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# Shifting the balance of power in the UNESCO World Heritage Committee: an empirical assessment

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*DRAFT NOT FOR CITATION*

## Abstract

The paper analyses whether emerging nations are extending their influence across the UNESCO World Heritage Committee and, if so, how this affects the decision-making processes concerning inscription of sites on the World Heritage List. We use both a quantitative and qualitative approach to identify patterns in decision-making processes regarding inscriptions at the World Heritage Committee sessions. Our results suggest that in the last decade a group of emerging powers including China, South Africa, Russia and India has dominated the UNESCO World Heritage decision-making process. At the same time, our results suggest an increasing “politicization” of decisions emerging from a polarization of positions concerning the role and legitimacy of Advisory Bodies’ technical recommendations. Our finding contributes to discussions on the role and contribution of the BRICS countries in challenging existing multilateral governance structures by presenting the example of the World Heritage, UNESCO’s self-proclaimed flagship program.

**Keywords** UNESCO, World Heritage, International Relations, Political Influence, Emerging Countries

**JEL Codes** F53 F55

## 1. Introduction

Adopted in 1972 by the UNESCO General Conference, the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (the Convention) represents an international effort that seeks to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. This international agreement is rooted in the recognition that protection of cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value often remains incomplete at the national level, as countries lack the economic, scientific, and technological resources for preservation. The implementing mechanism envisioned by the Convention for identifying heritage sites of ‘outstanding universal value’ for humanity is based on the inscription of sites in the so-called World Heritage List. Inscriptions of cultural and natural sites on the World Heritage List are the result of a selection process that occurs during the annual World Heritage Committee meetings. Here technical evaluations are presented by experts from the Convention’s Advisory Bodies (ICOMOS and IUCN), however the final decisions are taken by 21 representatives from the States Parties to the Convention that are elected to the World Heritage Committee. Since entering into force in 1975, the World Heritage Convention has enabled a growing system of international cooperation for the protection

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and promotion of heritage sites on the List. Today, the Convention is considered the foremost international legal instrument for the protection of global heritage of outstanding universal value (Titchen 1996; Jokilehto and Cameron 2008; Labadi 2013). As of 2014 some 191 countries have ratified the Convention and a total of 1007 properties have been inscribed on the World Heritage List.

In the last two decades, the World Heritage Convention has been increasingly subject to criticism by the World Heritage Committee members and other States Parties (Askew 2010; Brumann 2012; Meskell 2012; 2013). The List has been long recognized to be unbalanced in the type of inscribed properties and in the geographical areas of the world that are represented (Labadi 2007; Frey and Steiner 2011; Labadi 2013). The great majority of inscriptions are cultural sites and most of World Heritage is located in developed regions, in particular in Europe and North America (UNESCO 2007). In this respect, some commentators have stressed how criteria for site inclusion could have been culturally biased, notably toward western conceptions of heritage (Musitelli 2002). Furthermore, European and North American State Parties have been elected for a far greater number of terms in the World Heritage Committee than countries from other world regions (Strasser 2002).

While Western and developed countries have long dominated the World Heritage arena, it has been noted that in the last years there has been an increasing “politicization” of the selection process by State Parties, in terms of both the disagreement between experts evaluations and the decisions of the World Heritage Committee, and the polarization of positions between Committee members in the sites’ selection process (Jokilehto 2011; Meskell et al. 2014). As a result, listing of properties increasingly reflects national rather than global interests (Ashworth and van der Aa 2006). One possible reason for this is that, similar to other UN platforms and international organizations, decision-making within the UNESCO World Heritage Committee is witnessing a shift towards greater multipolarity (Wade 2011; Hale et al. 2013). As many developing and transitional countries have grown faster than developed countries in the last decade, such new and emerging players take advantage of global heritage issues in the international arena to pursue their strategic national interests.

An extensive literature has addressed, both quantitatively and qualitatively, how political influence and positioning of states affects the decision-making process within international organizations. One set of studies has analyzed voting behavior and decision-making in international organizations to assess competition between blocs and the role of dominant countries, with particular reference to United States (Voeten, 2000; Hug and Lukács 2014). Other studies have highlighted how nations linked to the United States or G7 countries through trade or aid are likely to align in their voting patterns with the dominant states preference at UNGA or UN Security Council (Kuziemko and Werker 2006; Dreher et al. 2008; Dreher and Sturm 2012). On the qualitative side, recent scholarship has also demonstrated informal influence by some countries with a particular focus on donors in international financial institutions (McKeown 2009; Stone 2011).

One common feature of such literature is the focus on decision-making within Intergovernmental Organizations that has experienced to a greater extent the hegemony of one dominant nation where their interests can be clearly assessed through voting behavior or indirect economic implications. By contrast, UNESCO’ 1972 World Heritage Convention and the characteristics of its decision-making process make political influence more difficult to define than in the papers cited above. First, while Western nations seem

to historically have had greater influence and benefit from World Heritage decision-making for decades, the hegemony of a single country like the United States is less evident, and thus the dimensions of conflict and interests alignment are more complex. Second, decisions in World Heritage Committee are mainly taken by consensus and multilateral negotiations among its members rather than through systematic voting procedures, that would allow scholars to more easily assess patterns of interest alignment and national influence.

As a result, we need to develop different metrics to assess the modes through which countries exert their influence. More precisely, we use a quantitative and qualitative approach to analyse patterns in decision-making processes regarding inscriptions at the World Heritage Committee sessions. On the quantitative side, we collected information from the Summary Records and other World Heritage Committee official documents for the period 2003–2013. For each nomination, we tracked the Advisory Bodies' recommendation, the content and the number of State Parties interventions during the discussions on site's nominations and the final decision by the World Heritage Committee. We also analyzed the number of national delegates present at each World Heritage Committee session. Unlike other quantitative studies which investigate patterns in the selection of properties for the whole period of activity of the World Heritage Convention (Bertacchini and Saccone 2012; Steiner and Frey 2012; Frey, Pamini et al. 2013; Reyes 2014), the data presented in this paper focuses on a shorter time frame of analysis (2003–2013). However, it also provides more detailed information on the procedural and substantive aspects of the decision-making process.

Through our quantitative analysis we also offer more multifaceted evidence of states' activity and power position within the World Heritage Committee. For each country, we consider the number of sites nominated, committee tenure, size of delegations and several measures of verbal interventions. We then employ cluster analysis linking the different dimensions of country characteristics to identify homogenous groups of State Parties in terms of power position and influence within the World Heritage committee. We complement the interpretation of our results through a qualitative approach, based on observations of four sessions of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (2011–2014), as well as interviews with senior UNESCO officials and representatives of national delegations. Along with other anthropologists researching UN organizations (Bendix 2013; Müller 2013) and political negotiations, especially within UNESCO (Brumann 2012; Schmitt 2012; Bjerregaard and Nielsen 2014), we are interested in how organizations such as UNESCO have global impacts, albeit in often unexpected and unpredictable ways that are not always revealed in official agendas.

Our results suggest that in the last decade a restricted group of emerging powers including China, South Africa, Russia and India has dominated the UNESCO World Heritage decision-making process using both formal and informal influence to enhance the international recognition of their heritage. At the same time, we find a clear evidence of a polarization of positions between different groups of committee members arising from the challenge mounted against the technical experts' recommendations for site selection.

The paper contributes to the cultural policy literature in two ways. It addresses soft power issues in cultural international relations by revealing how states' behavior and vision influences cultural policy outcomes at the international level. Moreover, it provides empirical data to better understand the debate concerning the governance of and tensions within the World Heritage system. Both contributions have potential policy implications for the future.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the decision making process within the World Heritage Committee, Section 3 elaborates several dimensions of state behavior and influence specific to World Heritage system, Section 4 presents the quantitative empirical strategy, Section 5 discusses the results while Section 6 concludes by discussing emerging trends and policy implications.

## **2. The World Heritage decision making process**

The World Heritage List consists of cultural and natural properties of “outstanding universal value” (OUV), which is defined in the Operational Guidelines of the Convention according to ten criteria detailing the specific requirements properties must meet for inclusion in the List. The composition of the World Heritage List is the outcome of two different phases—nomination and selection—and of the interacting input of three different actors—States Parties, Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Committee (Strasser 2002). The nomination process relies on the initiative of the State Parties, which submit nomination proposals for their heritage sites to be included in the List. Experts from two advisory bodies, respectively, the International Council on Museums and Sites (ICOMOS) for cultural properties and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for natural properties, evaluate the nomination dossiers by examining sources proving the OUV of the heritage sites. Field missions are also mobilized to inspect site authenticity, integrity and the level of protection. Once the evaluation is concluded, this is sent to the World Heritage Committee, which is the final decision-making body that is comprised of 21 national representatives that serve a 4 year term.

The selection of proposed heritage sites occurs at the annual sessions of the World Heritage Committee. According to the Operational Guidelines, the nominations are presented by the Advisory Bodies, which make their recommendations according to 4 types of evaluation: Inscription, Referral, Deferral and Not inscription. The same evaluation system is then followed by the World Heritage Committee to take the final decision after discussion of the nominations. Decisions concerning Not Inscription imply that the proposed heritage site may not be presented again by the State Party. While Referral and Deferral evaluations allow State Parties to resubmit at following sessions of the Committee the heritage site, as long as they provide additional information or substantially revise the nomination dossier. States Parties could submit up to two complete nominations, provided that at least one concerns a natural heritage site. The Committee can review up to 45 nominations each year, inclusive of nominations Deferred and Referred by previous sessions, extensions, transnational nominations and nominations submitted on an emergency basis.

Although the World Heritage Convention clearly states that decisions must be taken by the majority of two-thirds of its members present and voting (Art. 13.8), like in many other Intergovernmental Organizations deliberations are characterised by consensus and multilateral negotiations following formal discussion and informal meetings (Reinalda and Veerbek 2004). Decisions are necessarily prepared and pre-structured, for instance by means of drafts produced by the World Heritage Center, which act as the Secretariat of the World Heritage Convention. During the formal discussion members of the Committee may intervene more than once for each individual nomination and may even change their position in the course of the discussion. At the same, some nominations receive no formal discussion at all and the final decision may swiftly follow the initial Advisory Body recommendation. In some more contested cases decisions are made at the plenary session following negotiations in smaller informal meeting.

### 3. Uncovering influence of State Parties in the World Heritage Committee

In this section we identify different dimensions of State Party behavior within the specific context of the World Heritage Committee ~~and we develop a set of hypotheses about how such patterns of behavior may be~~which are connected to the political influence and power position a country exerts in the World Heritage decision-making process.

#### 3.1 Nomination activity by countries

In order to assess the political influence in the decision-making process within the World Heritage system, we analyze the patterns of nomination proposals and successful inscription by the State Parties. The key outcome of World Heritage decisions is the inscription of heritage sites on the World Heritage List. Thus, we suggest a positive correlation between the number of properties a country has on the List and its status and prominence within the World Heritage system. Thus, having a larger number of heritage sites inscribed may provide a greater political recognition by other State Parties on decisions affecting World Heritage. At the international level, countries may benefit from World Heritage by signaling the quality of their cultural and natural properties, attracting further resources from international cooperation in heritage protection or marketing their World Heritage sites as tourism destinations (Johnson and Barry 1995; Frey and Steiner 2011; Reyes 2014).

Since inscription depends on the ability and willingness of a country to nominate heritage properties in the List, this activity is particularly relevant to assessing the interest a country has in participating in the World Heritage arena. Today this is crucial considering that the selection process is increasingly affected by rent seeking and political interests (Frey et al. 2013). Although the goal of the World Heritage Convention is to protect sites of central importance for humanity, it is increasingly acknowledged that inclusion of heritage sites is often taken without following the criteria established in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (Meskell et al. 2014). In such a politicized context, and with the allegedly increased disconnection of World Heritage Committee decisions from technical expertise, the main implication is that nomination activity by a State Party is more likely to act as a proxy for its strategic political influence and power. Thus we suggest that State Parties are interested in increasing the number of nominated properties in order to achieve a greater political influence in the World Heritage system.

#### 3.2 Composition of the World Heritage Committee

According to the text of the World Heritage Convention, the composition of the Committee shall ensure an equitable representation of the different regions and cultures of the world (REF?Art. 8.2). This provision would help balancing the political power individual countries may have in decisions related to the World Heritage. However, albeit a secret ballot procedure, political and international relations factors seem to have prevailed, affecting the composition of the World Heritage Committee. For instance, Western nations have always had a relatively dominant position in terms of seats and length of Committee mandate. Some Western countries such as France and Germany, have in

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the past held consecutive mandates. Arguably, countries that are willing to see their heritage represented on the List or want to actively participate in the decisions concerning World Heritage may achieve this goal more effectively by promoting their candidature to the Committee as a way exert both formal and informal influence. From this perspective, Bertacchini and Saccone (2012) found a ~~clear~~ positive and statistically significant correlation between membership on the Committee, nomination activity by those same states and the likelihood of having a site inscribed. This is because membership provides political power to push Committee members' sites through the nomination process, but also because countries that are part of the Committee usually anticipate membership on the governing board and prepare their applications years before (Frey et al 2013).<sup>1</sup>

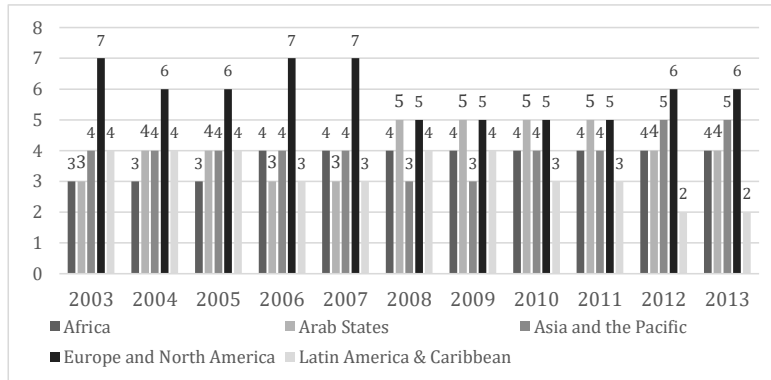
As a result, serving on the World Heritage Committee may be considered as a measure of the influence a country is able to exert in the decision-making process. Thus, we suggest that the greater the number of years a country serves the Committee the greater the influence it may exert in the decision-making process.

However, considering only the composition of the World Heritage Committee by number of seats does not fully account for the real influence nations or regional groups may play in this governing body. The size of delegations may add useful information about the extent of the commitment and amount of resources members of the Committee are willing to invest to actively participate into and influence World Heritage decision-making. Significantly, comparing the composition of the World Heritage Committee in terms of seats and the number of delegates for the period 2003-2013 suggests a different balance of power within this governing body. As shown in Figure 1a and 1b, it emerges quite clearly how countries from Asia and the Pacific have greatly outpaced Western nations in the number of delegates present, although European and North American countries have maintained a relative majority of seats over many years.

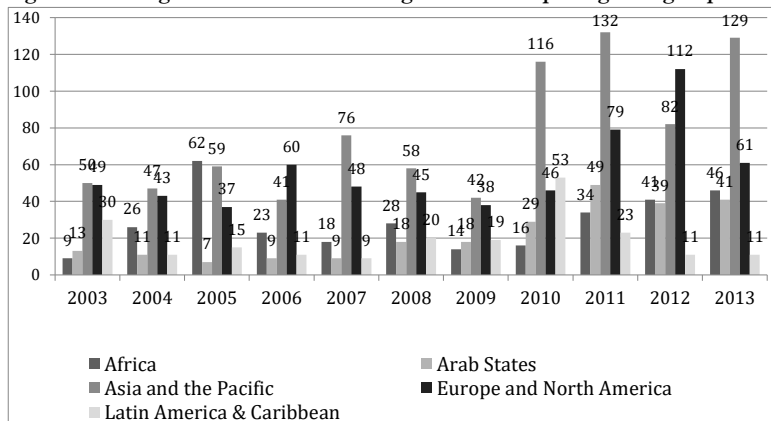
**Figure 1a – State Parties in the World Heritage Committee per regional group 2000-2013**

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<sup>1</sup> Recently there have been concerted efforts to prohibit nomination of sites by States Parties currently serving on the Committee, but the Committee itself has vetoed this recommendation. The matter is raised each year with nations like Finland, Switzerland and Estonia advocating abstention during membership, whereas Turkey, Russia, India, China and Japan, to name a few, take the opposite position.



**Figure 1b - Delegates in the World Heritage Committee per regional group 2000-2013**



Indeed, the size of a delegation might be considered a proxy for informal influence by a State Party. For example, having a larger delegation plays a substantial role in “corridor diplomacy” or in managing negotiations of multiple items agenda for the achievement of desired outcome by State Parties (McKeown 2009). We suggest that the larger the nation’s delegation size, the greater its informal influence in the World Heritage decision-making process.

### 3.3 Verbal interventions during the World Heritage Committee

Commentato [CL1]: ???

Given that decisions in the World Heritage Committee are mostly taken by member consensus, the frequency and type of verbal interventions State Parties make during the formal discussions is relevant to infer their political influence in reaching specific outcomes .

Being vocal in formal discussions might serve different purposes. First, considering the short time the Committee spends on each nomination, verbal interventions may be helpful for a State party to introduce additional information into the discussion or to directly

influence the final decision by explicitly expressing its position. For example, during the formal sessions, Committee members may intervene in the debate to express their evaluation of a nomination. In many instances they ask the Advisory Bodies to provide additional information concerning technical aspects of the nomination under examination. More generally, participating in formal discussion may also be considered as a means to gain legitimization among peers in the Committee or to reinforce diplomatic ties among nations. The frequency of verbal interventions may be considered as a proxy of how Committee members actively participate in the decision-making process and we suggest that there is positive correlation between the frequency of interventions during formal discussions and the political influence a country exerts into the final decisions of the Committee.

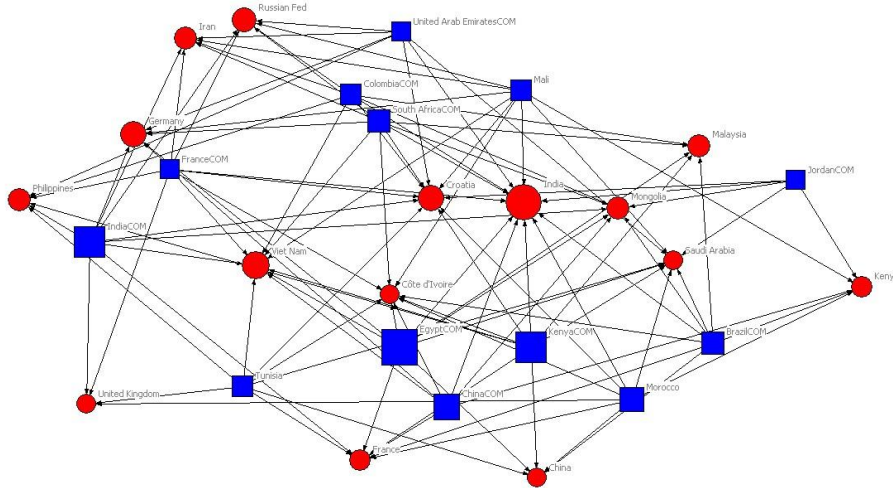
Considering this type of intervention, another relevant dimension to address is how State Parties on the Committee support or oppose recommendations by Advisory Bodies. While in the past the World Heritage Committee used to follow Advisory Bodies' recommendations (Pressouyre 1996), Committee decisions have increasingly diverged in recent years from the scientific opinions of the Advisory Bodies, contributing to a drift towards a more 'political' rather than 'heritage' approach to the Convention (Jokilehto 2011; Meskell et al. 2014). The main contention concerns nominations that the Advisory Bodies recommend for Not Inscription, Deferral and Referral. Such evaluations make a State Party's effort to inscribe a property more difficult and require additional time and resources to have the property inscribed in the List. Many States Parties describe any decision that is not an inscription as a "poisoned gift" – a term that delegates have used repeatedly with some disdain throughout recent Committee meetings (Meskell 2012; Hølleland 2013).

To illustrate, Figure 2a and 2b provide a graphic visualization of how verbal interventions expressed by Committee members during the formal discussion have been framed for this category of nominations in the whole period 2003-2013. Considering verbal interventions as ties between Committee members and a nominating countries, Figure 2a shows which members of the World Heritage Committee (blue nodes) have supported the upgrading in the evaluation of other nations' nominations (red nodes) that were initially recommended for Not Inscription, Deferral and Referral.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Figure 2b displays the network of Committee members' verbal interventions opposing the upgrade of the Advisory Body recommendation.<sup>3</sup> The size of the nodes is proportional to the number of ties a Committee member has developed or a nominating country has received.

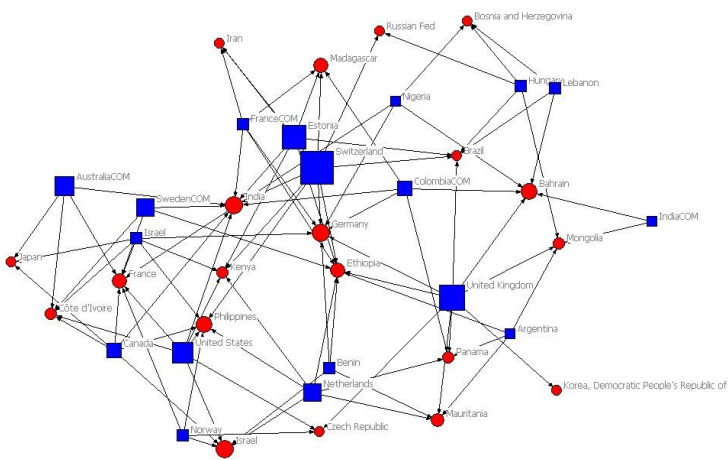
**Figure 2a – Countries' verbal interventions supporting upgrade for properties recommended as Not Inscribed, Deferred and Referred – 2003-13** (*nodes with 10 or more ties displayed*)

<sup>2</sup> As state parties in the World Heritage Committee may propose nominations, the same country may appear in the figures both as a blue node (Committee member) or a red node (nominating country). However, according to Operational Guidelines, a Committee member is not entitled to intervene in the formal discussion when one of its nominations is under examination.

<sup>3</sup> A verbal intervention supporting the upgrade of the Advisory Body initial recommendations means that the Committee members pushes the final decision toward a better final evaluation, so from Referral to Inscription, from Deferral to Referral or even Inscription and so on. Conversely, for verbal interventions opposing the upgrade we consider cases in which a committee member has both expressed the same Advisory Body recommendation or it has provided a lower evaluation during the formal discussion.



**Figure 4 – Countries’ verbal interventions opposing upgrade for properties recommended as Not Inscribed, Deferred and Referred – 2003-13** (*nodes with 5 or more ties displayed*)



The two figures depict a quite clear conflict in the use of verbal interventions that directly address the role and legitimacy of the Advisory Bodies’ technical expertise. On the one hand, the most vocal countries challenging Advisory Bodies recommendations have been emerging non-Western states. On the other hand, Western countries have been more vocal in maintaining and supporting the technical decisions made by the Advisory Bodies. Such arguments suggest that questioning the technical evaluations may represent a mean for emerging nations to raise their political influence in the selection of sites.

#### 4. Empirical Strategy

In order to identify common patterns of behavior and characteristics of countries that have served the Committee we use a cluster analysis approach. Considering the multifaceted dimension of political influence within the World Heritage decision-making process, such a methodology is useful in drawing distinct groups of countries that can be categorized according to one or more common patterns within the World Heritage Committee. An interpretation of the results allows a better understanding of individual State Parties' strategies.

Cluster analysis refers to a general set of statistical techniques used to form homogenous groups of objects that are described by a variety of characteristics (Everitt et al. 2001). The optimal number of clusters is assessed through agglomerative methods that signal the most marked differences among potential clusters. As an agglomerative method Ward's minimum-variance method is used (see Appendix A). According to the literature, this method appears to be superior to alternative algorithms and to provide more homogeneous clusters (Everitt et al. 2001).

The data we collected and organized information come from the Summary Records and other World Heritage Committee official documents for the period 2003-2013. Summary Records contain the text of verbal interventions that occurred in formal discussion at Committee sessions. For each nomination of cultural and natural properties,<sup>4</sup> we tracked the Advisory Bodies' recommendation, the final decision taken by the World Heritage Committee, the number of delegates, and each verbal intervention by State Parties during the sessions. This provided to a unique dataset of 340 nominations for the period under examination.

The country variables we choose are the following:

- Number of years a country served the World Heritage Committee
- Number of sites proposed by the country for inscription at Committee sessions
- Country average in terms of number of delegates per Committee session
- Country average in terms of number of interventions during formal Committee sessions
- % of a country's interventions supporting the upgrade in the final evaluation for nominations initially recommended by Advisory Bodies for Not Inscription, Deferral or Referral over total country's interventions
- % of a country's interventions opposing the upgrade nominations in the final evaluation initially recommended by Advisory Bodies for Not Inscription, Deferral or Referral over total country's interventions

Our analysis is applied to only those countries that have held a Committee seat for at least three years in the period between 2003 and 2013. This decision was taken to rule out

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<sup>4</sup> We excluded from the analysis nominations of mixed properties due to occurring divergences between Advisory Bodies recommendations or in the final decision of the Committee as for either the natural or cultural component of the nomination. Nominations of mixed properties account for about 4% of all the nominations submitted to the World Heritage Committee in the period 2003-2013.

potential noise in the results from nations that were ending their mandate in the Committee at the beginning of the period or started at the very end of it. In this way we restrict our sample to State Parties that have served sufficiently on the Committee to be effectively involved in the World Heritage decision-making process.

## 5. Results

Using Ward's minimum-variance method, we identify four clusters of State Parties serving on the Committee for the period 2003-2013 according to the selected variables. Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics highlighting the main differences of means across clusters, which can be used to provide additional insights into an interpretative framework of the main dynamics occurring in the World Heritage decision-making.

**Table 1 Clusters of State parties in the World Heritage Committee (2003-2013)**

		Cluster Variables						Countries per group
		Years in the Committee	N. of Nominations	Avg. N. of delegates	Interventions per year	% Supporting Upgrade	% Opposing Upgrade	
Cluster 1 (n=27)	Mean	3,93	2,85	7,15	10,18	18,96	7,20	Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Benin, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Cuba, Ethiopia, France, Israel, Lithuania, Kuwait, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Peru, Portugal, Saint Lucia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, US,
	St.Dev	0,47	2,85	4,10	4,25	5,41	6,68	
Cluster 2 (n=11)	Mean	4	1,82	6,31	15,51	34,89	6,27	Brazil, Colombia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Mali, Morocco, Netherlands, Tunisia, UAE
	St.Dev	0,44	1,6	4,00	5,24	5,06	7,41	
Cluster 3 (n=8)	Mean	6,63	7,13	18,48	12,35	24,25	3,22	China, Egypt, India, Japan, Nigeria, Russia, South Africa, Thailand
	St.Dev	0,74	6,12	10,87	5,67	9,14	1,27	
Cluster 4 (n=3)	Mean	3,67	4	7,67	19,75	16,81	38,21	Estonia, Switzerland, UK
	St.Dev	0,57	3	1,37	6,42	5,54	4,05	

From the Table we can see that Cluster 3, which includes Egypt, India, China, Russia, South Africa, Thailand and Japan, emerges distinctively for its main features and characteristics.<sup>5</sup> This group leads in several aspects of formal and informal influence that have been identified, namely the number of years of tenure in the World Heritage Committee (6,6), the number of nominations to the World Heritage List presented during the Committee sessions (7,1) and the number of delegates participating at the sessions (18,4). In terms of vocal interventions during formal discussions, countries in this group have not been, on average, the most active. However, they do show a relatively high

<sup>5</sup> The hierarchical tree diagram of the cluster analysis performed (See Appendix A) also confirms that this cluster is the most distant from the other formed ones.

proportion of interventions for upgrade in the final decisions for those sites initially recommended by Advisory Bodies for Not Inscription, Deferral or Referral.

Looking at the composition of this cluster, two main features can be noted. First, it is characterized by the strong presence of Asian countries, which suggests an increasing political influence of this regional group in the Committee decision-making. Second, and more significantly, in this cluster we find Russia, India, China and South Africa, which are part of the BRICS economies. The acronym BRICS was coined at Goldman Sachs (O'Neill 2001) for those nations at a similar stage of newly advanced economic development and the subsequent shift in global economic power away from the older-styled developed G8 countries (Meskell 2011; 2012). Over the past several years at least three of the four have simultaneously served on the World Heritage Committee. They seated together in the governing body from 2003 to 2005, while China, India, South Africa served on the 2010 and 2011 World Heritage Committee and Russia, India and South Africa in 2012 and 2013. Our results suggest that their alliance, evidenced by the 2011 Sanya Declaration<sup>6</sup> (Mielniczuk 2013, Ferdinand 2014), has enabled the inscription of new sites on the World Heritage List and ensured that potentially endangered sites also remain on that List regardless of the infrastructural development or extraction that threatens their conservation.

The countries in this cluster have extended both formal and informal influence in the World Heritage decision-making process mainly with the objective to use it to enable the inscription of more properties in the List and gain an international legitimization. Several facts from recent Committee sessions illustrate this trend. First, Russia, India, China and Japan have all opposed recent efforts to prohibit nomination of sites by States Parties currently serving on the Committee. Thus, a high rate of nominations coupled with their intent on serving in the Committee is a clear signal to ensure their own national properties are listed. Second, a Norwegian report to the 34th session of the Committee (2010) found that over the previous 10–15 years, an increasing politicization has developed whereby policy has trumped technical expertise. The report claimed (2010, 3) for example that China had put pressure on other members to secure their own nominated sites for inscription before formal Committee discussions, with several State Parties expressing concern.

The Russian nomination of the Bolgar Historical and Archaeological Complex provides a revealing example of how the multifaceted channels of political pressure that can be used for having sites inscribed (maybe add the UNESCO webpage). During the 2012 sessions in St Petersburg, ICOMOS recommended that Bolgar not be inscribed on the List because of significant changes to the historic structures following massive consolidation and reconstruction efforts. During those same World Heritage meetings Russia offered to fly delegates to the nearby city of Kazan where it hosted UNESCO's Youth Day, attempting to secure multilateral support for Bolgar's nomination (Meskell et al. 2014). During the 2013 meetings in Cambodia a French documentary film (Bentura 2014) revealed the excessive lobbying and pressure exerted on other Committee members by the Russian ambassador. In 2014 Russia strategically reframed the criterion for inscription of Bolgar as a Muslim pilgrimage site to ensure the support of many Islamic nations on the World

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<sup>6</sup>The Sanya declaration released during the 3rd BRICS summit reiterated the strong commitment of BRICS countries to UN multilateral diplomacy. It also stated their agreement over the need of a comprehensive reform in particular of the UN Security Council. It also expressed the support of China and Russia to the aspiration of India, Brazil and South Africa to play a bigger role in the UN (see: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-04/14/c\\_13829453\\_2.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-04/14/c_13829453_2.htm))

Heritage Committee. Iraq, Qatar, Algeria, Malaysia and the UAE backed Russia and the site was inscribed.

From the qualitative evidence collected at Committee sessions it is also possible to highlight some forms of logrolling?? **Don't know this term?** between countries within Cluster 3 to secure that their economic interests might be concealed with recognition of heritage protection. The case of Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape and South Africa's maneuvering to ensure it was not placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger<sup>7</sup> illustrate this point. With an open cast colliery operating within Mapungubwe's proposed buffer zone, the IUCN, ICOMOS, and the World Heritage Centre voiced their concerns to South Africa, sent scoping missions, and produced reports outlining the destructive impacts of the mine (Meskell 2013). India and Russia both strongly supported South Africa in the 2012 Committee meetings held in Saint Petersburg. Russia was also facing controversy over its own property, the Virgin Komi Forests, then endangered due to state-sponsored gold mining (see 35 COM 7B.25). With the BRICS alliance in force the debt was repaid when Komi was discussed. This example clearly aligns with Pavone's (2008) insights confirming that members of the World Heritage Committee are, first and foremost, state representatives who are free to pursue their own national interests, maximize power, push their economic self-interest and minimize their transaction costs. In the examples provided, those national imperatives and economic necessities seem to be more binding than any ethical norms related to the international and intergovernmental responsibility over the protection of World Heritage as defined in the World Heritage Convention.

While Cluster 3 provides a clear evidence of nations which have extended their influence across the UNESCO World Heritage Committee during the period 2003-2013, the analysis of both Cluster 2 and 4 points out to another remarkable pattern in the World Heritage decision-making process. Countries in both Cluster 2 and 4 in average do not rate highly in terms of their influence in terms of Committee tenure, size of delegations or number of nominations during the period of analysis. Yet these two groups have been the most vocal in formal discussions, with an average of 15,5 and 19,7 statements per session, respectively. However, their verbal interventions reveal a very divergent attitude.

Cluster 2 is characterized by nations that have more frequently challenged the technical recommendations initially slated for Not Inscription, Deferral and Referral by the Advisory Bodies. On average, the countries in this cluster show a share of about 35% of this type of statements over their total interventions in formal discussion. Notably, with the exception of one European country, Cluster 2 includes several emerging and developing countries, most of them belonging to the Arab States regional group. This finding is in line with the analysis by Schmitt (2012), who highlights that countries like Morocco and Tunisia during the 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>th</sup> Committee sessions advocated for low concordance with the requirement of outstanding universal value as expressed in the World Heritage criteria<sup>8</sup>, or for complying with norms for the protection of cultural and natural heritage. This sentence needs more work...

On the contrary, Cluster 4 comprising Switzerland, Estonia and the United Kingdom shows the opposite dynamics. These nations have been very vocal in their number of

<sup>7</sup> Inclusion of sites in this List, which is decided yearly by members of the World Heritage Committee, includes properties with World Heritage status that have been threatened by serious and specific dangers, such as: the threat of disappearance caused by accelerated deterioration, large-scale public or private projects or rapid urban or tourist development projects, the threat of an armed conflict, calamities and cataclysms.

<sup>8</sup> NOTE on criteria

**Commentato [EB2]:** It is about vote trading (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logrolling>) and quite extensively used in political science.

**Commentato [CL3]:** Can you look into that a little more..this is the Netherlands

**Commentato [EB4R3]:** Yes, it is better to check, but I can do it during the weekend when I will be back to Torino.

interventions, especially to support the evaluations of the Advisory Bodies and to oppose proposals by others Committee members to upgrade recommendations slated for Not Inscription, Deferral or Referral. The so-called ‘neutral’ nations like Estonia and Switzerland continue to argue for scientific and expert-based decision-making. At the end of their tenure on the Committee in 2013, Estonia expressed their gratitude to the Advisory Bodies but reiterated its concern over the political pressures being exercised by national governments and the dwindling heritage expertise within the delegations. Moreover, Switzerland and Estonia have advocated that Committee members abstain from nominating sites during membership.

Finally, Cluster 1 represents a heterogeneous group of countries that do not exhibit a high position in the dimensions of political influence identified in the World Heritage context relative to the other clusters. What is relevant to highlight in this case is that this group comprise almost all the Western countries that have served on the Committee in the last decade. Crucially, some of them have been also some of the most influential State Parties in the history of the World Heritage Convention for both the number of properties inscribed in the List and their active role in the World Heritage Committee.

For instance, France and Spain are among the Western countries with the highest tallies of properties on the World Heritage List. In addition, France, Australia and the United States have been among the earliest signatories to the World Heritage Convention in 1975, 1974 and 1973 respectively. They are also among the nations that served the longest on the World Heritage Committee (France for 25 years; Australia for 23 years and the United States for 23 years). It has been acknowledged that the final form of the World Heritage Convention owes much to an earlier US proposal of a World Heritage Trust (Cameron and Rössler 2013; Stott 2011, 2012), whereas countries like France and Australia have been active in envisioning strategies to solve the unbalances in the World Heritage list such as the Global Strategy<sup>9</sup> (Gfeller 2013; Labadi 2005). Yet those nations have also been less willing to adopt the provisions of the Global Strategy (UNESCO 2011) in terms of slowing down or halting the pace of their proposed nominations. In fact, during the period analyzed (2003-2013) those countries may have lowered their vocal influence within the Committee sessions, yet their nomination activity has remained stable comprising an average or **xx** nomination per year.

**Commentato [CL5]:** Puoi mettere il numero?

## Discussion

**In 2010,** The Economist (2010) reporting on the 34th session of the World Heritage Committee held in Brasilia signaled that ‘the UN agency (was) bending its own rules under pressure from member states’. In fact, during that meeting half of the Committee was comprised by new members and some of our informants attributed the changed dynamics that we observed quantitatively to this new geo-political configuration. In 2011, during the 35<sup>th</sup> Committee session, those mounting challenges to the Advisory Bodies recommendations by a selected group of countries (including those present in our cluster 3 and 4) gave rise to murmuring of the imminent “death of the Convention” (Meskell 2011) thus implying that the rising conflictual situation would damage both the viability and the prestige of the World Heritage List in the long run. In 2012, the increasing dissatisfaction of some State Parties over the Advisory Bodies’ recommendation lead some national delegates to suggest that if the situation continued, alternative advisory organizations could be considered *in lieu* of the ones that are currently used. While none of those situations has materialized up

**Commentato [EB6]:** Possibly, we need a starting sentence to link this new section with the previous one

<sup>9</sup> The Global Strategy is initiative was launched in 1994 by the World Heritage Committee to remedy the lack of balance in the type of inscribed property and in geographical area represented. Its aim is to ensure that the World Heritage List would reflect the diversity of world’s cultural and natural diversity fulfilling the requirement of outstanding universal value (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/globalstrategy/>).

to the present, those are all signs of the high level of disagreement within the World Heritage Committee. As such there may soon be a need to reform the decision-making process.

Critique and reflection over the necessity of reform to the decision-making process have come also from within UNESCO. An exemplary case is an article written by Kishore Rao (2010) then deputy director (currently director) of the World Heritage Center. Rao **boldlyboldly** stated that the issues related to the Committee's criticism of the Advisory Bodies highlighted systemic problems in the process of decision-making within the World Heritage System. Specifically, the current adjudicatory process is trumped by the economic interests that surround the nomination process, where states like China investing million of dollars in nomination dossiers expect that those monetary investments will be materialized into World Heritage inscriptions. Thus, Rao suggested that a system of better cooperation and mentoring of nomination proposal would be better suited and would favor a more collaborative process between the State Parties and the Advisory Bodies.

More recently, the World Heritage Committee seems to have moved towards this direction. Last year at the 38<sup>th</sup> Session of the World Heritage Committee, 26 new properties were inscribed. The list surpassed the 1000 World Heritage sites, but in same year the level of disagreement between the Advisory Body recommendations and the final decision of the World Heritage Committee reached a new peak. In fact, 47% of recommendations were overturned by the Committee and a record 81% of nominated sites inscribed on the List. Given this situation the Committee decided (Decision 38 Com 13, 9) to create an informal working group invited by the German delegation that will discuss the issues related to the working methods and evaluation processes of nomination. While the results of this working group are not currently known, our quantitative and qualitative data suggest that this conflictual situation is the result of the increasing influence in the decision making process of a restricted group of emerging powers including China, South Africa, Russia and India. Ultimately, the new convergence of interests headed by this group of emerging states is embedded in a wider level of crisis within the multilateral order which is stalling the work of several UN organizations (Hale and Held 2013), and whose effects have began to be felt at the level of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (Meskell et al 2014).

Our results also find compelling parallels with the analysis that Mielniczuk (2013) and Ferdinand (2014) and conducted on the behavior of **BRICS** countries in the UN General Assembly (UNGA). Mielniczuk's (2013) analysis of the opening speeches of the BRICS's leader to the UNGA since the 90's shows a pattern of discourse alignment over the years, projecting a common vision over several issue in global foreign policy such as: the need to restructure the institution of economic global governance, reform of the UN Security Council and a concern again the perils of a unipolar world. Ferdinand's (2014) analysis of voting patterns and votes cohesion in the UNGA from 1974-2011 also has showed a pattern of continuous cohesion within the BRICS. Moreover he highlights a closer alignment since 2010, just one year after the first BRICS summit took place in Russia in 2009. Although Ferdinand noted that the cohesion is not complete and there has been some divergence over two particular issues (namely, human rights and disarmament), even in those cases the degree of divergence has decreased over the past decade. What is relevant is that BRICS shows a high convergence in foreign policy within the UNGA, and this phenomenon has increased since the creation of the BRICS summits, which transformed what was a financial externally-imposed categorization into a political grouping (Stuenkel 2014).

While Ferdinand agrees with others scholars cited in his article (but disagrees with Nye 2011) that BRICS do not form a compact alliance, they still represent a flexible partnership

**Commentato [CL7]:** Potresti controllare se in termini di mutual support BRICS si supportano tra di loro e se possiamo includere il Brasile? un po' come ha fatto Ferdinand? Non puoi fare un contrasto fra i 4 cluster e un cluster in un metti artificialmente solo i BRICS e li contrasti col resto dei paesi?

within the multilateral system. This is peculiar in presenting the combination of both a strong group identity within the space for “autonomy and pursuit of individual interest” (Nogueira quoted in Ferdinand 2014:388). As stated by one of our informants, a former UNESCO ambassador to one of the BRICS country, “BRICS are not NATO”, in the sense that they are not a compact alliance but they still represent an opportunistic coalition of those emerging countries that converge over multiple issues within the multilateral system.

**Commentato [EB8]:** I don't know whether this paragraph is strictly necessary...

Ultimately, our quantitative finding on BRICS both extends discussions on the role of BRICS within the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (Claudi 2011, Meskell 2011, 2012, 2014) and supports those claims on the role and contribution of BRICS countries in challenging existing multilateral governance structures by presenting the example of the World Heritage Committee, UNESCO self-proclaimed flagship program.

## Conclusion

This article has analyzed whether emerging countries, in particular the group composed of India, China, Russia, South Africa, are exerting their influence across the UNESCO World Heritage Committee and how this affects World Heritage decision-making.

Although an extensive literature has addressed, both quantitatively and qualitatively, how political influence and the position of states affects decision-making process within international organizations, little evidence has been produced regarding the political and economic factors that influence decisions in UNESCO World Heritage. We argue that in the World Heritage arena political influence in decision-making can be studied by focusing on several context-specific dimensions of State Party behavior. More specifically, we consider the number of heritage sites nominated, committee tenure, size of delegations and several measures of verbal interventions.

Employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches we identify and interpret common patterns of behavior arising from different groups of countries for the period 2003-2013, which in turn highlights a shifting balance of power in the World Heritage Committee. While our analysis is still based on a rather limited empirical basis our results suggest that in the last decade a restricted group of emerging nations such as China, South Africa, Russia and India has dominated the UNESCO World Heritage decision-making process using both formal and informal influence to enhance the international recognition of their national heritage. At the same time, we find evidence of polarization of positions between different groups of Committee members arising from the challenge to technical expertise involving site selection.

The polarization of attitudes between clusters, in particular the contrasting position between cluster 2 and clusters 3 and 4, shows a phenomenon of mounting attacks on the institutional *status quo* and reveals a situation of increasing conflict taking place within the multilateral arena of UNESCO World Heritage. This polarization of attitudes between the three clusters underscored by our quantitative data is due to the increasing dissatisfaction with the institutional *status quo* and reveals a situation in which conflicts arising within the multilateral institution (UNESCO), may eventually shift toward a form of contested multilateralism<sup>10</sup> within the World Heritage system. Ultimately, our findings contribute to

**Commentato [CL9]:**

Put the names of some of the countries for clarity?

**Commentato [CL10]:** Not sure I want to keep this note or the reference to contested ml as it is really a different thing

<sup>10</sup> Contested multilateralism as defined by Morse and Keoane (2014), refers to a situation of high level of conflictuality in multilateral institutions. This situation happens when competing coalitions of nation states

discussions on the role and contribution of BRICS nations in challenging existing multilateral governance structures by presenting the example of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee..

**Commentato [EB11]:** As we added a new section "discussion" I think this part should go there and not in the conclusions.

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dissatisfied with the status quo couple the threat of defection with a of the creation of alternative multilateral organizations (regime shifting or competitive regime creation).

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## APPENDIX A Cluster Analysis Methodology

Ward's minimum-variance method used to perform cluster analysis belongs to the group of hierarchical agglomerative methods in which every object is an individual cluster at the beginning of the algorithm. The clusters are then successively joined together into groups until only a single cluster remains. The objective of Ward's method is to join two clusters at each step such that the variance for the joined clusters is minimized. However, since clusters that are merged using Ward's method cannot be separated again in subsequent steps, it has been suggested that the results of the Ward technique should be corrected in an additional step. In this case, the results are checked for robustness by the use of discriminant analysis.

In order to determine the optimal number of clusters, the criterium of agglomeration schedule is employed. The agglomeration schedule, as shown in Table A1, reveals increases in the distances at each step of the fusion process.

High increases in the distance levels suggest an optimal number of clusters, since they signal the most marked differences among potential clusters. Gaps in the distance levels can be found from clusters 6 to 5, 4 to 3, and 2 to 1. Therefore, several cluster solutions can be at stake. The choice of the four-clusters solution is chosen because, except for a two cluster alternative, it provides the second best solution in terms of highest share (91,8%) of objects classified correctly according to discriminant analysis and it is better suited to highlight the main differences in country behavior occurring within the context of phenomenon under study.

Table A1. Agglomeration schedule (Ward technique, last 25 steps)

Number of Clusters	Clusters Combined		Distance	Increase of distance
25	20	39	0,842	0,075
24	44	48	0,935	0,093
23	1	2	1,033	0,098
22	11	25	1,152	0,119
21	7	23	1,275	0,123
20	16	30	1,400	0,125
19	34	41	1,527	0,127
18	6	18	1,664	0,137
17	7	8	1,821	0,157
16	3	12	2,038	0,217
15	11	22	2,256	0,218
14	13	17	2,494	0,238
13	14	44	2,733	0,239
12	20	34	2,978	0,245
11	1	36	3,253	0,275
10	20	45	3,665	0,412
9	3	7	4,094	0,429
8	10	20	4,694	0,600
7	1	16	5,312	0,618
6	6	11	6,069	0,757
5	1	3	7,019	0,950
4	10	13	8,045	1,026
3	1	14	9,992	1,947
2	1	6	12,008	2,016
1	1	10	16,427	4,419

**Figure A1 – Hierarchical Tree Diagram**

