

Dr. rer. pol. Iuliia Eremenko
University of Bamberg

Local experts in Polish and German World Heritage Cities: understanding their role in polycentric governance of heritage sites

Abstract for the general public

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 four cities (two in Poland and two in Germany). The choice of cities for this study was determined by the specificity of World Heritage sites and the comparability of two pairs of cities, Torun and Stralsund, Bamberg and Zamosc.

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 Bamberg, Stralsund, Torun and Zamosc; 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.

The novelty of this study is that it investigates the role of local experts, who often do not have specialised training in conservation or restoration but who have a high degree of trust from citizens and/or local authorities.

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.