regarding WH as well as in the stated reasons for the imbalanced global distribution a focus on history is apparent, which might be explained by a synonymous use of history and heritage. According to Lowenthal, those are two fundamentally different concepts. While history seeks to describe the past, “[h]eritage is not like this at all. It is not a testable or even reasonably plausible account of some past, but a *declaration of faith* in that past.” ([53], emphasis in original) The concept of heritage as a cultural process of meaning-making resulting from the conscious acts of labelling, classification, selection and deliberate omission [3] is thus foreign to most participants.

8. Conclusion: towards a postcolonial approach to World Heritage Education

In this chapter we have presented and discussed selected results of a qualitative study exploring cultural WH from the perspective of secondary school students in Lower Saxony, Germany. The analysis of the participants’ associations with cultural WH and the stated reasons for the imbalanced global distribution, has uncovered a domination of Eurocentric lines of reasoning. The results of the study thus confirm the urgent need for decolonising WHE by means of including critical and reflexive approaches to education. Hence, WHE has to go beyond the mere instrumental interest of transmitting unquestioned content knowledge. Following this understanding, raising awareness for WH and its safeguarding should by far not be the only objective of WHE. To gain credibility and – most importantly – relevance, WHE needs to challenge dominating Eurocentric thinking patterns and pick up and reflect on global challenges.

The educational resources known to the authors currently fail to address the issues that have been criticised in the past and/or still are today. Within the WH programme, an incremental shift to a more inclusive and complex understanding and management of cultural WH has taken place, but unfortunately current

educational resources do not reflect these reforms. The definitions and related procedures of WH are presented as given facts, and not as the results of negotiation processes that have been adapted in the past and will probably be adapted again in the future. The critique that has been voiced in the past [e.g. 3, 9, 54], should not only be limited to internal or academic debates, but explicitly be reflected in WHE.

As colonial knowledge systems persist in education, language or cultural attributions, they subconsciously structure our mindset. Tlostanova and Mignolo [55] thus call out “to start learning to unlearn [...] in order to relearn”, meaning to break free from imposed thinking patterns and develop an reflective practice. The adoption of critical and reflexive thinking in WHE can build upon the approaches offered by critical and decolonial Global Citizenship Education (GCE) [56, 57]. According to Andreotti [58], critical GCE aims at tackling epistemological questions and reflects on “how we came to think/be/feel/act the way we do and the implications of our systems of belief in local/global terms in relation to power, social relationships and the distribution of labour and resources.” In comparing different frameworks for GCE, she describes “power, voice and difference” [58] and discussing the root causes of global disparities as central aspects of critical GCE. In the context of WHE this could for example include a conscious examination of how terms such as the OUV are defined and understood in guidelines, by ICOMOS or academic scholars. Here, Mignolo [59] offers a helpful critique of the term ‘universalism’ without falling back to cultural relativism. Instead, he argues that the universalisation of experiences, as proclaimed by colonialism and imperialism, is not feasible.

Next to questioning underlying concepts of WH, critical and reflexive approaches in WHE should also deal with the representations and personal meanings of specific sites. Cultural WH is a highly visual field, images of iconic features represent whole destinations and can directly influence the visitor experience [60]. Regarding reflexive learning experiences on site, hermeneutic photography has proven useful. In the described research project, participants visited a local WHs and were asked to take two photos. The first photo represented a universal view of the site, while the second photo showed a personal view [32, 61]. This exercise can be used as a starting point to discuss different meanings of given sites, point towards conflicts between prescribed universal values and personal meanings and reflect upon how iconic images shape WHs as *place*.

To conclude, we call for a WHE that is grounded in a critical and decolonial GCE. The core of such a WHE should be

- a. developing an awareness for one’s own perception of heritage.
- b. sensitising for other perceptions and meanings of heritage, especially respecting the perspectives of locals.
- c. reflecting upon how different understandings are tied to specific contexts, knowledge systems as well as personal experiences.

This is based on the assumption that one must become aware of one’s own perceptions in relation to other views in order to be able to expand one’s own perspective. The different perceptions hold by learners and people who live/work nearby WHs are thus a resource which needs to be tapped. In general, the question ‘Who talks when and where how about WH?’ has to be tackled. For decolonising WHE we recommend to reflect upon personal meanings of WHs in, for example, sub-Saharan Africa as a kind of ‘a voice off’ and compare these considerations with ‘voices from within’ [49].

For educational activities and learning resources we suggest to explicitly uncover and deconstruct Eurocentric thinking patterns and integrate post- and decolonial approaches. Teachers and heritage interpreters need to be made aware of how the heritage of different countries, cultures or communities is represented in learning resources. Special attention should be paid to language to avoid reproducing cultural hierarchies by using degrading terms.

Further the interests and procedures of the involved stakeholders in the context of WH have to be questioned. WHE and heritage in general needs to be understood as the result of a cultural social process influenced by power relations and national interests. In the previous section it has become apparent, that education has to foster a critical attitude towards 'development' and especially terms such as 'developing/developed countries'. At first glance, the connection of WH and 'development' might not seem obvious. However, with the proclaimed contributions of WH to sustainable development [62, 63], we claim that WHE is obliged to tackle questions such as 'What does development mean?' or 'How can different development paths look like?' At this point it becomes apparent that the adoption of critical and reflexive thinking in WHE offers the chance to take up challenging topics that go far beyond the previous core themes of WHE.

It would be desirable if educational activities and resources in schools as well as at WHs involve critical discussions of the WH programme, reflexive methods, and increasingly establish a dialogue with other WHs so that the claim of transnational validity can be accounted for. First suggestions for how to implement critical and reflexive approaches in WHE in school will be published in a textbook in 2021 [64]. There, we have included topics such as changes in the conceptualization of cultural WH, the imbalanced global distribution of WH or heritage of the transatlantic slave route (e.g. Jazz as protest music, colonial heritage in the Global South and North, local (post)colonial heritage) and proposed methods such as hermeneutic photography.

It needs to be stressed, that the mentioned suggestions for educational activities are just a beginning. They have no claim for completeness and should be regarded as consequences of this particular study. Since the focus was purely on young people's perceptions of cultural WH, no conclusions can be drawn regarding the interpretation of natural WH. We suggest, that further studies on the perceptions of young people regarding WH include cultural and natural WH, as well as intangible cultural heritage. In the future, a similar exploration of young people's perspectives could be conducted in the Global South. Such a study would not only enrich the academic discussion, but also produce material (e.g. photos or quotes) that can be included in educational resources in the Global North. This suggestion does not only aim for identifying different perspectives on heritage, but also to find similarities and build a common ground.

Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the Ministry of Science and Culture of Lower Saxony, grant number 76ZN1534 (VWVN 1357). The project was based at the Research Center *TRUST – Transdisciplinary Rural and Urban Spatial Transformation* at the Leibniz University Hannover. We kindly thank Prof. Dr. Joachim Grabowski and Sandra Adam, Institute of Psychology, who conducted the quantitative study of the research project.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

A similar version of this chapter has previously been published in Sustainability 12(20) [61].

Thanks

The research project was an associated member of the joint project *CHER: Cultural Heritage as a Ressource?* at the Leibniz Research Center Inclusive Citizenship. We kindly thank all members for the constructive exchange and the discussions on cultural heritage.

Author details

Verena Röhl¹ and Christiane Meyer^{2*}

¹ Institute of Land and Sea Transport Systems—Integrated Transport Planning, Technische Universität, Berlin, Germany

² Institute of Science Education—Geography Education Section, Leibniz University Hannover, Hanover, Germany

*Address all correspondence to: meyer@idn.uni-hannover.de

IntechOpen

© 2021 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 

References

- [1] UNESCO. World Heritage List Statistics [Internet]. 2021. Available from: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/stat> [Accessed 2021-06-26]
- [2] UNESCO. Expert Meeting on the 'Global Strategy' and Thematic Studies for a Representative World Heritage List. Paris: UNESCO; 1994. 8 p.
- [3] Smith L. Uses of Heritage. New York: Routledge; 2006. 368 p.
- [4] Harrison R. What is Heritage? In: Harrison R, editor. Understanding the Politics of Heritage. Manchester: Manchester University Press; 2010. p. 5-42
- [5] Logan W. Cultural diversity, cultural Heritage and human rights: Towards Heritage management as human rights-based cultural practice. International Journal of Heritage Studies. 2012;3:231-244. DOI: 10.1080/13527258.2011.637573.
- [6] Winter T. Beyond eurocentrism? Heritage conservation and the politics of difference. International Journal of Heritage Studies. 2014;2:123-137. DOI: 10.1080/13527258.2012.736403
- [7] UNESCO. Progress Report, Synthesis and Action Plan on the Global Strategy for a Representative and Credible World Heritage List. Paris: UNESCO; 1998. 57 p.
- [8] Strasser P. 'Putting reform into action': Thirty years of the world Heritage convention: How to reform a convention without changing its regulations. International Journal of Cultural Property. 2002;2:215-266. DOI: 10.1017/S0940739102771427
- [9] Meskell L. A Future in Ruins: UNESCO, World Heritage and the Dream of Peace. New York: Oxford University Press; 2018. 400 p.
- [10] Jimura T. The Relationship Between World Heritage Sites and School Trips in Japan. In: Rogério A, Lira S, Pinheiro C, editors. Heritage 2012. Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Heritage and Sustainable Development. Barcelos: Green Lines Institute for Sustainable Development; 2012. p. 1611-1620
- [11] Dippon P. Lernort UNESCO-Welterbe: Eine akteurs- und institutionsbasierte Analyse des Bildungsanspruchs im Spannungsfeld von Postulat und Praxis. Heidelberg: Selbstverlag des Geographischen Instituts der Universität Heidelberg; 2012. 285 p.
- [12] Hinrichs N. Künstlerische Vermittlung des UNESCO-Welterbes Wattenmeer. Oberhausen: Athena; 2016. 294 p.
- [13] Flamme C. Dokumentieren, Vermitteln und Bewahren: Dreidimensionale Modelle in der World Heritage Education. Oberhausen: Athena; 2018. 532 p.
- [14] Turunen J. Decolonising European minds through Heritage. International Journal of Heritage Studies. 2019;10: 919-941. DOI: 10.1080/13527258.2019.1678051
- [15] UNESCO. Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and World Natural Heritage. Paris: UNESCO; 1972. Available from: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/> [Accessed: 2021-06-14]
- [16] UNESCO. World Heritage Education Programme [Internet]. 2020. Available from: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/wheducation/> [Accessed: 2020-03-23]
- [17] German Commission for UNESCO (Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission). Resolution der 66. Hauptversammlung

der Deutschen UNESCO-Kommission, Hildesheim, 28. und 29. Juni 2006 [Internet]. 2006. Available from: <http://www.unesco.de/infothek/dokumente/resolutionen-duk/reshv66.html> [Accessed: 2021-05-06]

[18] Eberth A, Hallermann S, Pahlke M, Raffelsiefer M, van der Koelen A, Wack C. Seydlitz Erdkunde 1. Gymnasium Rheinland-Pfalz. Braunschweig: Seydlitz; 2016. 232 p.

[19] Meyer C, editor. Diercke Erdkunde. Einführungsphase Niedersachsen. Braunschweig: Westermann; 2017. 128 p

[20] Bernecker R, Eschig G, Klein P, Viviani-Schaerer M. Die Idee des universellen Erbes. In: Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission, Luxemburgische UNESCO-Kommission, Österreichische UNESCO-Kommission, Schweizerische UNESCO-Kommission, editors. Welterbe-Manual: Handbuch zur Umsetzung der Welterbekovention in Deutschland, Luxemburg, Österreich und der Schweiz. 2nd ed. Bonn: Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission; 2009. p. 10-15

[21] Byrne D. Heritage Conservation as Social Action. In: Fairclough G, Harrison R, Jameson J H Jnr., Schofield J, editors. The Heritage Reader. New York: Routledge; 2008. p. 149-173

[22] Coombe RJ. Managing Cultural Heritage as Neoliberal Governmentality. In: by Bendix RF, Eggert A, Peselmann A, editors. Heritage Regimes and the State. Göttingen: Göttingen University Press; 2013. p. 375-387

[23] German Commission for UNESCO (Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission). Communicating World Heritage: A Guide for World Heritage Information Centres. Bonn: Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission; 2019. 61 p.

[24] Tilden F. Interpreting our Heritage: Principles and Practices for Visitor Services in Parks, Museum and Historic Places. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press; 1957. 110 p.

[25] Uzzell DL. Interpreting Our Heritage: A Theoretical Interpretation. In: Uzzell D L, Ballantyne R, editors. Contemporary Issues in Heritage and Environmental Interpretation: Problems and Prospect. London: The Stationery Office; 1998. p. 11-25

[26] Silberman NA. Heritage interpretation as public discourse: Towards a new Paradigm. In: Albert MT, Bernecker R, Rudolff B, editors. Understanding Heritage: Perspectives in Heritage Studies. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter; 2013. p. 21-33

[27] Ströter-Bender J. Einleitung. In: Ströter-Bender J, editor. World Heritage Education: Positionen und Diskurse zur Vermittlung des UNESCO-Welterbes. Marburg: Tectum; 2010. p. 11-16

[28] UNESCO. World Heritage in Young Hands. To Know, Cherish and act. Paris: UNESCO; 2002. 178 p.

[29] Austrian Commission for UNESCO (Österreichische UNESCO-Kommission), editor. Welterbe für junge Menschen: Österreich: Ein Unterrichtsmaterial für Lehrerinnen und Lehrer. Wien: Österreichische UNESCO-Kommission; 2007. 114 p.

[30] Bayerische Landeszentrale für politische Bildungsarbeit, editor. welterbe.elementar. München: Bayerische Landeszentrale für politische Bildungsarbeit; 2017. 12 p.

[31] de Cesari C. World Heritage and mosaic universalism. Journal of Social Archaeology. 2010;3:299-324. DOI: 10.1177/1469605310378336

[32] Röhl V, Meyer C. World cultural Heritage from the perspective of young

- people: Preliminary results of a qualitative study. In: Amoêda R, Lira S, Pinheiro C, Santiago Zaragoza JM, Calvo Serrano J, García Carrillo F. *Heritage 2018: Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Heritage and Sustainable Development: Volume 2*. Granada: Green Lines Institute for Sustainable Development; 2018. p. 1091-1102
- [33] Kuckartz U. *Qualitative Text Analysis a Guide to Methods, Practice and Using Software*. London: Sage; 2014. 192 p.
- [34] Morgan DL. *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications; 1997. 80 p.
- [35] Deutsche Welle. 2014. Syriens zerstörtes Kulturerbe: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyzOU18wzqA&t=2s> [Accessed: 2021-05-26]
- [36] UNESCO. *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. Paris: UNESCO; 2017. 175 p.
- [37] Strasser P. Welt-Erbe? Thesen über das ‚Flaggschiffprogramm‘ der UNESCO. In: Hemme D, Tauschek M, Bendix R, editors. *Prädikat „Heritage“: Wertschöpfung aus kulturellen Ressourcen*. Münster: Lit Verlag; 2007. p. 101-128
- [38] Ashcroft B, Griffiths G, Tiffin H. *Post-Colonial-Studies: The Key Concepts*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge; 2007. 292 p.
- [39] Spivak GC. The Rani of Sirmur: An essay in Reading the archives. *History and Theory*. 1985; 3:247-272
- [40] Dixon, CA. *The ‘othering’ of Africa and its diasporas in Western museum practices*. PhD thesis. Sheffield: University of Sheffield; 2016. 303 p.
- [41] Torgovnik M. *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*. Chicago: Chicago University Press; 1990. 353 p.
- [42] Massey D. *For Space*. London and New York: Sage; 2005. 232 p.
- [43] Ziai A. Post-development 25 years after The development dictionary. *Third World Quarterly*. 2017;12:2547-2558. DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2017.1383853
- [44] Hegel GWF. *The Philosophy of History*. New York: Dover Publications; 1830 [1956]. 457 p.
- [45] Martin F, Griffiths H. Power and representation: A postcolonial Reading of global partnerships and teacher development through north-south study visits. *British Educational Research Journal*. 2012;6:907-927. DOI: 10.1080/01411926.2011.600438
- [46] Marmer E, Sow P. African history teaching in contemporary German textbooks: From biased knowledge to duty of remembrance. *Yesterday & Today*. 2013;10:49-76
- [47] Mbembe A. *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization*. Columbia: Columbia University Press; 2019. 280 p.
- [48] Reichart-Burikukiye C. Wo liegt Afrika? Das Afrikabild an Berliner Schulen. *Berliner Blätter*. 2001;25:72-97
- [49] Kersting P. *AfrikaSpiegelBilder und Wahrnehmungsfiler: Was erzählen europäische Afrikabilder über Europa?* In: Kersting P, Hoffmann KW, editors. *AfrikaSpiegelBilder. Reflexionen europäischer Afrikabilder in Wissenschaft, Schule und Alltag*. (Mainzer Kontaktstudium Geographie 12). Mainz: Geographisches Institut; 2011. p. 3-10.
- [50] Semple EC. *Influences of Geographic Environment: On the Basis of Ratzel's System of Anthro-Geography*. New York: H. Holt and Co; 1911. 683 p.

- [51] Alexander DE. Environmental Determinism. In: Alexander DE, Faibridge RW, editors. *Environmental Geology: Encyclopedia of Earth Science*. Dordrecht: Springer; 1999. 786 p. DOI: 10.1007/1-4020-4494-1_112.
- [52] Fischer S, Fischer F, Kleinschmidt M, Lange D. *Globalisierung und politische Bildung: Eine didaktische Untersuchung zur Wahrnehmung und Bewertung der Globalisierung*. Wiesbaden: Springer; 2016. 185 p.
- [53] Lowenthal D. *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. 7th ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2009. 356 p.
- [54] Harrison R, Hughes L. *Heritage, colonialism and Postcolonialism*. In: Harrison R, editor. *Understanding the Politics of Heritage*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; 2010. p. 234-269
- [55] Tlostanova MV, Mignolo WD. *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press; 2012. 304 p.
- [56] Andreotti V, de Souza LMTM, editors. *Postcolonial Perspectives on Global Citizenship Education*. New York: Routledge; 2012. 270 p.
- [57] Sant E, Davies I, Pashby K, Shultz L, editors. *Global Citizenship Education*. London and New York: Bloomsbury; 2018. 248 p.
- [58] Andreotti V. Soft versus critical global citizenship education. *Policy & Practice*. 2006;3:40-51
- [59] Mignolo WD. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham: Duke University Press; 2011. 458 p.
- [60] Cutler SQ, Doherty S, Carmichael B. *Immediacy, photography and memory: The tourist experience of Machu Picchu*. In: Bourdeau L, Gravari-Barbas M, Robinson M, editors. *World Heritage, Tourism and Identity: Inscription and Co-Production*. New York: Routledge; 2016. 131-146
- [61] Röhl V, Meyer C. Young People's perceptions of world cultural Heritage: Suggestions for a critical and reflexive world Heritage education. *Sustainability*. 2020;12: 8640. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12208640>.
- [62] UNESCO. Policy for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention. WHC-15/20.GA/INF.13. Paris: UNESCO, 2015. 18p.
- [63] Labadi S, Giliberto F, Rosetti I, Shetabi L, Yildirim E. *Heritage and the Sustainable Development Goals: Policy Guidance for Heritage and Development Actors*. Paris: ICOMOS, 2021. 134p.
- [64] Meyer C, Röhl V, editors. *Unser Welterbe: Faszination, Vermittlung, Verantwortung*. Braunschweig: Westermann, 2021 [in press].