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Conference Paper

Between conflicts and partnerships: Managing the UNESCO World heritage label in peripheral and metropolitan urban regions in Europe

54th Congress of the European Regional Science Association: "Regional development & globalisation: Best practices", 26-29 August 2014, St. Petersburg, Russia

Provided in Cooperation with:
European Regional Science Association (ERSA)

Suggested Citation: Neugebauer, Carola Silvia (2014) : Between conflicts and partnerships: Managing the UNESCO World heritage label in peripheral and metropolitan urban regions in Europe, 54th Congress of the European Regional Science Association: "Regional development & globalisation: Best practices", 26-29 August 2014, St. Petersburg, Russia, European Regional Science Association (ERSA), Louvain-la-Neuve

This Version is available at:
https://hdl.handle.net/10419/124384

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Between conflicts and partnerships: Managing the UNESCO World heritage label in peripheral and metropolitan urban regions in Europe

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The UNESCO world heritage label (WHL) as a contentious topic in local to global public gains in importance for the European urban and regional development. Because on the one hand, the nominations of European sites as UNESCO world heritage are increasing, and on the other hand the polarization of space is still continuing. The disparities between peripheral and metropolitan regions and their towns are growing. The need to steer sustainably the economic, demographic and cultural concentration processes in metropolises confronts the challenge in peripheral regions to stabilize and initiate developments in view of shrinking processes and manifold problems. In consequence of these trends the UNESCO world heritage label constitutes a relevant urban and regional topic that refers to conflicting connotations like "development barrier" and "source of conflict" *and* "chance for development".

However to date, the potential of the WHL for sustainable urban development is barely investigated. On the one hand it lacks of comprehensive evaluation studies that reveal the world heritage label's cross-sectoral impacts on urban development in between socio-cultural, institutional administrative and economic changes, studies that point out its negative effects and assess the label's impacts according to the normative paradigm of sustainability. On the other hand, it lacks of studies that explain systematically why the WHL influences how on urban development and which conditions vary its local impacts. In this regard, the spatial (peripheral and metropolitan) context of an urban world heritage site *and* its local actors' concepts and behaviours towards the UNESCO label constitute important, but insufficiently researched conditions. In consequence, there is a want of approaches outlining how the WHL could be enhanced successfully for sustainable urban development, given differentiated local framework conditions.

Taking up these lacks of knowledge a comparative research project (Neugebauer 2013) aimed at spatially differentiated and actor sensitive local management approaches in order to preserve the urban world heritage *and* to use the UNESCO label for socio-cultural and economic sustainable development. Thereunto, the local impacts of the WHL were evaluated in peripheral and metropolitan contexts and in reference to differentiated local behaviours towards the label. This paper outlines the main results of this research.

Empirical and theoretical basics

The empirical base of the research constitutes the investigation of the three case studies of St. Petersburg (Russia), Stralsund and Wismar (Germany). They were investigated due to their historic city centers that are widely recognised by the UNESCO as world heritage sites. Moreover, they were selected due to their local framework conditions representing different spatial (peripheral versus metropolitan) contexts as well as different local behaviours (passive versus active) towards the WHL. In consequence, the city of St. Petersburg with its dynamic development processes, worldwide networks and high profile stands up clearly from Stralsund and Wismar that are medium sized towns in peripheral regions with manifold problems of stagnation and decline. Stralsund and Wismar in turn differ from each other with regard to the obvious local activities of city administrations to enhance the WHL for urban development: The passive behaviour towards the UNESCO label in Wismar is more similar to St. Petersburg than to the very active city administration in Stralsund. The table 1 shows the qualitative and quantitative research methods applied.

Theoretically the research study is based on a newly developed evaluation approach that applies – among others – the socio-scientific understanding of causality, external plausibility and a theoretic impact model. The latter is showed in extracts by figure 1. The figure reveals that – based on the

three fundamental functions of each label to serve for communication and marketing, for networking and product development – the UNESCO WHL could impact on urban developments in a wide range positively and negatively concerning the local issues of "life quality", "economic development" and "heritage conservation and urban planning". The figure points out the diversity of local actors from city administration, private economy and inhabitants who are probably touched by the WHL's effects and/or involved in its acting. Apart from that, the theoretic impact model includes the anticipation of potential mechanisms and conditions of the WHL's local acting. Given these empirical and theoretical basics, the study states finally four key results that contour the potential of the UNESCO world heritage label for sustainable urban development.

The WHL's impacts for urban development

The research data proves first of all, that the WHL constitutes effectively a potential for urban development changing and influencing urban developments in the wide range of local issues. So the WHL can change indeed local quality of life, economic development as well as the local practices of heritage conservation, urban planning and development.

The WHL fosters for example life quality in all three urban case studies by strengthening the space-related identity and feelings of attachment of up to one third of the local inhabitants (see table 2). The label causes identity and feelings of place attachment particularly among those city dwellers that incorporate in general widely the physical and historic characteristics of the living space in their space-related identities. Consequently, the UNESCO label supports also collaterally the stabilization of the world heritage cities as attractive locations for residence.

Apart from that, the WHL affects on different economic branches. So the label is verifiably effective for those enterprises whose products or services are related to the specific location (city) and its historic heritage. That applies above all to the local tourism and – with severe restrictions – to the local real estate industry. So the label can strengthen at maximum collaterally the local real estate industry in creating a first positive interest for the world heritage city among those few (private) investors that have only very little knowledge of the attractive macro investment spaces and thus are prone to any sort of advertisement as orientation. The label, however, does not influence on their final investment decisions, in contrast to the sphere of tourism. So in tourism the WHL steers on the one hand the travel decisions of the very small group of "hard world heritage tourists" (3-5%) that visit explicitly UNESCO sites. On the other hand, the WHL can influence collateral-positively the travel decisions of the "soft world heritage tourists", if the label promotes the attractiveness of the city in combination with other key emotive and cognitive features. Furthermore, the WHL can strengthen the economic situation of the local construction business specialized in the old-building and monument renovation due to the Federal Investment Programme for German World Heritage Sites (2009-2013). However, apart from this unique programme the WHL has no operational importance for the specialized construction business because of the distinct regionality of building craft and the price-oriented contract placing mechanisms. Finally, the study reveals no impacts of the WHL on the development, marketing and sale of products and services of local enterprises with high portions of highly trained employees in the sphere of engineering services, higher education and health services. Moreover, the label is at maximum of collateral importance for the human resource management of the questioned local enterprises – human resource management that attend among others to the bond and recruitment of employees.

The data collected proves moreover that the WHL affects on the local practices of heritage conservation and urban planning. So firstly, the label accounts for more local – and under certain circumstances more inter-/national - attention and support for the local heritage conservation in terms of local to international participations and advises in local decision-making and/or in terms of financial allocations (e.g. aid money from public authorities, patrons and foundations). Secondly, the WHL triggers local learning and thus new sectoral expertise especially in the sphere of heritage conservation and communication, and finally the label can support new approaches of participative and integrative urban planning and development.

However finally, these cross-sectoral effects of the label on urban development cannot be assessed uncritically and consequently positive. *So the research reveals as a second key result that the WHL does not support per se sustainable urban developments in the investigated case studies, because either the label's effects or the local activities for enhancing the WHL do not correspond to the planning relevant measure of sustainability.* The research study operationalises sustainable development by the principle of integration, participation and distributive justice (equity). Thus, there are some examples for the negative, not sustainable acting of the WHL on urban development. So the WHL can cause additional parallel structures within the city administration as well as surcharges of local actors (contradicting the principle of distributive justice), non-transparent decision making processes as well as newly produced or reinforced barriers between the departments of the city administration (contradicting the principle of participation), the deterrence of few local economic stakeholders as well as the massive threat of urban heritage despite of the UNESCO label (contradicting the principle of integration). Summing up, these negative effects rank however behind the overall positively assessed impacts of the UNESCO WHL for sustainable urban development.

The conditions varying the WHL's local impacts/effects

Apart from that, the undertaken research reveals as third key result that the WHL constitutes a spatially differentiated and actor-dependent potential for (sustainable) urban development, affecting on local developments collaterally instead of vitally. According to this, the spatial context of a world heritage city influences the local capacities and opportunities to enhance the WHL as well as the local impacts of the UNESCO status. And finally, the gathered data shows that the potential of the WHL for urban development is relatively bigger for peripheral heritage cities than for metropolitan ones. That is *–first of all* - because the WHL motivates in peripheral context more local actors to develop and implement concepts and activities for urban development. These are intentions and activities to protect *and* use the world heritage label for local developments, because the people reflect and refer very clearly to the spatial contexts of their cities, the deep challenges and limited opportunities for development. Thus, stakeholders form the towns of Wismar and Stralsund state for example the following:

> „What do we have apart from our nice blue sky and a bit of landscape? That is the historic city center. Without the old town many people wouldn't come. And thus, also the world heritage label is an economic factor. As such I have always seen it" (monument conservator, Wismar).

In contrast to that, stakeholders in St. Petersburg reflect the spatial context and thus the importance of the WHL quite differently:

> "The city is changing. So the label doesn't help us, but rather endangers development. […] It is a political Carte blanche, but cultural-historic metropolises like Dresden and St. Petersburg do attract tourists and investors by their own, also without the UNESCO world heritage label" (monument conservator, St. Petersburg).

And secondly, the relatively bigger potential of the WHL for peripheral towns results from the relatively stronger visibility of the label from a local and external perspective. So the WHL competes in a peripheral context against less positive attributes, characteristics and brandings of the town than in metropolitan world heritage cities. Subsequently, the approaching of local and external target groups by the WHL is relatively easier and likely in peripheral contexts and thereby the effectiveness of the label higher. Given these tow facts, the local impacts of the WHL on the preservation of the built (world) heritage as well as on the socio-cultural and economic urban development tend to be stronger pronounced in peripheral world heritage cities than in metropolitan ones. However, the local capacities to enhance the WHL are more restricted in peripheral cities than in the metropolitan one due to limited financial and human resources in local economy, civil society and public administration.

Intertwined with the spatial context of a world heritage city, the local effects of the UNESCO label depends also verifiably on the behaviour of the local stakeholders: *So the more actively and comprehensively local actors with authority and capacity do enhance (protect and use) the world heritage label, the more pronounced and divers are the label's impacts on the urban development within general, intrinsic limits.*

The table 2 gives an example for this fourth key result. So the data shows differences between the three case studies regarding the respondents' knowledge and degree of information on the WHL as well as regarding the label-related feelings of place attachment and concernment by specific cultural, educational and leisure offers: In Stralsund and Wismar the local effectiveness of the WHL is more obvious than in St. Petersburg. These differences of the label's local effectiveness are finally attributed to different local activities that are carried out in order to enhance the WHL for new qualities of life. So since the period of application for the UNESCO label, various actors in Stralsund are working together continuously to enhance the WHL by means of manifold, emotive and cognitive activities. The activities range from the regular edition of print media ("UNESCO Letter", the magazine "Welt Kultur Erbe"), press reports, temporary and permanent world heritage exhibitions to school projects and an annual world heritage day. The local world heritage manager initiates and coordinates these activities since 2003 together with the honorary local "world heritage advisory board" and in cooperation with local stakeholders from the cultural, educational and economic sphere. Wismar as the world heritage twin city of Stralsund has benefited from Stralsund's activities, especially from its communication and print media that were distributed also in Wismar. This has resulted in similar high levels of local knowledge and label-related feelings of identity among the dwellers of Wismar (see table 2). The fact, however, that Wismar hasn't strived towards the socio-cultural use of the WHL in terms of specific educational and cultural offers for a long time, is also reflected by the data revealing the low level of the local people's "concernment" by WHL in their spare time. In contrast to that the actors in St. Petersburg show to date no activities to enhance the WHL continuously socio-culturally resulting in low levels of information and label-related concernment and identity.

Differences of effectiveness like these prove finally that the potential of the WHL to change urban development has to be always opened up by the local actors' actions. Depending on whether vigorous actors – like the mayors and decision makers – *consider* and *enhance* the WHL strategically with sustainable urban development in mind, the local actors' activities trigger positive or negative local impacts. The range of possible negative impacts of the WHL was mentioned already before for the three case studies: They resulted from the local actors' unthoughtfulness and indifference towards the potential acting of the WHL on urban development and thus from deficiencies in local label-related management approaches.

Finally, the research points out that the world heritage label's local impacts are intrinsically limited. So I suggested before that the label reaches always only little target groups, for example among the city dwellers and tourists, and that it affects on decision making and changes only collaterally instead of vitally. Thus, a steady increase in local enhancement activities meets once the intrinsic limits of the UNESCO label's potential for change and the diminishing marginal utility, and label's intrinsic limits seems to be narrow. Moreover, the WHL's local effects are not only dependant on local framework conditions like the spatial contexts and the local actors' behaviour towards the label, but also – and in some case very clearly – on non-local, inter-/national events and activities.

Conclusion: spatially differentiated management approaches

Given these four key results, the study argues for *differentiated approaches that world heritage cities should follow in dealing with the UNESCO label – approaches that reflect the spatial context of the city as well as the behaviour of the local actors as relevant conditions varying the WHL's local impacts and that seek opening up strategically the label's potential to strengthen sustainable urban development.*

So it was outlined before that the conditions to enhance (protect and use) the world heritage label differ significantly between towns in peripheral and metropolitan spatial contexts: The challenge to stabilize and initiate sustainable urban development in view of limited local resources and a relatively stronger potential acting of the world heritage label in peripheral regions confronts the need in metropolitan regions to steer sustainably dynamic urban developments, also in terms of balanced urban change and heritage conservation and in view of less potential benefits from the WHL. Thus, two different concepts seem to meet best these different constellations. That is to say: *Whilst metropolitan world heritage cities should seek the "sustainable preservation of the (world) heritage (label)" first of all, world heritage cities in peripheral regions should address not only the "sustainable preservation", but also the "sustainable use of the (world) heritage (label)".*

Finally, the study outlines these two concepts in detail suggesting two differentiated management approaches for world heritage cities. So thematic, structural and procedural suggestions are formulated for the local actors especially in city administrations and that address not only the audiences in the three case study regions, but in European world heritage cities under similar framework conditions. Thus, the suggested management approaches seek encouraging local thinking, how to manage the specific challenges and how to use the specific chances of the WHL for sustainable development in using the existing and well-tried instruments and structures of conservative urban development.

literature

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Figure and tables

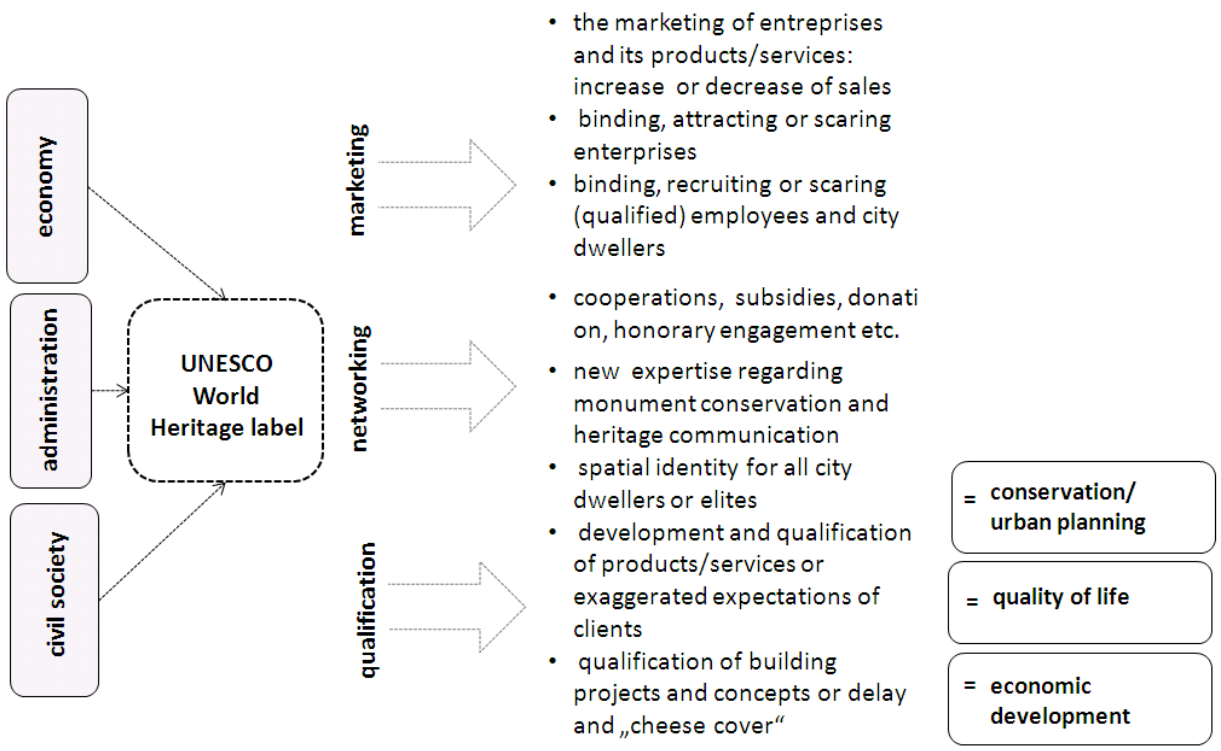

figure 1: The potential impacts of the UNESCO world heritage label on urban development (source: author)

Applied methods	Stralsund	Wismar	St. Petersburg
standardized survey (among local inhabitants)	N=197	N=191	N=300
local expert interviews (with firms, civil associations, city administration, politicians; regional to national actors, e.g. donators)	41	43	40
external expert interviews (with scientist and analysts in economic associations)	39		
content analysis of local newspapers about the topic of UNESCO world heritage	analysed period 2002 - 2010		1990 -2009
document analysis, statistic analysis	i.e. planning documents and concepts, label-related communications and media, official statistics		

table 1: The applied methods of research (source: author)

Asked topics	Stralsund	Wismar	St. Petersburg
„I don't get any information about the wolrd heritage."	2,8%	4,4%	27,3%
the local people's knowledge about the boundaries of the world heritage site: percentage of wrong answers	18,6%	11,0%	39,0%
feeling attached to the city by the WHL: „not at all" („feeling very attached")	20,1% (36,7%, third last rank)	31,1% (29%, third last rank)	39,9% (27%, last rank)
being concerned by the WHL … • in my feeling towards the city: "not at all" ("very")	26,8% (26,8%)	26,8% (34,1%)	60,5% (20,0%)
• in my spare time: "not at all" ("very")	42,2% (15,6%)	79% (8,5%)	81,7% (3,0%)

Table 2: Selected results of the standardized survey among the inhabitants of Stralsund, Wismar and St. Petersburg (source: author)