

The World Heritage Convention 40 years. Origins, Past and Present

By Dr. Jan Turtinen

In 2012 the 1972 World Heritage Convention will celebrate its 40th anniversary. With 188 States Parties the Convention is one of the most widely recognised international agreements today. Since the first properties were inscribed in 1978 the World Heritage List has continuously been growing in number and content. Today the List includes 936 sites in 153 states.

The World Heritage Convention is an expression of processes of our time. It illustrates the growing importance of international organisations like UNESCO framing problems as global, providing solutions, and organising the actions of states, organizations, and individuals. What used to be the responsibility of national states – heritage protection, preservation and communication – has been internationalised from the point of view of humankind as a community, the international community and the world as a whole. The key note address will discuss the origins of the Convention, how it evolved in the international system and the ideas and the assumptions it rests on.

The development of the Convention's implementation from 1972 till today will be described. As will be illustrated by key elements and examples, the last four decades has entailed a growing bureaucracy. Political and economical interests are increasingly driving the implementation of the Convention. It will be argued that the growing interest in UNESCO's World Heritage is both a success for the Convention and a major challenge for its future.

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