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## The Polish Contribution to the Protection of World Cultural Heritage in the Last Five Decades

### Polski wkład w zachowanie światowego dziedzictwa kulturowego w perspektywie ostatnich pięciu dekad

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#### Abstract

The World Heritage Convention is UNESCO’s foremost normative instrument and major cultural treaty. At present, the number of States Parties stands at 196. Its primary mechanism of protection—the World Heritage List—currently encompasses 1,248 cultural and natural properties of outstanding universal value across 170 States Parties (comprising 972 cultural, 235 natural, and 41 mixed properties). Although only 17 properties are from Poland, their value and significance for the overall implementation of the Convention cannot be underestimated. This article seeks to provide a critical account of Poland’s role as a State Party in the operation of this UNESCO international law instrument, set within the broader context of its 50 years of practice and achievements. It traces the legal and institutional history of Poland’s participation in the World Heritage Convention system, with particular attention to the contribution of Polish expertise to the formulation and development of the concept of World Heritage and its underlying notion of Outstanding Universal Value. Accordingly, this article explores Poland’s experiences and contributions—both as a State Party and through the engagement of Polish experts—to the advancement of the World Heritage programme and its governance.

#### Keywords

World Heritage, Poland, international law, international cooperation, sustainable development

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### Abstrakt

Konwencja w sprawie ochrony światowego dziedzictwa kulturowego i naturalnego stanowi jeden z najważniejszych instrumentów normatywnych UNESCO oraz kluczowy traktat w dziedzinie kultury. Obecnie do grona państw stron należy 196 krajów. Główny mechanizm ochrony przewidziany w ramach Konwencji – lista światowego dziedzictwa – obejmuje dziś 1248 obiektów o wyjątkowej powszechnej wartości, położonych w 170 państwach świata. Wśród nich znajdują się 972 obiekty kulturowe, 235 przyrodniczych oraz 41 mieszanych. Mimo że z terytorium Polski na liście figuruje jedynie 17 obiektów, ich znaczenie oraz rola w realizacji zobowiązań wynikających z Konwencji są nie do przecenienia.

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest dokonanie krytycznej analizy roli Polski jako państwa strony w funkcjonowaniu tego instrumentu prawa międzynarodowego, osadzonej w szerszym kontekście 50 lat obowiązywania tego traktatu oraz jego osiągnięć. Tekst ukazuje prawną i instytucjonalną historię uczestnictwa Polski w systemie ochrony światowego dziedzictwa, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem wkładu polskiej wiedzy eksperckiej w kształtowanie i rozwój koncepcji światowego dziedzictwa oraz stojącego za nią pojęcia wyjątkowej powszechnej wartości (*Outstanding Universal Value*).

Artykuł opisuje doświadczenia i zasługi Polski – zarówno jako państwa strony, jak i z perspektywy aktywności polskich ekspertów – dla rozwoju programu światowego dziedzictwa oraz mechanizmów jego zarządzania.

### Słowa kluczowe

światowe dziedzictwo, Polska, prawo międzynarodowe, współpraca międzynarodowa, zrównoważony rozwój

THIS YEAR, 17 DECEMBER MARKS THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ENTRY INTO FORCE OF THE World Heritage Convention (henceforth ‘WHC’ or ‘Convention’),<sup>1</sup> the flagship instrument and major cultural programme of the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (henceforth ‘UNESCO’). Founded on the principle of equality between all cultures, the programme brings together the protection of the world’s cultural and natural heritage of special significance. It emphasizes that the preservation of these unique properties and sites should be secured by international cooperation and assistance worldwide. As of March 2025 there are 196 States Parties to this convention, making it a treaty of nearly universal application and scope. Indeed, it is considered one of UNESCO’s most successful legal instruments, with a ratification rate and level of awareness that is unparalleled among other conventions adopted under the organization’s auspices.<sup>2</sup> The designation of a site as a World Heritage (henceforth ‘WH’) Site is a significant quality label, establishing a benchmark for the preservation of cultural heritage on a global scale.

Poland has been a State Party to the WHC since 29 June 1976.<sup>3</sup> In fact, it was among the first countries to ratify the treaty, and the formulation of its provisions was significantly influenced by the work of prominent Polish scholars: Kazimierz Michałowski, Jan Zachwatowicz, Krzysztof Pawłowski,<sup>4</sup> Andrzej Tomaszewski and Władysław Sieroszewski. Moreover, the Historic Centre of Kraków and the Wieliczka and Bochnia Royal Salt Mines were among the first 12 sites included on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1978. To date, there are 17 sites in Poland, including four

<sup>1</sup> Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted on 16 November 1972 (1037 U.N.T.S. 151).

<sup>2</sup> See B. Ringbeck, ‘50 Years World Heritage Convention: Founding Idea(s) and Implementation – Reflections on Important Developments Over Time’, in: *50 Years World Heritage Convention: Shared Responsibility – Conflict & Reconciliation*, M.-T. Albert et al. (eds), Cham 2022, pp. 21–28.

<sup>3</sup> See K. Piotrowska-Nosek, ‘Konwencja w sprawie ochrony światowego dziedzictwa kulturalnego i naturalnego’, in: *Konwencje UNESCO w dziedzinie kultury. Komentarz*, K. Zalańska (ed.), Warsaw 2014, pp. 239–240.

<sup>4</sup> Oral Archives of the World Heritage Convention, Interview with Krzysztof Pawłowski, 8 May 2018, Warsaw, Poland, [whc.unesco.org/en/oralarchives/krzysztof-pawlowski](http://whc.unesco.org/en/oralarchives/krzysztof-pawlowski), accessed: 25 September 2025; also K. Pawłowski, *Meandry badań nad kształtowaniem miasta. Geneza, niespodzianki, refleksje, czyli kwadratura koła*. Warsaw 2023.

transboundary properties, that are protected under the WHC international regime. A wide range of studies and initiatives have previously examined Poland's accomplishments, expertise and capacity in the preservation and research of WH Sites. Notably, from 3–13 September 2013, the National Institute of Heritage organized a thematic exhibition entitled 'Poland for World Heritage / La Pologne pour le patrimoine mondial' at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris.<sup>5</sup> The exhibition was accompanied by a comprehensive catalogue featuring essays by distinguished archaeologists, historians and monument conservators.<sup>6</sup>

In such a context, this article aims to offer a critical account of Poland's role as a WHC State Party in the functioning of UNESCO's most visible cultural programme, set within the broader context of the last 50 years of its practice and development. In this regard, the legal and institutional history of Poland's participation in the WHC system is outlined, with a special focus on Polish expertise in creating and developing the idea of world heritage and its outstanding universal value ('OUV'). In essence, this article investigates the experience and contribution of Poland, as a party to the Convention, and Polish experts to the development of the WH programme and its governance design.

### History and system of the Convention

The idea of the Convention grew out of the need for collective action and international cooperation to protect natural wonders (such as forests, mountains and ecosystems) and cultural treasures (such as historic cities, temples and traditions) for the benefit of all mankind. The International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia, launched in 1959 following appeals from Egypt and Sudan, led to the relocation of a number of important monuments, including the famous temples of Abu Simbel (Egypt) and salvage from Faras Cathedral (Sudan). Numerous countries provided voluntary ad hoc financial and/or technical assistance. The success of this project, and particularly the creation of an international coalition to support it, led UNESCO and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (henceforth 'ICOMOS') to prepare a draft convention on the protection of cultural heritage. This, together with other parallel initiatives to protect natural wonders and sites – notably those launched by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (henceforth 'IUCN') – led to the establishment of the WHC, which promotes the idea that human history and the environment are intricately linked and must be preserved together through common international mechanisms.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the Convention represents a unique marriage between nature and culture, recognizing that natural and cultural heritage deserve equal attention in conservation efforts.<sup>8</sup>

The WHC has established a comprehensive system for the identification, protection and conservation of cultural and natural heritage worldwide. This system works through governance bodies, listing criteria, monitoring mechanisms and financial assistance to ensure that sites which meet the criteria of OUV (there are separate criteria for natural, cultural and mixed heritage sites) are safeguarded for future generations. More importantly, nominated cultural properties must also pass authenticity and integrity tests and must have an adequate protection and management system to ensure their safeguarding. The WH List, which today contains 1,223 cultural and natural properties of OUV, plays a key role in this system. It includes 952 cultural, 231 natural and

<sup>5</sup> See *La Pologne pour le patrimoine mondial: Exposition thématique*, 3–13 September 2013, [whc.unesco.org/fr/evenements/1083](http://whc.unesco.org/fr/evenements/1083), accessed 20 March 2025.

<sup>6</sup> *Poland for World Heritage / La Pologne pour le patrimoine mondial*, M. Trelka (ed.), Warsaw 2013.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. R. O. Slatyer, *The Origin and Evolution of the World Heritage Convention*, 'Ambio' 1983, vol. 12, no. 3/4, pp. 138–139.

<sup>8</sup> See C. Cameron, 'Conceptual Development of the World Heritage Convention', in: *The 1972 World Heritage Convention: A Commentary*, F. Francioni, F. Lenzerini (eds), 2nd ed., Oxford 2023, pp. 8–18; also see C. Cameron, M. Rössler, *Many Voices, One Vision: The Early Years of the World Heritage Convention*, Abingdon-New York 2016.

50 mixed properties in the territories of 168 States Parties. The WH system is governed by several key actors: UNESCO, the overarching organization responsible for the protection of cultural and natural heritage worldwide; the World Heritage Committee (henceforth 'Committee'), composed of 21 members elected by the States Parties, which oversees the implementation of the Convention; the World Heritage Centre, which is responsible for day-to-day coordination and technical assistance; and Advisory Bodies, which include ICOMOS, which evaluates cultural heritage sites; the IUCN, which evaluates natural heritage sites; and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (henceforth 'ICCROM'), which provides training and technical assistance. The Convention's provisions are implemented in accordance with the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (henceforth 'OG'), which are periodically revised.<sup>9</sup>

A fundamental component of the programme pertains to the system by which its compliance is monitored and international assistance is provided. For these purposes, the List of World Heritage in Danger and the World Heritage Fund, respectively, assume paramount importance. The List of WH in Danger encompasses sites of OUV that are imperilled. As of March 2025, the list comprises 56 properties confronting considerable risks due to factors such as armed conflict, natural disasters, pollution, poaching, uncontrolled urbanization and unregulated tourist development. The purpose of this international register is twofold: firstly, to inform the international community about these threats and, secondly, to encourage corrective actions to preserve these irreplaceable sites. Most importantly, inscription on the List of WH in Danger facilitates the mobilization of international support, including technical and financial assistance, to address the challenges faced by these properties.

### The Convention and global governance of cultural heritage

It should be emphasized that the Convention has had a significant impact on international law by establishing binding obligations, increasing cooperation and strengthening the legal protection of cultural and natural heritage. It continues to serve as a foundation for global heritage policy and to inspire further legal developments in environmental and cultural conservation.<sup>10</sup> Since its adoption, the international law applicable to cultural and natural heritage has changed dramatically. Heritage has become part of an international movement that aims to go beyond the narrow concept of 'cultural property' as the subject of private rights of a predominantly economic nature. This movement emphasizes the collective and public nature of heritage and its representational value as the totality of creative expressions, practices and spaces that a given community recognizes as part of its cultural tradition and identity.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, the protection and enhancement of WH are closely linked to the Global Sustainable Development Goals (henceforth 'SDGs').<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, the significance of the Convention within the broader landscape of global governance of cultural heritage and sustainable development was emphasized by the World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022 (28–30 September 2022, Mexico City). The final declaration, endorsed by 140 signatories<sup>13</sup> is a landmark document in

<sup>9</sup> The latest version was adopted on 31 July 2024 (UNESCO Doc. WHC.24/01); the first text of the Operational Guidelines, entitled *Operational Guidelines for the World Heritage Committee*, dates back to 1977 and was adopted at the First Session of the World Heritage Committee (27 June – 1 July) in Paris (UNESCO Doc. CC-77/CONF.001/8 [30 June 1977]).

<sup>10</sup> F. Francioni, 'The 1972 World Heritage Convention: An Introduction', [in:] *The 1972 World Heritage...*, op. cit., pp. 4–5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> See S. von Schorlemer, 'The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Its Impact on Implementation of the 1972 World Heritage Convention', in: *Cultural Heritage, Sustainable Development and Human Rights: Towards an Integrated Approach*, L. Pineschi (ed.), London–New York 2023, pp. 131–54.

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022 (28–30 September 2022, Mexico City) (MONDIACULT-2022/CPD/6).

terms of the cultural policies, the standard-setting architecture of UNESCO culture conventions and recommendations, and its impact on the world beyond 2030. It positions culture as a global public good and addresses individual and collective responsibility for ensuring the conservation, safeguarding and promotion of the entire cultural sector, including both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.<sup>14</sup> The need for protection during emergencies originating from human and natural hazards was stressed, as were the actions for response jointly organized by international institutions and organizations to address those threats to culture and communities. Moreover, the necessity to incorporate culture in the debate on climate change and with recognition of an international normative framework addressing the climate issues was advocated. The latter is of essence in terms of UNESCO WH Sites, as some of them are greatly exposed to climate risks.

In September this year, the MONDIACULT 2025 World Conference will be held in Barcelona as the first World Forum on Cultural Policies, to be organized by UNESCO every four years. Work on the first 2025 UNESCO Global Report on Cultural Policies is now underway. Many of the thematic chapters, such as those on guaranteeing cultural rights and protecting and promoting culture in the face of climate change, are the most important topics in light of the WHC regime. At this point one can expect that the notion of UNESCO designations will be integrated into the chapters in alignment with the main themes. This expectation also stems from the current practice of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Accordingly, the Declaration on Future Generations, annexed to the Pact for the Future, adopted by the General Assembly in September 2024, fosters a global commitment to ‘honour, promote and preserve cultural diversity and cultural heritage, as well as languages, knowledge systems and traditions, and foster intercultural and interreligious dialogue.’<sup>15</sup> It is therefore evident that protecting the world’s cultural heritage is one of the most significant objectives of the international community in the context of sustainable development and the maintenance of peace.

### Poland and the concept of world heritage

The huge hydrological project to construct the Aswan Dam – together with economic and social changes in Egypt and Sudan, the growing political polarization of the cold war and the ongoing decolonization – meant that protecting the heritage of the Nile Valley required compromise and cooperation across divides. This necessitated not only financial support but also the active participation of multiple archaeological missions, leveraging their expertise and experience. The Polish archaeological mission was present in both Egypt and Sudan, where it made significant advances in the protection of both the ancient and the Christian heritage of the Valley.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Professor Kazimierz Michałowski (1901–81), a recognized archaeologist, Egyptologist and art historian, with practical experience gained mainly in Greece and Egypt (Edfu), presided over a committee of experts directing the relocation of the temple of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the most significant contribution of Polish archaeology to the Nubian campaign was the salvaging of Faras and its frescoed cathedral.<sup>18</sup>

The city’s location, on the border between modern Egypt and Sudan at the Wadi Halfa Salient, was flooded by Lake Nasser, and is now permanently submerged. Prior to this flooding, the work in Faras was entrusted to Professor Michałowski. The excavations at this Nubian site were carried

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., para. 9.

<sup>15</sup> U.N. Doc. A/RES/79/1 (22 September 2024), Annex II, *Declaration on Future Generations*, para. 15.

<sup>16</sup> See M. A. Shehata, ‘Victory in Nubia: Egypt’, *UNESCO Courier*, February–March 1980, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. F. Pawlicki, ‘Polish School of Archaeology and Conservation by the Nile’, in: *Poland for World Heritage...*, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>18</sup> For more, see K. Michałowski, ‘The Polish School of Mediterranean Archaeology’, *Kwartalnik Historii i Nauki* 1980, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 707–720; S. Jakobiński, ‘Memories from the Nubian Campaign’, in: *Remembering the ‘Nubia Campaign’: Recollections and Evaluations of The International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia after Fifty Years*, M. C. De Simone (ed.), Boston–Leiden 2024, pp. 215–223.

out under his leadership from 1960 to 1964 by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw in Cairo, which he had founded. The works undertaken by the mission team revealed a Christian cathedral with magnificent wall paintings. A total of 169 frescoes were unearthed; 120 of them were removed from the walls and relocated. Sixty-six of the paintings were taken to Poland and are currently on display in the Polish National Museum in Warsaw, and until 2024 in the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum.<sup>19</sup>

It is worth noting the private sector's contribution to protecting cultural heritage, all the efforts to raise awareness of the significance of cultural heritage in fostering intercultural dialogue and campaigns that target different groups and highlight the importance of international cooperation in protecting the common heritage of humankind. In 2014 the newly arranged Faras Gallery in the Polish National Museum was reopened to the public. The private donation of the philanthropist Wojciech Pawłowski and his family enabled the Faras Gallery to be modernized. The invaluable works are presented within a brand-new framework.<sup>20</sup>

Poland remains committed to this initiative and continues to share its expertise in this regard. In 2023 at UNESCO's General Conference, Poland was elected to the Executive Committee of the International Campaign for the Establishment of the Nubia Museum in Aswan and the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Cairo. One of the recent events related to Poland's membership in the Executive Committee was an exhibition organized at the Louvre in Paris (17 October 2024), coordinated by Professor Dobrochna Zielińska.<sup>21</sup> The exhibition presented reconstructions of costumes depicted in the paintings decorating Faras Cathedral, discovered by Polish archaeologists during the UNESCO campaign to save the monuments of Nubia.

The Polish experience gained in Nubia and other archaeological missions, as well as the restoration of monuments and historical sites destroyed during the Second World War, played an important role in the creation of the Convention. The key person was Jan Zachwatowicz (1900–83), who designed both the reconstruction of Warsaw's historic centre and the Blue Shield sign – a symbol of protection under the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.<sup>22</sup> He was a professor at the Warsaw University of Technology, a member of the Polish Academy of Sciences, a member of the Académie d'architecture in Paris and Poland's General Inspector of Monuments. Zachwatowicz contributed to the reorganization and expansion of the Polish restoration service. During the occupation of Poland (1939–1945), he participated in educational initiatives, the protection and preservation of works and the measurement of historic buildings (including the market square in Warsaw's historic centre). From January 1945 onwards, he assumed the role of co-director of the Warsaw Reconstruction Office. In the aftermath of the Second World War, numerous historic buildings in cities such as Gdańsk, Poznań and Wrocław underwent restoration or reconstruction in accordance with the principles established by Zachwatowicz and his team. His extensive experience, both theoretical and practical, proved instrumental in the drafting of the Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (henceforth 'Venice Charter'),<sup>23</sup> which provided an international framework

<sup>19</sup> Reportedly, Sudan's National Museum, which housed an invaluable collection of artefacts spanning thousands of years, suffered damaged from looting and substantial destruction at the hands of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in 2024. See S. Geranpayeh, "'We Are Crying': Heritage Authorities Express Sorrow after Sudan National Museum Looted and Ransacked', *The Art Newspaper*, 1 April 2025.

<sup>20</sup> M. Kuc, 'Otwarcie Galerii Faras w Muzeum Narodowym w Warszawie', *Rzeczpospolita*, 16 October 2024, [rp.pl/rzezba/art12222611-otwarcie-galerii-faras-w-muzeum-narodowym-w-warszawie](https://rp.pl/rzezba/art12222611-otwarcie-galerii-faras-w-muzeum-narodowym-w-warszawie), [accessed: 15 June 2025].

<sup>21</sup> [louvre.fr/expositions-et-evenements/evenements-activites/archeologie-du-textile-restituer-les-costumes-du-pouvoir-de-la-nubie-chretienne-6e-14e-siecles](https://www.louvre.fr/expositions-et-evenements/evenements-activites/archeologie-du-textile-restituer-les-costumes-du-pouvoir-de-la-nubie-chretienne-6e-14e-siecles), [accessed: 15 June 2025].

<sup>22</sup> Adopted 14 May 1954 (249 U.N.T.S. 240). The Blue Shield sign is used to mark cultural property so that it is protected from attack in the event of an armed conflict. The Blue Shield, formerly the International Committee of the Blue Shield, is also an international organization founded in 1996 with the purpose of protecting the world's cultural heritage from threats such as armed conflict and natural disasters.

<sup>23</sup> The full text is available at: [icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Charters/Venice\\_Charter\\_EN\\_2023.pdf](https://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Charters/Venice_Charter_EN_2023.pdf), [accessed: 20 March 2025].

for the conservation and restoration of historic buildings. Zachwatowicz was among its drafters and signatories. The Venice Charter was adopted on 31 May 1964 by the Second International Congress of Architects and Specialists of Historic Buildings, which also created ICOMOS to implement the charter. ICOMOS was established a year later in the ruins of the Nazi-destroyed Royal Castle in Warsaw, where 121 delegates from 26 countries met and adopted the status of this international non-governmental organization. The delegates then travelled to Kraków, where the First ICOMOS Congress was held at Wawel Castle on 24 and 25 June 1965.<sup>24</sup>

Due to his extensive experience, Zachwatowicz was one of the three European experts<sup>25</sup> who were invited by Hiroshi Daifuku, then head of UNESCO's cultural sector, to draft technical studies to show the scope and ambition of the envisaged new treaty and its impact on the world's cultural and natural heritage. Zachwatowicz was responsible for presenting the technical and scientific rules for implementing protection and conservation measures.<sup>26</sup> His study was extensively debated at the meeting of experts, coming from 13 countries, which was convened to co-ordinate principles and scientific, technical and legal criteria for an effective system of protecting and using monuments and sites (26 February–2 March 1968). Particularly, three points were addressed that would constitute the crux of protective measures under the WHC: laboratories and training of personnel; maintenance, restoration and reconstitution; and rehabilitation.<sup>27</sup> Zachwatowicz's line was fully supported by the Polish delegation during the work of the Special Committee of Government Experts convened to prepare the Draft Convention concerning the Protection of Cultural and Natural World Heritage (4–22 April 1972).<sup>28</sup> The Polish government was represented by Władysław Sieroszewski (1900–96), the then chief legal adviser in the Warsaw Reconstruction Office and later in the Warsaw Town Planning Office (1947–1951), who also served as one of the four vice-presidents of the Special Committee of Government Experts.<sup>29</sup>

Poland became a party to the WHC in 1976. In the same year it participated in the first General Assembly of States Parties to the Convention and was elected to the Committee for its term.<sup>30</sup> It was represented by the architect and academic Krzysztof Pawłowski (b. 1934), Poland's Deputy General Inspector of Monuments and a disciple of Zachwatowicz. He was elected Vice-President of the Committee, and he participated actively in the preparation of the basic principles of the functioning and implementation of the regime of the Convention, including the first OG.<sup>31</sup> He also advocated for the inclusion of the first entries of Polish heritage to the WH List.

<sup>24</sup> At present, ICOMOS has over 10,100 individual members in 153 countries, as well as 110 national committees and 28 international scientific committees. With rare exceptions, each member must be qualified in the field of conservation and a practicing landscape architect, architect, archaeologist, anthropologist, town planner, engineer, administrator of heritage, historian, art historian, palaeontologist or archivist. ICOMOS is a partner and founding member of Blue Shield.

<sup>25</sup> The other two were Guglielmo De Angelis d'Ossat, an Italian historian of architecture and restoration theorist, as well as the General Director of the Administration of Antiquities and Fine Arts from 1947 to 1960. He prepared a study on the scientific concepts on which the protection and presentation of monuments and sites would be based (see UNESCO Doc. SHC/CS/27/3 [26 January 1968]). The other person was Robert Bricet, a French lawyer and civil servant. He was Head of the Department of Studies and General Actions at the Ministry of Youth and Sports and former president of the French delegation at the intergovernmental conference in The Hague (1954). He contributed a study on the legal provisions required for ensuring the protection of monumental heritage (see UNESCO Doc. SHC/CS/27/5 [26 January 1968]).

<sup>26</sup> See UNESCO Doc. SHC/CS/27/4 (31 January 1968).

<sup>27</sup> UNESCO, Final report of meeting of experts to co-ordinate, with a view to their international adoption, principles and scientific, technical and legal criteria applicable to the protection of cultural property, monuments and sites, Paris, February–March 1968 (UNESCO Doc. SHC/CS/27/8 [31 December 1968]), pp. 12–14; see Cameron, *Conceptual Development*, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> UNESCO Doc. SHC.72/CONF.37/4 (7 April 1972); see UNESCO Doc. 17 C/18 (15 June 1972).

<sup>29</sup> UNESCO Doc. SHC.72/CONF.37/19 (21 April 1972), para. 4.

<sup>30</sup> UNESCO Doc. SHC-76/CONF.014/COL.9 (15 February 1977), Annex.

<sup>31</sup> See UNESCO Doc. CC.77/CONF.001/9 (30 September 1977).

### Poland's cultural and natural properties on the WH List

At present, 17 properties located in Poland are inscribed on the WH List: the Historic Centre of Kraków, the Wieliczka and Bochnia Royal Salt Mines, Auschwitz Birkenau German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940–1945), Białowieża Forest, the Historic Centre of Warsaw, the Old City of Zamość, the Castle of the Teutonic Order in Malbork, the Medieval Town of Toruń, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska (the Mannerist Architectural and Park Landscape Complex and Pilgrimage Park), the Churches of Peace in Jawor and Świdnica, the Wooden Churches of Southern Małopolska, Muskauer Park / Park Mużakowski, Centennial Hall in Wrocław, the Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe, the Wooden *Tserkvas* of the Carpathian Region in Poland and Ukraine, the Tarnowskie Góry Lead/Silver/Zinc Mine and its Underground Water Management System and the Krzemionki Prehistoric Striped Flint Mining Region. Almost 50 years after Poland's first entry on the WH List, it can be argued that these 17 properties reflect the remarkable diversity of strategies, objectives and trends that shape the functioning of the Convention globally.

### Early inscriptions and shaping the meaning(s) of OUV

In the initial phase of submitting proposals for the WH List, Poland prepared a total of five nominations. Two of them – the historic centre of Kraków and the Wieliczka and Bochnia Royal Salt Mines – were inscribed at the 2nd session of the Committee.<sup>32</sup> The decisions regarding the remaining sites – Auschwitz Birkenau Concentration Camp, the Historic Centre of Warsaw and Białowieża Forest – were postponed to the following session of the Committee. The Historic Centre of Kraków was inscribed due to the outstanding quality of its urban architecture, in terms of both its townscape and its individual monuments. It was also recognized as a compelling illustration of the process of continuous urban growth from the Middle Ages to the present, notable for its integrity and authenticity. Historical continuity and state of preservation were also decisive factors for inscribing Wieliczka and Bochnia.<sup>33</sup> However, as time passed, it became increasingly evident that conservation issues were giving rise to significant problems and challenges. The property was among the first to be considered for inclusion on the List of WH in Danger,<sup>34</sup> and it was also one of the first entries on that List,<sup>35</sup> being removed from it in 1998. Thus, the Polish experience contributed to both the procedure for inscription and inscription itself on the WH List and the List of WH in Danger.

Two further Polish nominations were of considerable significance in terms of the practical implementation of the Convention system: Auschwitz Birkenau Concentration Camp (in 2007, at the request of Poland, the property's name was changed to **Auschwitz Birkenau: German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940–1945)** in order to reflect the history of the site as a German Nazi site more accurately)<sup>36</sup> and the Historic Centre of Warsaw. Both were testimonies to the grave crimes committed during the Second World War. In the first case, the monument was considered for inscription from the very beginning as irrefutable evidence of the Holocaust, one of the greatest crimes ever perpetrated against humanity and an important site of remembrance. The question was raised as to whether the site met the Convention's cultural criteria and, more generally, whether sites of recent conflicts and those commemorating most heinous international

<sup>32</sup> UNESCO Doc. CC-78/CONF.010/10 Rev. (9 October 1978), para. 38.

<sup>33</sup> For further information, see: *Historic Mines – Art of Nature, Work of People*, K. Piotrowska et al. (eds), Warsaw 2016.

<sup>34</sup> UNESCO Doc. SC/84/CONF.004/9 (2 November 1984), para. 26.

<sup>35</sup> UNESCO Doc. SC-89/CONF.004/12 (22 December 1989), p. 14; also see 'Królewskie kopalnie soli w Wieliczce i Bochni (1978, 2013) – 40 lat na Liście Światowego Dziedzictwa UNESCO', in: *Międzynarodowa Konferencja Muzeów Górniczych i Skansenów Podziemnych, Wieliczka–Bochnia 2018*, Wieliczka 2019; 'Królewskie kopalnie soli w Wieliczce i Bochni na Liście światowego dziedzictwa UNESCO', *Biuletyn Polskiego Komitetu ds. UNESCO* 2013.

<sup>36</sup> UNESCO Doc. WHC-07/31.COM/24 (31 July 2007), Decision 31 COM 8B.8.

crimes should be included on the WH List. The Committee decided to enter **Auschwitz Birkenau: German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940–1945)** as ‘a unique site and to restrict the inscription of other sites of a similar nature.’<sup>37</sup> This contributed to the wider practice of the Convention and the evolution of the notion and scope of OUV.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, it has also been reflected in the practice of inscribing sites of remembrance on the WH List. To date, the Committee has inscribed a set of properties relating to the most tragic events of human history,<sup>39</sup> though only very few inscriptions directly linked to the most recent conflicts: **Auschwitz Birkenau: German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940–1945)**, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome, Japan), Bikini Atoll Nuclear Test Site (Marshall Islands) and the three most recent inscriptions of 2023.

However, only **Auschwitz Birkenau: German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940–1945)** was inscribed based on the original wording of the OUV criterion (vi): ‘be most importantly associated with ideas of beliefs, with the events or with persons, of outstanding importance or significance.’<sup>40</sup> In addition, the Committee decided to enter this site on the WH List as ‘a unique site and to restrict the inscription’ of other sites of this type in the future.<sup>41</sup> In relation to this, a significant change of the criterion was introduced in 1980, or just after the inscription of **Auschwitz Birkenau: German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940–1945)**. The revised wording reads as follows: ‘be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance (the Committee considers that this criterion should justify inclusion in the WH List only in exceptional circumstances or in conjunction with other criteria).’<sup>42</sup> This criterion had long referred exclusively to cultural properties, and only in 1994 was it extended to natural heritage; the revision was justified by its aim ‘to encourage a more open interpretation of this criterion.’<sup>43</sup> However, the second site of remembrance relating to a recent armed conflict (the Hiroshima Peace Memorial) was only designated in 1996, again exceptionally on the basis of the cultural criterion (vi),<sup>44</sup> although in its 1980 wording, this criterion appeared to be much broader in its scope.<sup>45</sup>

Notably, the inscription of the Bikini Atoll Nuclear Test Site, in 2010, was based on the same criterion used in conjunction with criterion iv, ‘be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history.’<sup>46</sup> In fact, the consideration of this second criterion may be seen as indicating the necessity of strengthening the justification prior to the application of the authenticity test. From the subsequent revisions of the OG it can be inferred that criterion vi needs to be supplemented with associative values. In other words, the OUV is to be reinforced by the associative values mentioned in other criteria. Associative values are particularly relevant when considering WH nominations of properties related to recent conflicts. Indeed, a multi-criteria evaluation of such sites, which

<sup>37</sup> UNESCO Doc. CC-79/CONF.003/13 (30 November 1979), para. 46.

<sup>38</sup> See S. M. Titchen, ‘On the Construction of “Outstanding Universal Value”: Some Comments on the Implementation of the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention’, *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* 1996, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 235–242.

<sup>39</sup> C. Cameron, ‘World Heritage Sites of Conscience and Memory’, in: *World Heritage and Cultural Diversity*, D. Offenhäuser et al. (eds), Bonn 2010, pp. 112–119.

<sup>40</sup> UNESCO Doc. WHC 2 (8 September 1978), para. 7.

<sup>41</sup> UNESCO Doc. CC-79/CONF.003/13 (30 November 1979), para. 31.

<sup>42</sup> UNESCO Doc. WHC/2 Revised (November 1980), para 18.

<sup>43</sup> UNESCO Doc. WHC-94/CONF.003/16 (31 January 1995), p. 65. In 2003, the two original, separate sets of criteria – for cultural heritage and for natural heritage – were merged, enabling better assessment of nominations in relation to their sometimes combined cultural and natural dimensions. See UNESCO Doc. WHC-03/6 EXT.COM/8 (27 May 2003).

<sup>44</sup> UNESCO Doc. WHC-96/CONF.201 VIII.C (14 October 1996).

<sup>45</sup> UNESCO Doc. WHC.17/01 (12 July 2017) para. 77.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid..

usually involved a matrix of memories, narrative and emotions, seems crucial to assess whether they convey OUV. The discussion initiated by the significance of memorial sites, particularly those related to recent armed conflicts and crimes, began with **Auschwitz Birkenau: German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940–1945)** and returned in the third decade of the 21st century. It concerned inscriptions of three sites commemorating armed conflicts and grave international crimes: Memorial Sites of the Genocide: Nyamata, Murambi, Gisozi and Bisesero (Rwanda), Funerary and Memorial Sites of the First World War (Western Front) (Belgium, France) and the ESMA Museum and Site of Remembrance – Former Clandestine Centre of Detention, Torture and Extermination (Argentina).<sup>47</sup> In fact, despite their status as cultural heritage, the primary significance of such sites lies in promoting understanding of difficult histories and facilitating the sharing of multiple narratives, with a view to fostering a better future. At the same time, it is crucial to ensure that such inscriptions do not lead to new misunderstandings or conflicts arising from contrasting narratives and memories.

### The significance of cross-border and serial inscriptions

At present, 49 transboundary sites have been inscribed on the WH List on the territories of 72 States Parties to the WHC. It is evident that a number of these individual sites traverse the contemporary states' boundaries. The composition of others is such that they are comprised of multiple disparate components, located 'on the territory of a single State Party, or on the territory of all concerned States Parties having adjacent borders'.<sup>48</sup> In this regard, nomination dossiers of transboundary sites shall be prepared and submitted by those States Parties jointly. They shall also establish a joint management body to manage a transboundary property.<sup>49</sup> However, transboundary properties may also be created by extending an existing WH property located on the territory of one State Party. This may be done on the basis of a nomination by that State Party and with the consent of the other State Party on whose territory the transboundary site will also be located.<sup>50</sup> The first transnational inscription is that of the Jesuit Missions of the Guaranis, shared between Argentina and Brazil, which was inscribed in 1983<sup>51</sup> and is regarded as one of the earliest clear examples of a joint nomination. Initially, each country nominated different parts of the site separately, but the overall recognition now spans both sides of the border. As for natural sites, the first inscription of such property was decided by the Committee during its 3rd session, in 1979: Kluane, Wrangell-St. Elias, Glacier Bay and Tatshenshini-Alsek,<sup>52</sup> which were jointly nominated by the USA and Canada, having a long tradition of cross-border protective and peaceful cooperation.

The concept of transboundary or joint nominations grew stronger in the 1990s and 2000s as UNESCO increasingly emphasized international cooperation. It is evident that the management and preservation of such a territorially and materially complex site necessitates close cooperation between the states and societies concerned. It can be argued that the increasing number of transboundary cultural sites inscribed on the WH List is indicative of a significant trend within UNESCO to promote and reward regional cooperation efforts in the area of cultural heritage.

It is also worth emphasizing the importance of transboundary serial properties, which are defined as properties that include two or more component parts that are clearly linked. Accordingly, component parts should reflect cultural, social or functional links over time, providing landscape, ecological, evolutionary or habitat connectivity where relevant. Furthermore, each component part should contribute to the OUV, and the ensemble should be coherent and manageable. A serial transboundary property must be nominated with the consent of all concerned

<sup>47</sup> See UNESCO Doc. WHC/23/45.COM/8B.Add (5 September 2023).

<sup>48</sup> OG para 134b.

<sup>49</sup> OG para 135.

<sup>50</sup> OG para 136.

<sup>51</sup> UNESCO Doc. SC/84/CONF.004/9 (2 November 1984), para. 25.

<sup>52</sup> UNESCO Doc. CC-79/CONF.003/13 (30 November 1979), para. 46.

States Parties, which shall establish a joint body and procedures to oversee the management of the nominated property as a whole.<sup>53</sup>

In recent decades, many transboundary serial properties have been inscribed on the WH List, primarily due to their universal intangible human values, such as Struve Geodetic Arc (2005: Estonia, Belarus, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Moldova, Russia, Sweden and Ukraine); Qhapaq Ñan, Andean Road System (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru); the Silk Roads, the Network of Routes of the Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor (China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan); and the Architectural Work of Le Corbusier, an Outstanding Contribution to the Modern Movement, a transnational serial property consisting of 17 sites, spread over seven countries on three continents (Argentina, Belgium, France, Germany, India, Japan and Switzerland).

The post-Cold War state practice in Central and Eastern Europe appears to corroborate this tendency. In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Iron Curtain and the ensuing processes of state succession and democratization, the majority of states in the region established new transboundary WH Sites and/or acceded to existing ones, thereby rendering them trans-frontier. Furthermore, they have proactively collaborated on nominations for sites of significant importance to various states and communities which in the past were subject to intricate territorial configurations. Examples of this practice can be found in various arrangements in European countries of the former Eastern bloc. In this particular context, the practice of Poland, reunited Germany and the new states of Ukraine and Belarus may be regarded as emblematic.<sup>54</sup>

In fact, among the Polish sites, those with a cross-border nature play a special role; this applies to a total of four of the 17 Polish properties. With respect to cultural heritage, the Polish-German and Polish-Ukrainian border areas merit particular consideration. Since 1991 Poland and reunited Germany have managed to effectively cooperate on joint cultural projects and preservation programmes, notwithstanding difficulties resulting from negotiating the legal status of certain displaced cultural material and the territorial and population transfers following the Second World War. More importantly, as a result of their inter-state and inter-regional collaboration, four sites considered important to the history of both nations were inscribed on the WH List: the medieval Castle of the Teutonic Order in Malbork, the Medieval Town of Toruń (both in 1997), Centennial Hall in Wrocław (2006) and the jointly administered transboundary cultural site of Muskauer Park / Park Mużakowski. This last site is a landscaped park of approximately 560 ha situated along the Neisse River and the border between Poland and Germany. Created by Prince Hermann von Puckler-Muskau from 1815 to 1844, it blends harmoniously with the surrounding agricultural landscape. It pioneered new approaches to landscape design architecture in Europe and America. The property, which is traversed by a national border established in the aftermath of the Second World War, holds particular significance for the entire region. The establishment of extensive cross-border cooperation was precipitated by a number of factors. These included the conclusion of the Cold War, the reunification of Germany (and the subsequent normalization of border issues<sup>55</sup> and neighbourly cooperation<sup>56</sup>) and Poland's participation in European integration. This symbolic location was inscribed on the WH List in July 2004, i.e. after Poland's accession to the European Union ('EU'). In its evaluation file, ICOMOS notably emphasized the significance of cooperation between the two nominating states in their analysis of its OUV. This cooperation was identified as being instrumental not only in the restoration of the site, but

<sup>53</sup> OG, paras 137–139.

<sup>54</sup> See A. Jakubowski, 'World Heritage, Cultural Conflict and Political Reconciliation], in: *Heritage, Culture, and Rights: Challenging Legal Discourses*, A. Durbach, L. Lixinski (eds), Oxford-Portland 2017, pp. 258–262.

<sup>55</sup> Treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and Poland Concerning the Demarcation of the Established and Existing Polish-German State Frontier (1708 U.N.T.S. 382, signed on 14 November 1990, entered into force on 16 January 1992).

<sup>56</sup> Treaty between Federal Republic of Germany and Poland on Good Neighbourly Relations and Friendly Cooperation (1708 U.N.T.S. 500, signed on 17 June 1991, entered into force on 16 January 1992).

also in the establishment of the Muskau School, which is recognized as an active international conservation centre for landscape management.<sup>57</sup>

The property, which is jointly managed, is located within the confines of the Muskau Arch, a geological formation of global uniqueness characterized by a terminal moraine that has been accumulated in a piled-up configuration. This moraine assumes the form of an arch on both sides of the border between Poland and Germany. The region is distinguished by a distinctive anthropogenic lake district, comprising over one hundred reservoirs on the Polish side, whose waters are renowned for their remarkable chromatic diversity. The jewel of the geopark, Muskauer Park / Park Mużakowski, is a prime example of this. Combined with a network of bicycle paths, Nordic walking trails and the possibility of canoeing on the Lusatian Neisse River, as well as attractions on both sides of the border, it creates a coherent tourist product, offering sightseeing and active recreation across the border. In 2011, the entire 578.8 km<sup>2</sup> of Muskauer Faltenbogen / Łuk Mużakowa, a German–Polish transboundary geopark, was certified as a European Geopark and included in the Global Geoparks Network.<sup>58</sup> Since 2015, when the Geopark Programme first began, it has been designated a UNESCO Global Geopark.<sup>59</sup> This demonstrates that the UNESCO designations overlap, and when applied strategically they can provide tangible benefits to the local community, contribute meaningfully to the UNESCO programme and foster synergies between the designations and stakeholders involved.

Analogous trends were also observed in Poland and Ukraine following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Notably, despite the failure of restitution negotiations concerning specific cultural materials displaced during the Second World War, Poland and Ukraine have initiated a highly successful collaboration in the domain of cultural site conservation through a series of joint cultural projects. This cross-border co-operation has been particularly efficient in terms of nominating cultural property on the WH List. In 1998, the Historic Centre of the City of Lviv was nominated for the WH List by Ukraine on the basis of its rich multicultural character. The city's cultural significance is also characterized by its unique reciprocal influences between the cultural centres of Western and Eastern Europe, as well as the regions of Asia Minor and the Middle East. This nomination was made on the understanding that the Historic Centre of the City of Lviv holds great significance for the history and culture of both nations.

Perhaps the best example of the power of reconciliation referred to in the WHC is the 2013 inscription of a group of *tserkvas* (wooden Orthodox churches) in the Carpathian Region, which are found in both Poland and Ukraine.<sup>60</sup> The nomination file, submitted by both governments, explains that these churches are ‘immensely important spiritual centres for the local communities, who continue to participate in religious activities. This contributes significantly to the survival of this unique diversity of religious rites, adding an intangible, emotional context to the significance of these sites.’<sup>61</sup> Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, communities of the Orthodox and Greek Catholic faiths built churches made of horizontal wooden logs, reflecting the cultural traditions that developed separately due to the mountainous terrain. The churches include Hutsul, Halych, Boyko and western Lemko types. The inscription of this transboundary serial cultural site was intended to encourage cooperation between the two nations and their borderland communities, which are burdened with painful memories of tragic events connected to the Second World War.

<sup>57</sup> UNESCO Doc. WHC-04/28COM/INF.14A (2004) 141; see Jakubowski, *World Heritage, Cultural Conflict...*, op. cit., p. 260.

<sup>58</sup> [muskau-arch.eu](http://muskau-arch.eu), [accessed: 20 March 2025].

<sup>59</sup> [unesco.org/en/igpp/muskauer-faltenbogen/luk-muzakowa-unesco-global-geopark](https://unesco.org/en/igpp/muskauer-faltenbogen/luk-muzakowa-unesco-global-geopark), [accessed: 20 March 2025]. Since then, two other UNESCO Global Geoparks have been established: Holy Cross Mountains UNESCO Global Geopark (2021) and Land of Extinct Volcanoes UNESCO Global Geopark (2024), covering mountainous landscapes their geological, biological and cultural diversity.

<sup>60</sup> Wooden *Tserkvas* of the Carpathian Region in Poland and Ukraine (UNESCO Doc. WHC-13/37.COM/20 [5 July 2013]).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

Poland and Belarus have also shared cooperative experiences from the beginning of the transformation. In 1992, the WHC agreed to extend the WH natural site of the Białowieża Forest, nominated by Poland, and to establish a transboundary site for the part of the forest situated within the new state of Belarus.<sup>62</sup> This action by the WHC encouraged the two states to cooperate and share management experiences. Furthermore, in 2005, the Committee reached the decision to inscribe the sixteenth-century Nesvizh Castle in Belarus on the WH List. The property is of great artistic importance to this region, serving as a universal exemplar of cultural exchange and a symbol of the shared history of Poland and Belarus. The nomination dossier was prepared in close collaboration with Polish scholars and research institutions.<sup>63</sup>

Białowieża Forest, an extensive forest complex situated on the border between Poland and Belarus, was the one of the first transboundary natural sites to be inscribed on the WH List. In fact, Białowieża National Park (Poland) was inscribed in 1979.<sup>64</sup> It encompasses the last remaining section of primaevial forest in Europe and is home to many rare animal species, including the world's largest population of free-roaming European bison, numbering several hundred. In 1992, the property was expanded to include Belovezhskaya Pushcha in Belarus.<sup>65</sup> This was not only an important step to protect world heritage in the post-cold war realities, but also a great contribution to the stability of borders after the break-up of the Soviet Union.<sup>66</sup> The creation of the transboundary property was indeed encouraged by the cooperation between the two States Parties concerned. Following a significant expansion in 2014, the property now encompasses an area of 141,885 ha, with a buffer zone extending it to 166,708 ha. The property's distinctive attribute is the size of its old-growth forests, which feature extensive undisturbed areas where natural processes persist. The property encompasses substantial areas of old-growth forest that have remained undisturbed or minimally disturbed for an extended period, constituting a distinctive feature within the Central European mixed forest terrestrial ecoregion and the lowland temperate Western Palearctic region.

However, recent years have been marked by political unrest in the region, particularly the Belarusian government's support for Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the resulting destabilizing activities on the state border, which is also the EU's external border. This has resulted in a number of threats to the integrity of the Białowieża Forest. It is evident that these threats are associated with the militarization of protected areas, particularly the construction of the border barrier and associated infrastructure in Poland.<sup>67</sup> This has led to the de facto split of the property into two separate subdivisions, thereby significantly increasing the ecological fragmentation of the property. The associated direct and indirect impacts of border infrastructure and security operations, the presence of illegal migrants and edge effects further exacerbate fragmentation and cumulative pressure on ecological connectivity and processes, including hydrology, wildlife movement, wildlife population ecology, predator-prey dynamics, etc. The breakdown in transboundary cooperation between these two WHC States Parties, following a deterioration of bilateral relations, has also resulted in a lack of coordinated management at the property-wide level.<sup>68</sup> However, the report from the joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring Mission in 2024 proved the Polish State's commitment to the core values of the Convention and international obligations even in the view of existing challenges on the border. The complex border situation, in addition to prior proposals to expand commercial logging in the Polish section of the forest, give rise to

<sup>62</sup> UNESCO Doc. WHC-92/CONF.002/12 (14 December 1992), p. 37.

<sup>63</sup> See the nomination file at [whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1196.pdf](https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1196.pdf), [accessed: 30 March 2025]; Jakubowski, *World Heritage, Cultural Conflict...*, op. cit., p. 260.

<sup>64</sup> UNESCO Doc. CC-79/CONF.003/13 (30 November 1979), para. 46.

<sup>65</sup> UNESCO Doc. WHC-92/CONF.002/12 (4 December 1992), p. 37.

<sup>66</sup> See M. Perkowski et al., *The Disputed Białowieża Forest Legal Remedies for the Protection of Cross-border Properties*, Boston–Leiden 2022, pp. 39–43.

<sup>67</sup> See UNESCO Doc. WHC/24/46.COM/17 (9 August 2024), Decision 46 COM 7B.50.

<sup>68</sup> Perkowski et al., *The Disputed Białowieża Forest...*, op. cit., pp. 134–40.

valid concerns regarding the state of conservation of the OUV. These impacts on the OUV of the property could result in the property meeting the criteria for inscription on the List of WH in Danger in the near future.<sup>69</sup> The issues concerning the conservation of the Białowieża Forest demonstrate the need for a more systematic approach to the protection of transboundary WH Sites (particularly natural sites). It has been argued that this approach should encompass existing instruments of international law, including those pertaining to the protection of the environment and climate change.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, it is important to emphasize Poland's involvement in a significant project focused on the conservation of natural habitats and ecosystems of outstanding value, namely the Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe. This transnational property, inscribed on the WH List, comprises 95 component parts in 18 countries: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, France, Germany, Italy, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and Ukraine. Following the conclusion of the last Ice Age, the European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) proliferated from a limited number of isolated refuges in the Alps, the Carpathians, the Dinarides, the Mediterranean region and the Pyrenees over a brief period of several thousand years, a process that is still ongoing. The successful extension of the tree's habitat across a whole continent is due to its adaptability and tolerance of different climatic, geographical and physical conditions.<sup>71</sup> This entry is undoubtedly one of the greatest international ecological initiatives framed within the WHC system.

#### Uniqueness and representativeness

In addition to the cultural and natural transboundary properties, Auschwitz Birkenau German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940–1945) – the special site of remembrance – and those representing unique historical, architectural and urban sites (the Historic Centre of Kraków, the Wieliczka and Bochnia Royal Salt Mines, the Old City of Zamość, the Castle of the Teutonic Order in Malbork, the Medieval Town of Toruń, Centennial Hall in Wrocław, the Tarnowskie Góry Lead/Silver/Zinc Mine and its Underground Water Management System, the Krzemionki Prehistoric Striped Flint Mining Region and the Wooden Churches of Southern Małopolska), Poland's inscriptions also feature two important tendencies in the Convention's practice: 1) the strong connection between living cultures and tangible heritage and 2) recovery and reconstruction.

In the first aspect, two entries are significant for the contemporary understanding of WH: the Churches of Peace in Jawor and Świdnica and Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, the Mannerist Architectural and Park Landscape Complex and Pilgrimage Park. The Churches of Peace in Jawor and Świdnica bear witness to an extraordinary act of tolerance during the era of religious wars in Europe. These two Lutheran churches also manifest a special political development in seventeenth-century Europe, characterized by great spiritual strength and commitment. Not only are both buildings magnificent Baroque wooden architectural masterpieces, they are also regularly used for religious services and serve the local community.<sup>72</sup> In turn, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska (the Mannerist Architectural and Park Landscape Complex and Pilgrimage Park) represents a captivating cultural landscape, imbued with profound spiritual significance. Its natural setting – in which an array of symbolic edifices relating to the Passion of Jesus Christ and the life of the Virgin Mary were meticulously arranged at the beginning of the seventeenth century – has remained virtually unaltered. To this day, it continues in this capacity, serving as a site of spiritual significance and

<sup>69</sup> See *Report on the Joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring Mission to the World Heritage Property 'Białowieża Forest' (Belarus, Poland) from 18 to 27 March 2024*, p. 52, available at [whc.unesco.org/document/207619](https://whc.unesco.org/document/207619), [accessed: 20 April 2025].

<sup>70</sup> Perkowski et al., *The Disputed Białowieża Forest...*, op. cit., pp. 165–215.

<sup>71</sup> See [whc.unesco.org/en/list/1133](https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1133), [accessed: 15 May 2025].

<sup>72</sup> See [whc.unesco.org/en/list/1054](https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1054), [accessed: 15 May 2025].

pilgrimage for many. The site is distinguished by the harmonious integration of religious devotion and nature, and by the uninterrupted tradition of the mysteries enacted there.<sup>73</sup>

Both sites demonstrate an understanding of the concept of OUV in terms of authenticity and integrity. Therefore, to a significant extent, they can be regarded as emblematic of WH Sites. Nevertheless, the inscription of the Historic Centre of Warsaw was undoubtedly of particular significance for the entire Convention system. The comprehensive conservation work on the scale of the entire historic centre of Warsaw was a unique European experience, and it contributed to the verification of conservation doctrines and practices. Consequently, it serves as a remarkable exemplar of comprehensive reconstruction following the deliberate and complete destruction of a city. The material reconstruction was founded on two key elements: the inner strength and determination of the nation and the reconstruction of heritage on a unique scale in the history of the world. The reconstruction of Warsaw's historic centre was a significant contribution to the evolution of urbanization and conservation doctrines in numerous European countries in the aftermath of the Second World War. This example demonstrates the effectiveness of conservation initiatives on a global scale.<sup>74</sup>

The Polish nomination was followed in 2011 by the inscription of the Archives of the Capital Reconstruction Bureau in the Memory of the World Register.<sup>75</sup> The inscription constitutes 'a testimony of a nearly total destruction of the city and its rebuilding'. The reconstruction, which involved the active participation of members of the community, is considered 'an outstanding achievement by architects, conservators, artists and workers, and also a meaningful social phenomenon'.<sup>76</sup> The collection is held in the State Archives in Warsaw. In this context, the Memory of the World Programme can be regarded as a complementary addition to the older entry on the World Heritage List. It is important to highlight the connections between different types of cultural heritage, which supplement one another and together create a cohesive whole, as well as their roles within the broader context of world cultural heritage.<sup>77</sup>

This inscription also provided the necessary impetus for a wider debate and agenda in favour of the recovery and reconstruction of cultural heritage sites. Indeed, a result of the international conference entitled 'International Conference on Reconstruction: The Challenges of World Heritage Recovery', held in Warsaw on 6–8 May 2018,<sup>78</sup> was the Warsaw Recommendation on Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage ('Warsaw Recommendation').<sup>79</sup> The Committee approved the proposal at its 42nd session in Manama (Bahrain).<sup>80</sup> The Warsaw Recommendation, as an instrument for dealing with exceptional situations of heritage destruction, can serve as a model document that sets the rules of conduct. The goal was to discuss the standards that would be

<sup>73</sup> See [whc.unesco.org/en/list/905](http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/905), [accessed: 10 May 2025].

<sup>74</sup> ICOMOS, *The Historic Center of Warsaw: Advisory Body Evaluation (ICOMOS) (7 June 1978)*, [whc.unesco.org/document/153136](http://whc.unesco.org/document/153136), [accessed: 10 May 2025].

<sup>75</sup> [unesco.org/en/memory-world/archive-warsaw-reconstruction-office](http://unesco.org/en/memory-world/archive-warsaw-reconstruction-office), [accessed: 15 June 2025].

<sup>76</sup> *Nomination form, Memory of the World Register Archive of Warsaw Reconstruction Office*, p. 1, [media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mowoo1/poland\\_archive\\_of\\_warsaw\\_reconstruction.pdf](http://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mowoo1/poland_archive_of_warsaw_reconstruction.pdf), [accessed: 15 June 2025].

<sup>77</sup> Jagielska-Burduk, *Cultural Heritage as a Legal Hybrid: Between Public and Private Law*, Cham 2022, p. 197.

<sup>78</sup> *The Challenges of World Heritage Recovery: International Conference on Reconstruction*. The conference was organized by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the National Heritage Institute, in cooperation with the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the Polish National Commission for UNESCO, the Polish National Committee of ICOMOS, the Royal Castle in Warsaw, the Royal Łazienki, the Warsaw Uprising Museum and the Warsaw Metropolitan Conservator of Monuments, [gov.pl/web/sport/miedzynarodowa-konferencja-the-challenges-of-world-heritage-recovery-international-conference-on-reconstruction](http://gov.pl/web/sport/miedzynarodowa-konferencja-the-challenges-of-world-heritage-recovery-international-conference-on-reconstruction), [accessed: 11 May 2025].

<sup>79</sup> Available at [whc.unesco.org/document/168799](http://whc.unesco.org/document/168799), [accessed: 10 May 2025]. The aftermath of the conference is a comprehensive interdisciplinary publication: *The Challenges of World Heritage Recovery*, M. Marcinkowska, K. Zalańska (eds), Warsaw 2019, [ksiegarnia.nid.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/TheChallengesOfWorldHeritageRecovery.pdf](http://ksiegarnia.nid.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/TheChallengesOfWorldHeritageRecovery.pdf), [accessed: 10 May 2025].

<sup>80</sup> UNESCO Doc. WHC/18/42.COM/18 (4 July 2018), Decision 42 COM. 7, paras 25–28.

applied in the reconstruction of destroyed cities. The comprehensiveness of this instrument makes it a document of a broader nature. The impact of the Warsaw Recommendation already extends beyond the problems of hazards and destruction of WH Sites, and serves as a model of good practice referred to in other documents. More importantly, Poland's postwar experience, including the reconstruction of Warsaw's historic centre, serves as a prime example of using all available materials to document the condition of a site before its destruction. The role of documentation is crucial, including that associated with the construction process, the manner in which construction began, and the integration of this process with elements involving the tradition and culture of the communities affected. The Warsaw Recommendation presents a holistic vision for the reconstruction process. This is of critical importance, as it relates to inclusivity, involving the local community and hearing its needs, as well as defining the place of cultural heritage in the development of communities.<sup>81</sup>

The Warsaw Recommendation also contributed to national and regional cultural heritage policy frameworks and policy papers prepared by global expert organizations. Significantly, the European External Action Service, in its document 'Concept on cultural heritage in conflicts and crises: A component for peace and security in European Union's external action' (2021), presents cultural heritage as a political and symbolic element in conflicts and crises, a vehicle for peace and development.<sup>82</sup> It envisages the protection of heritage in three stages: before it is threatened, during the period of threat and in the process of recovery from conflict and reconstruction (the broad term 'recovery process' is used to refer to reconstruction, restoration and revitalization). In this latter regard, the European External Action Service indicates the Warsaw Recommendation as a source of best practices. Furthermore, it also recalls the Peacebuilding Assessment Tool for Heritage Recovery and Rehabilitation: PATH. This project has been developed by the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, an intergovernmental organization dedicated to the preservation of cultural heritage worldwide through training, information, research, cooperation and advocacy programmes. The project is linked to the ICCROM programme, 'First Aid and Resilience for Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis', which includes the preparation of the 'Toolkit on Heritage for Peace and Resilience'. In the glossary of the PATH publication, the keyword 'reconstruction' refers to the definition adopted in the Warsaw Recommendation, which demonstrates how the toolkit shows the multidimensionality of the reconstruction and restoration process.<sup>83</sup>

### Poland's contribution to the implementation of the Convention

In addition to the foregoing discussion on Poland's input to the functioning and shaping of the Convention system, it is also crucial to consider a number of international initiatives to protect and enhance WH. In particular, various Polish entities and actors have participated in distinct programmes and projects for WH. Additionally, the role of Polish experts and scientists in the work of the WHC treaty bodies should be outlined.

Among the key institutions constituting national cultural bodies and serving as centres of excellence in implementing Poland's policy under the Convention, particular attention should be given to the National Institute of Cultural Heritage<sup>84</sup> in Warsaw and the International Cultural Centre in Kraków.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup> *Warsaw Recommendation on Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage* (adopted 8 May 2018), [whc.unesco.org/document/168799](http://whc.unesco.org/document/168799), [accessed: 10 May 2025], paras 7–8.

<sup>82</sup> 9962/21 (adopted 18 June 2021). See K. Hausler, 'The EU Approach to Cultural Heritage in Conflict and Crisis: An Elephant in the Room?', *Santander Art and Culture Law Review* 2021, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 193–202.

<sup>83</sup> A. Tandon et al., *PATH – Peacebuilding Assessment Tool for Heritage Recovery and Rehabilitation: Toolkit on Heritage for Peace and Resilience ICCROM2021*, Rome 2021, available at: [iccrom.org/publication/path-peacebuilding-assessment-tool-heritage-recovery-and-rehabilitation](http://iccrom.org/publication/path-peacebuilding-assessment-tool-heritage-recovery-and-rehabilitation), [accessed: 12 May 2025].

<sup>84</sup> See [nid.pl](http://nid.pl), accessed [5 September 2025].

<sup>85</sup> [mck.krakow.pl/en](http://mck.krakow.pl/en), [accessed: 5 September 2025].

The National Institute of Cultural Heritage houses a specialized unit dedicated to World Heritage in Poland.<sup>86</sup> The institute cooperates with site managers, and supports the government in fulfilling its obligations under the WHC. This includes the preparation of periodic reports, monitoring, and the organization of expert meetings. In 2007, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage assigned the Institute the task of coordinating activities related to the implementation of the WHC provisions, establishing a World Heritage Team for this purpose. The World Heritage Team's remit includes collecting data on the condition, protection, and management of WH properties; cooperating with their owners and managers to ensure proper care and management; preparing expert reports; organizing advisory missions and monitoring visits; engaging in international cooperation with the World Heritage Centre and Advisory Bodies; and organizing meetings and training courses. Over the years, the National Institute of Cultural Heritage has prepared Polish translations of the OG (five manuals), which are made available to the public through Open Access, and has organized training courses on the use of these guidelines. In addition it contributed to preparing nomination files and overseeing the process (in terms of content, procedure, etc.) of inscribing the following properties on the List: the Muskauer Park / Park Mużakowski, the Wooden *Tserkvas* of the Carpathian Region in Poland and Ukraine, the Bochnia Royal Salt Mines (extension), the Tarnowskie Góry Lead/Silver/Zinc Mine and its Underground Water Management System, and the Krzemionki Prehistoric Striped Flint Mining Region. The National Institute of Cultural Heritage is responsible for the management of the Polish part of the Muskauer Park / Park Mużakowski, a transboundary WH Site. Furthermore, the National Institute of Cultural Heritage co-organized<sup>87</sup> the conference 'International Conference on Reconstruction: The Challenges of World Heritage Recovery' that resulted in the Warsaw Recommendation.

In turn, the International Cultural Centre was established and directed for twenty-seven years (until 2018) by Professor Jacek Purchla,<sup>88</sup> whose leadership significantly contributed to the Centre's engagement in multiple international projects of importance, particularly those addressing issues related to world cultural heritage. In 2022, the Centre organized the conference 'Fifty years of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. Achievements and Challenges in Europe'.<sup>89</sup> The event, co-hosted by the Polish Committee of ICOMOS and Kraków City Hall, commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the Convention in 2022 and provided a forum for Polish and international scholars and professionals to debate the emerging challenges for cultural heritage.

Alongside the work and mandate of these two institutions, the Committee for World Cultural Heritage in Poland, established in 2007, has made significant contributions to fulfilling the obligations of the World Heritage Convention (WHC).<sup>90</sup> The Committee acts in an advisory capacity to the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, serving as a platform for cooperation between recognized scholars and professionals, representatives of the Ministry, the National Institute of Cultural Heritage, and the Polish National Commission for UNESCO. Its tasks include drafting opinions, proposals, analyses, and expert reports, as well as undertaking other activities related to the implementation of the WHC. In 2021, a new national-level monitoring body was established when the Minister of Culture and National Heritage appointed a team to oversee

<sup>86</sup> See 'World Heritage in Poland', *World Heritage* 2017, no. 84 (special issue).

<sup>87</sup> Together with the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and in cooperation with the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the Polish National Commission for UNESCO, the Polish National Committee of ICOMOS, the Royal Castle in Warsaw, the Royal Łazienki, the Warsaw Uprising Museum, and the Warsaw Metropolitan Conservator of Monuments.

<sup>88</sup> Oral Archives of the World Heritage Convention, Interview with Jacek Purchla, 10 May 2018, Kraków, Poland, [whc.unesco.org/en/oralarchives/jacek-purchla](http://whc.unesco.org/en/oralarchives/jacek-purchla), [accessed: 25 September 2025].

<sup>89</sup> See [mck.krakow.pl/events/481](http://mck.krakow.pl/events/481), [accessed: 25 September 2025].

<sup>90</sup> Regulation no. 39 of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage of 30 October 2007 on the appointment of the National Committee for World Cultural Heritage in Poland, Official Journal of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (Dz.Urz.MKiDN), 2007, no. 5, item 72, [sip.lex.pl/akty-prawne/dzienniki-resortowe/powolanie-komitetu-do-spraw-swiatowego-dziedzictwa-kulturowego-w-34171945](http://sip.lex.pl/akty-prawne/dzienniki-resortowe/powolanie-komitetu-do-spraw-swiatowego-dziedzictwa-kulturowego-w-34171945), [accessed: 14 June 2025].

the preparation of management plans for World Heritage Sites in Poland.<sup>91</sup> The members of this body – comprising ministry representatives, academics, and professionals – carry out study visits to Polish UNESCO sites, consult and advise site managers and local governments, and participate in stakeholder meetings during the drafting of management plans. Despite its recent establishment, this initiative has already proven successful in supporting site managers and providing an additional multilevel platform for debate.

With regard to other initiatives and practices, it is noteworthy that the Polish cities whose historic centres have been designated as World Heritage Sites – namely, Kraków, Toruń, Warsaw, and Zamość – are members of the Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC). This is an international non-governmental organization that unites 250 cities with sites inscribed on the WH List, represented by their mayors. The organization was established in 1993, and it operates under an agreement with UNESCO.<sup>92</sup> The OWHC aims to implement the Convention, encourage cooperation and exchange information and expertise between member cities at both the regional and international levels. The OWHC collaborates closely with other organizations that pursue similar objectives, promoting activities that support the efforts of cities in developing countries. It assists members in adapting and refining their management methodologies in accordance with the particular stipulations for inclusion on the WH List. Furthermore, the organization facilitates enhanced connections between research conducted by specialists and the requirements of local authorities. Its objectives also include fostering a sense of solidarity among member cities and raising public awareness of the significance of heritage and its preservation. At the national level, in 2004, at the Second Forum of Polish UNESCO Cities and Sites, some Polish local governments and institutions responsible for or locally associated with properties on the WH List established the League of Polish UNESCO Cities and Sites<sup>93</sup> (now operating under the name of the League of World Heritage Sites in Poland).<sup>94</sup> The objective of this initiative was to foster collaboration, enhance the visibility of sites, promote cultural activities and stimulate tourism. The Polish local authorities are working in accordance with the fundamental objectives of the global strategy for implementing the Convention, namely to involve and cooperate with local communities.<sup>95</sup> Between 2022 and 2025 the association, in collaboration with the Polish National Commission for UNESCO,<sup>96</sup> launched a series of webinars presenting WH Sites to the Polish schools which are members of the UNESCO Associate Schools Network (in Poland over 100 entities belong to the network). In this way a large group of individuals from across the country could connect via online platforms with experts and management representatives from Polish WH Sites.

Polish local governments also participate in initiatives for protecting the values of the WHC, including support for sustainable development. In addition to participating in the aforementioned UNESCO Global Geoparks programme, many Polish local governments belong to the UNESCO Creative Cities Network.<sup>97</sup> The programme was initiated in 2004 with the objective of fostering collaboration between cities that acknowledge creativity as a pivotal element in the advancement of cultural industries, which are recognized as a strategic catalyst for sustainable development. The programme's objective is to raise public awareness of the significance of culture and its capacity

<sup>91</sup> Regulation of the Minister of Culture, National Heritage and Sport of 31 August 2021 on the appointment of a team to monitor the preparation of management plans for World Heritage sites in Poland, Official Journal of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (Dz.Urz.MKDNiS), 2021, no. 68, [sip.lex.pl/akty-prawne/dzienniki-resortowe/powolanie-zespolu-do-spraw-monitorowania-przygotowania-planow-35919514](http://sip.lex.pl/akty-prawne/dzienniki-resortowe/powolanie-zespolu-do-spraw-monitorowania-przygotowania-planow-35919514), [accessed: 14 June 2025].

<sup>92</sup> [ovpm.org](http://ovpm.org), [accessed: 12 May 2025].

<sup>93</sup> [worldheritage.pl](http://worldheritage.pl), [accessed: 14 May 2025].

<sup>94</sup> [worldheritage.pl/stowarzyszenie](http://worldheritage.pl/stowarzyszenie), [accessed: 14 June 2025].

<sup>95</sup> See e.g. UNESCO Doc. WHC-11/18.GA/11 (1 August 2011), p. 6. See also International Law Association, Committee on Participation in Global Cultural Heritage Governance, *Final Report* (23 June 2022), available at: [ila-hq.org/en\\_GB/documents/01-ila-participation-final-report-lisbonfinal](http://ila-hq.org/en_GB/documents/01-ila-participation-final-report-lisbonfinal), [accessed: 12 May 2025].

<sup>96</sup> Polish National Commission for UNESCO, [unesco.pl](http://unesco.pl), [accessed: 14 June 2025].

<sup>97</sup> [unesco.org/en/creative-cities](http://unesco.org/en/creative-cities), [accessed: 15 May 2025].

for fostering development across various domains of society, encompassing the economic sector. The programme seeks to establish innovative hubs for creativity and cultural services, and to increase access to and engagement in cultural activities, with a particular focus on marginalized communities. The commitment expressed by cities in joining the Network is indicative of their dedication to the establishment of collaborative relationships, the encouragement of creativity, the dissemination of optimal methodologies and the further involvement of residents in cultural activities. To date, six Polish cities have become members of the Network and designated as cultural capitals: Kraków, City of Literature; Wrocław, City of Literature; Katowice, City of Music; Bydgoszcz, City of Music; Łódź, City of Film; and Gdynia, City of Film.

Given the involvement of Polish experts and scientists in the treaty bodies of the WHC, it should be noted that Professor Pawłowski served as Vice-Chairman of the Committee at its first session in 1977 and subsequently as Rapporteur at the Committee's second session in 1978. In the same year, he also held the position of Vice-Chair of the Committee Bureau, a role in which he made a substantial contribution to the operationalization of the Convention. Between 2013 and 2017, Poland served as a member of the Committee (38th–41st sessions). Experts from the National Institute of Cultural Heritage provided comprehensive organizational and substantive support throughout this mandate. Their work included analysing documents, preparing statements and speeches for the Polish delegation, representing Poland in Committee discussions, and participating in the work of the ad hoc group tasked with preparing and implementing reforms of the World Heritage system. In addition, they chaired one of the Committee's subgroups responsible for developing and finalizing changes to the Operational Guidelines. The National Institute of Cultural Heritage also organized events promoting Polish heritage, such as exhibitions and meetings, including during Committee sessions in Germany, Türkiye, and Bahrain. Moreover, in 2017, Professor Jacek Purchla, then Director of the International Cultural Centre in Kraków and, from 2015 to 2020, Chairman of the Polish National Commission for UNESCO and UNESCO Chair for Heritage and Urban Studies at the Kraków University of Economics, assumed the role of Chair of the Committee. In this capacity, he made a noteworthy contribution to the debate on protecting World Heritage in collaboration with civil society organizations—particularly in the context of armed conflicts.

It should also be noted that in 2017, during the 41st session of the Committee in Kraków, Poland, as the host country, initiated the first World Heritage Site Managers' Forum.<sup>98</sup> This initiative proved successful in its proposed format, embracing lectures, case studies, and debates. Following its incorporation into the programme for the subsequent Committee sessions, this initiative has become a recognized best practice, facilitating knowledge and experience sharing among WH Site managers.<sup>99</sup> In their final statement, the participants of the 1st World Heritage Site Managers' Forum addressed three areas of concern regarding the WH (eco)system: communication, transparency, and integration across governance levels; processes, particularly the need for timely, cooperative, and context-sensitive monitoring and decision-making; and capacity-building, emphasizing training, knowledge exchange, and the development of tools to strengthen heritage management.

In terms of other initiatives for the protection of WH Sites, Poland is distinguished not only as the country where ICOMOS was founded and which made a significant input to the concept of WH and the Convention itself, but also by the efforts of its scientists, who have enhanced the achievements of the community involved in the conservation of monuments.<sup>100</sup> Both the International Committee for the Training of Conservators (1984) and the International Committee for the Theory and Philosophy of Conservation (2005) were initiated under the chairmanship

<sup>98</sup> Organized by the National Institute of Cultural Heritage, ICCROM in cooperation with the World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS and IUCN.

<sup>99</sup> See 1st World Heritage Site Managers' Forum – UNESCO World Heritage Centre; [whc.unesco.org/en/whsmf17](http://whc.unesco.org/en/whsmf17), [accessed: 5 September 2025].

<sup>100</sup> See *Outstanding Universal Value and Monitoring of World Heritage Properties*, B. Szmygin (ed.), Warsaw 2011.

of Professor Tomaszewski. Polish members of ICOMOS are involved in a variety of significant committees, bodies and international organizations dealing with cultural heritage.<sup>101</sup> Importantly, on 24 November 2025, at the 25th General Assembly of the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, held in Paris, Poland was elected to the World Heritage Committee. In the third and final round of voting for the last of the so-called open seats, Poland received the highest number of votes. This result may be regarded as an expression of international recognition of Poland's long-standing involvement in matters relating to cultural heritage and related policy domains, as well as an affirmation of its demonstrated capacity to contribute to multilateral cooperation and to support initiatives aligned with UNESCO's mandate.<sup>102</sup>

Many highly accomplished Polish conservators, archaeologists and architects have also participated in a wide range of projects aimed at protecting and conserving WH Sites. This encompasses Polish missions in Egypt and Sudan. Significant work has been undertaken at the WH Site of Ancient Thebes with its Necropolis. The Polish-Egyptian Archaeological and Conservation Mission at the Temple of Hatshepsut in Deir el-Bahari was established by Professor Michałowski in 1961. Following this, archaeologists, conservators, architects and other specialists operating under the auspices of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw have been engaged in the documentation and reconstruction of the temple.<sup>103</sup> The temple was opened to visitors in 2002, with further parts opening to the public in 2015 and 2017. In addition, in 2023, Poland was elected to the Executive Committee of the International Campaign for the Establishment of the Nubia Museum in Aswan and the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Cairo.<sup>104</sup> Recently, the International Society of Nubian Studies (ISNS), presided over by Professor Artur Obłuski, has initiated the establishment of the Sudan Cultural Emergency and Recovery Fund (SCERF) in collaboration with the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM) of Sudan, with the stated objective of protecting and restoring Sudan's cultural heritage.

Since the 1970s, a significant number of seminal works have been produced by Polish scientists in Latin America, with a particular focus on Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru. The collaboration between Polish specialists and researchers from Latin America extends beyond the specific field work and expert evaluation of sites on the WH List. The exchange of experiences is also important, as reflected in the scholarship programme of the Polish National Commission for UNESCO, implemented jointly with the University of Warsaw. The programme, which was inaugurated in 2012, facilitates the awarding of scholarships to specialists from Latin America, enabling them to undertake professional internships in Poland for a period of several months. During their internships, the awardees had the opportunity to acquire knowledge and expertise regarding Polish experience in research and monument protection, as well as gaining access to cultural sites on the WH List.<sup>105</sup>

The first initiative of the UNESCO/Poland Co-Sponsored Fellowships in Archaeology and Conservation was a result of the joint collaboration between the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and the University of Warsaw (2017). Between that time and the COVID-19 pandemic, UNESCO/Poland Co-Sponsored Fellowships in Archaeology and Conservation were offered at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.<sup>106</sup> In 2023, following the pandemic, a revised UNESCO/Poland Co-Sponsored Fellowship in Archaeology

<sup>101</sup> I. Szmelter, 'Cultural Heritage: Tradition/History/Education', in: *Poland for World Heritage...*, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>102</sup> UNESCO Doc. WHC/25/25.GA/10 (28 November 2025), Resolution 25 GA 6.

<sup>103</sup> F. Pawlicki, 'Polish School of Archaeology and Conservation by the Nile', in: *Poland for World Heritage...*, op. cit., pp. 44–46.

<sup>104</sup> [unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/11/42GC\\_Subsiidiary\\_Organs\\_External\\_Auditor\\_Results.pdf](https://unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/11/42GC_Subsiidiary_Organs_External_Auditor_Results.pdf), [accessed: 18 April 2025].

<sup>105</sup> M. Ziółkowski, 'Polish Research and Conservation at Latin American Sites on UNESCO World Heritage List', in: *Poland for World Heritage...*, op. cit., pp. 53–79.

<sup>106</sup> M. Herbich, 'Fellowships in Conservation and Archaeology, Polish National Commission for UNESCO Review', *Bulletin 2017–2018*, pp. 94–95.

and Conservation was launched.<sup>107</sup> The new format offers fellows the opportunity to undertake a nine-month archaeological internship at the Faculty of Archaeology at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Fellowship beneficiaries receive international travel expenses and health insurance from UNESCO. The list of Member States invited to participate in each year of the Programme may vary from year to year, with a view to encouraging diverse, balanced participation with a focus on the SDGs. The number of countries invited may be subject to change depending on the programme's thematic focus and the availability of resources. On the Polish side, programme coordination is handled by the host university, the Polish National Commission for UNESCO, and the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA).<sup>108</sup> The programme is funded by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education through the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange.

Poland's proven experience in conservation, as well as the knowledge of its specialists, have been instrumental in efforts to safeguard cultural heritage in the Middle East.<sup>109</sup> Several archaeological sites in this region have already been inscribed on the WH List, including the Site of Palmyra in Syria and Erbil Citadel in Iraq, with further additions anticipated in the future. The overarching objective of these activities is to document, conserve and safeguard the heritage of humanity in the face of constant threats to heritage in the present era.<sup>110</sup> In a similar vein, a range of pivotal activities have been undertaken to safeguard the archaeological heritage of Cambodia. These activities encompass conservation efforts, the documentation of historical sites, the provision of training programmes and the establishment of scholarship programmes.<sup>111</sup>

#### Debate regarding world heritage, UNESCO networks and research in Poland

In Poland, there is a well-established group of scholars specializing in legal issues related to cultural heritage. In the context of UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN networks. At present, there are 13 UNESCO Chairs that promote international cooperation in higher education and research. Their areas of focus include human rights, sustainable development, and cultural heritage. The latter group includes the following UNESCO chairs: UNESCO Chair in Heritage and Urban Studies (Kraków University of Economics), UNESCO Chair on Cultural Property (University of Opole), and UNESCO Chair on Intangible Cultural Heritage in Public and Global Governance (University of Warsaw). In the context of WH protection, particular attention should be paid to the UNESCO Chair on Cultural Property Law, established in 2018,<sup>112</sup> whose research team explores synergies between the various UNESCO cultural conventions. The identification and use of such synergies to enhance the effectiveness of UNESCO programmes is also reflected in the work of the bodies governing these conventions. One of the key initiatives of the UNESCO Chair on Cultural Property Law is the publication of the *Santander Art and Culture Law Review*,<sup>113</sup> an international academic journal that brings together Polish and international scholars and is recognized in international journal rankings for its academic quality. The newly established UNITWIN Culture

<sup>107</sup> [unesco.org/en/fellowships/poland-archaeology-conservation](https://unesco.org/en/fellowships/poland-archaeology-conservation), [accessed: 15 June 2025].

<sup>108</sup> [nawa.gov.pl/en/the-polish-language](https://nawa.gov.pl/en/the-polish-language), [accessed: 15 June 2025].

<sup>109</sup> See P. Bieliński, 'Polish Archaeological Projects in Asian Part of the Middle East', in: *Poland for World Heritage...*, op. cit., pp. 81–109.

<sup>110</sup> See also M. Olbryś, 'Specyfika realizacji zadań ochrony dziedzictwa kultury w konfliktach zbrojnych w świetle doświadczeń misji Polskiego Kontyngentu Wojskowego w Iraku (2003–2008)', in: *Ochrona dziedzictwa kultury w konfliktach zbrojnych w świetle prawa międzynarodowego i krajowego. 60 lat Konwencji Haskiej i 15 lat jej Protokołu II*, E. Mikos-Skuza, K. Sałaciński (eds), Warsaw 2016, pp. 255–274.

<sup>111</sup> See S. Lim, 'Polish Contribution to Saving World Cultural Heritage in the Far East', in: *Poland for World Heritage...*, op. cit., pp. 111–127.

<sup>112</sup> With Professor Alicja Jagielska-Burduk, the co-author of this article, as its chair.

<sup>113</sup> [ejournals.eu/en/journal/saclr](https://ejournals.eu/en/journal/saclr), [accessed: 15 June 2025].

in Emergencies,<sup>114</sup> which addresses man-made and natural hazards to cultural heritage, should be highlighted. This initiative is a collaborative effort involving several international partners from Australia, Bahrain, Mexico and Poland, coordinated by the Adam Mickiewicz University and the University of Technology in Sydney. Among the many current research initiatives in the field of WH, a recent project called ‘Quantification in global governance of cultural heritage: Unpacking its meaning and methods’<sup>115</sup> is of great importance in terms of MONDIACULT 2025 and global cultural policies. The project addresses a significant gap in current heritage research by investigating the impact of quantification processes not only on the governance of cultural heritage, but also on its intrinsic social meanings and roles. It therefore seeks to examine how indicator-based legal regulations may influence collective interpretations of the past.

### Conclusions and outlook

The objective of this article has been to provide a critical analysis of Poland’s role as a State Party to the WHC in the functioning of UNESCO’s most visible cultural programme over the 50 years of its practice and development. It has been demonstrated that Polish experience in archaeological and conservation practice had a significant influence on the conceptualization of WH and the implementation of the Convention in its early years. Polish nominations for inclusion on the WH List have also contributed to the concept of WH becoming a catalyst for peace, reconciliation, cross-border cooperation and development. Polish researchers and specialists have been working for many years on numerous documentation, archaeological, conservation and reconstruction missions in various parts of the world, especially where heritage is under threat. In terms of future prospects and challenges of the WHC, it will be necessary to ensure better synergy between the Convention and other cultural heritage instruments at national and international levels. In relation to the former, Poland’s experience is also an emblematic example of core challenges and continuing attempts to integrate the WHC regime within national legal and policy mechanisms. In fact, the field of legal scholarship has repeatedly emphasized that Poland should better implement the UNESCO Recommendation on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage at the National Level,<sup>116</sup> particularly in regard to institutional and legislative aspects.<sup>117</sup> The primary concern is the alleged inconsistency between the provisions for protection under the WH List and the existing national legislative framework. Additionally, there is a lack of procedural forms of participation in the designation and management of heritage by local communities. It is therefore anticipated that the new legal framework will provide more effective protection for WH.<sup>118</sup> In this regard, the debate on the required amendments to the Act of 23 July 2003 on the protection and safeguarding of monuments has been underway for a considerable period of time.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, it is important to consider the option of adopting an entirely new regulatory framework, specifically a code of heritage protection law. In 2025, the Minister of Culture and National Heritage established a new working group with the objective of drafting an instrument that would address the protection and management of WH Sites, as one of its core priorities.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>114</sup> [cultureunitwin.amu.edu.pl](http://cultureunitwin.amu.edu.pl), [accessed: 15 June 2025].

<sup>115</sup> National Science Centre, Poland, project no. 2024/53/B/HS5/02197, led by Dr Andrzej Jakubowski, the co-author of this article.

<sup>116</sup> UNESCO Doc. 17 C/Resolutions + CORR (adopted 16 November 1972).

<sup>117</sup> See K. Zalańska, ‘Ochrona miejsc światowego dziedzictwa w prawie polskim – plan naprawczy’, *Ochrona Zabytków* 2012, no. 3–4, pp. 133–134.

<sup>118</sup> See P. Dobosz, ‘Conditions and opportunities for applying legal regulations in management of properties and sites located on Polish territory and inscribed on the World Heritage List’, in: *Management of UNESCO World Heritage Properties in Poland: Selected Issues*, B. Szmygin (ed.), Warsaw 2015, pp. 37–52.

<sup>119</sup> Official Journal 2024, item 1292, as amended.

<sup>120</sup> [gov.pl/web/kultura/powolalismy-czlonkow-zespołu-do-opracowania-projektu-nowelizacji-ustawy-o-ochronie-zabytkow](http://gov.pl/web/kultura/powolalismy-czlonkow-zespołu-do-opracowania-projektu-nowelizacji-ustawy-o-ochronie-zabytkow), [accessed: 18 April 2025].

At the international level, the integration of culture (including cultural heritage) within the new UN agenda for sustainable development as a discrete global goal represents a seminal emerging perspective on the safeguarding and appreciation of cultural heritage. This is of particular importance in view of the changing conditions of the human environment and the challenges posed by both natural and anthropogenic hazards, including armed conflicts and intentional destruction of heritage. The enhancement of instruments for counteracting such threats and responding to them is a considerable challenge, but also a future objective for the benefit of all humankind. As demonstrated in this article, the experience gained from the creation of the WHC, and Poland's contribution to this major international project, can serve as a guide and inspiration for future global endeavours. Indeed, it is imperative that the international community as a whole acknowledges the primary responsibility for protecting the natural and cultural environment as one of its fundamental objectives. Following its election to the World Heritage Committee, Poland will, together with the other members of the Committee, contribute during its term to addressing contemporary challenges related to the protection of World Heritage, including emergency situations, threats to heritage sites, and the impacts of climate change.

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