Dr Iuliia Eremenko
Assistant Professor, Faculty of Political Science and International Studies, University of Warsaw

Topic: The Role of Local Experts in Protecting World Heritage Sites: the Experience of Stralsund and Torun

This research is part of the project "Local experts in Polish and German World Heritage Cities: understanding their role in polycentric governance of heritage sites" No. 2021/43/P/HS5/02926 co-funded by the National Science Centre and the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 945339.

Abstract

The 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage is unquestionably one of the most prominent and recognized legal instruments in the representation of natural and cultural heritage sites worldwide.

The number of sites in the UNESCO World Heritage List increases every year. To effectively attend to the needs of the public, an increasing number of experts are included in the decision-making process regarding such sites. This research analyses the building of local expertise on World Heritage issues in polycentric governance. The author looks at the example of local experts in World Heritage Cities. The study conducts a comparative analysis of two cities (in Poland and in Germany), similar in terms of their World Heritage Site structure and historical past.

This study uses the theory of governance with a special focus on the concept of polycentric governance to describe the decision-making system in World Heritage Cities. Following McGinnis and Ostrom, in this research "polycentric governance" system is defined as "a complex combination of multiple levels and diverse types of organizations drawn from the public, private, and voluntary sectors that have overlapping realms of responsibility and functional capacities" (2012). Private corporations, voluntary associations, and community-based organizations play critical supporting roles in a polycentric system of governance, even if they have not been assigned official public roles (ibid.).

This research focuses on the expertise of citizens who do not have the formal status of experts but influence decision-making as a resource to legitimize the decisions through greater involvement. This leads to more democratic decision-making at the city level. In particular, the analysis of expertise is a resource to legitimize the decisions taken, through greater involvement of citizens. Although not having formal status, these citizens nevertheless participate in and influence public policy, having experience, recognition and authority in the urban community.

Following Merje Kuus, this study identifies expertise as a process, "not a thing but a social relation; not something that one has but something that one uses or performs" (2014: 3, 40). Capturing and describing the emerging hybrid form of political participation combines the participation of experts at different levels and citizens with practical knowledge of the situation.

The term "local expert" in this study describes people whose opinions influence the local decision-making process in World Cultural Heritage. They may have a professional background, for example, in the field of conservation. This term also includes people that lack formal scientific training but acquired knowledge through extensive experience. Local experts may be involved in national or international decision-making in the polycentric governance of heritage sites, but this study focuses on their role at the local level.

The choice of qualitative research methods was dictated by the need to better understand the local-level actors involved in the decision-making process in World Heritage and their role in polycentric governance systems.

Empirically, the study is based on semi-structured interviews with those who, according to documentation of ICOMOS National Committee documents and city administrations, were

involved as experts in World Cultural Heritage in Stralsund and Torun; local city activists; members of the World Heritage Centres; city administration and representatives from UNESCO and ICOMOS (as an advisory organisation of the World Heritage committee) International Office and National Committees. The second source of information is a qualitative analysis of ICOMOS National Committee documents and city administration documents about the people they invited as World Heritage experts.

This research is a part of the project "Local experts in Polish and German World Heritage Cities: understanding their role in polycentric governance of heritage sites", which is currently in the active stage. The data for the German case studies has already been collected, and part of it was published in the work, "Developing an Expert Community and Defining its Role in the Politics and Decision-Making of a World Heritage City: The Experience of Bamberg" (Eremenko, Filimonov 2021).

Data collection for the Polish case study is currently ongoing, and preliminary results will be presented during the "Uses of Heritage" event organized by Study Circle 1, "Place of Heritage in Interdisciplinarity."

The analysis of the data collected from both case studies will be guided by research questions that aim to explore the role of local experts in protecting World Heritage Sites, how they contribute to the governance of heritage sites, the challenges faced by local experts, and the comparison of the experiences of Stralsund and Torun in terms of the role of local experts in the preservation of World Heritage Sites.

This study hypothesizes that in polycentric governance systems the structures of World Heritage local expertise are becoming less hierarchical. Increasing numbers of participants are being included in expert reviews, influencing this process, and determining the content of recommendations. As a result, people who are well known locally and have significant experience but who are not experts in terms of their social and professional status, have started to play an important role in decision-making in World Heritage.

The study is expected to provide insights into the role of local experts in the protection of World Heritage Sites and contribute to the understanding of the polycentric governance of heritage sites in Polish and German World Heritage Cities. The project's expected outcomes will help identify challenges faced by local experts and suggest ways of addressing them.

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