



World Heritage / Patrimoine Mondial

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Title of thesis: Concepts of heritage – A comparison of the UNESCO conventions concerning tangible (1972) and intangible (2003) heritage

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Please provide a 500 words abstract outlining your thesis; you may wish to attach a table of contents or any other relevant material:

Hypothesis

The concepts of heritage in the two UNESCO conventions are based on universalistic ethical standpoints and should express it through (associative) ethical standards.

Abstract

This master thesis, written in 2005, addresses the main concepts of UNESCO's heritage conventions. Understanding them depends highly on their contexts and the goals behind them. This became evident in the case of a notion like authenticity. It exemplifies a tendency to a certain cultural relativism, because initial empirical or mechanical criteria failed in a world-wide application. However, UNESCO as an intergovernmental organisation has the task of promoting its mission of peace, which implies the need to judge between its member states. Therefore, it needs standards to structure the world. These standards have to be based on its universalistic ethical standpoints, namely on human rights. Consequently, standards of heritage concepts need to be of an associative or ethical nature. The final goal needs to be to interpret national or local symbols in a global context. This goal was certainly not explicitly set from the beginning of the *World Heritage Convention* on, but one can crystallize it through changing heritage concepts in its application. As a consequence, the later *Intangible Heritage Convention* avoids mere empirical criteria and stresses an introduction of a universal ethic.

To illustrate concepts of heritage and to point out the differences, this thesis pursues three interrelated issues.

Firstly, it analyzes the main concepts, and it shows how they were developed and how they have been modified over the course of time. Concept means the dichotomy of an idea and a specific word definition. Certainly, both cannot be separated, therefore, concepts of heritage are analyzed both as a word (lexicographically) and as a thought or idea behind this word (in the conventions).

Secondly, the paper demonstrates that standards within these concepts are required in order to be able to judge; in other words, in order to list items as heritage a comparison is needed, and any comparison requires standards.

Thirdly, this paper states that these standards need to be of a universalistic ethical nature, and it proposes basic standards which justify the maintenance of something as vague as heritage.