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Georgia Tech
Model United Nations

Committee
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

General Assemblies

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#GTMUN2025

*Bridging
technology
and
diplomacy.*



Table of Contents

Letter from the Secretary General	5
Position Paper Rubric	6
Introduction to Committee	9
Disclaimer	9
History of Committee	11
Topic 1	12
Key Terms and Acronyms	13
Introduction	15
Critiques of the Global Education System	16
Current Challenges	18
Barriers to Access and Equity	18
Globalization and Technological Gaps	18
Economic Disparities and the Risk of Brain Drain	19
Cultural Homogenization and Identity Loss	20
Pandemic-Era Learning Losses and Structural Weakness	21
Directives / QARMAs	22
Topic 2	23
Key Terms and Acronyms	24
Introduction	25
Background	25
Current Problems	31
Global North and Politicking	31
Tourism	31
Developmental Tradeoffs	32
Delisted Sites	32
Disconnect with Local Population	33
Directives / QARMAs	35
Bibliography	36



Letter from the Secretary General

Esteemed Delegates,

It is my greatest honor to welcome you to the 26th Georgia Tech Model United Nations Conference. My name is Victoria Rodriguez, and I have the privilege of serving as the Secretary General for the 2025 session.

As a mechanical engineering student here at Georgia Tech, I can confidently say that participating in Model United Nations (MUN) has opened several personal, academic, and professional doors. In this journey of 13 years, I've had the opportunity of being a delegate, a director, a mentor, and finally, a Sec-Gen. Sometimes a breeze, sometimes an up-hill battle filled with blood, sweat and tears. I've made several friends and won awards along the way, but what I truly carry with me are the important things: the value of empathy, the courage to speak when it matters, and the humility to listen when others have something to teach.

This year, we are bringing you our largest GTMUN to date. With approximately 900 delegates joining us in 16 committees, we are proud to be one of the most dynamic forums for debate in the Southeastern United States. And I can promise you that it will also be the best GTMUN yet, given the tireless work of our Secretariat and staff, who have poured their hearts and souls into building a conference that you will remember long after the gavels fall.

GTMUN is more than just a conference; it is an opportunity for exploration. Through the years, we have cultivated a space where you can explore different positions on the global stage, discover new ways to approach problems and craft solutions, and test the kind of delegate you want to become. You will experiment with speeches, refine your negotiation style, and create crisis arcs that challenge both you and your peers in committee. Just as Georgia Tech is a hub for innovation, GTMUN is the best space to challenge you intellectually, diplomatically, and personally.

But the value of this conference goes beyond leadership, teamwork, and public speaking. Like our slogan says, "bridging technology and diplomacy," GTMUN is about bringing ideas closer to people. It's about connecting logic with compassion, ambition with responsibility, and creativity with collaboration. I hope the skills you foster during this year's conference (and the friends you make along the way) will be something you carry with you far beyond these two days.

As you prepare for this conference, I encourage you to bring all your energy, passion, and curiosity into every committee session. Debate boldly, listen openly, and collaborate sincerely. On behalf of the GTMUN Secretariat, I welcome you to the GTMUN 2025 Conference. We cannot wait to see the impact you will make.

Wishing you the best of luck as you prepare for your committee,



Victoria Rodriguez

Secretary General of GTMUN 2025



Position Paper Rubric

What is a *Position Paper*?

A position paper is a paper which describes how a country intends to address the topics of the committee, detailing tangible solutions to committee issues and connection to the country's policies. A position paper should contain details for each topic that will be addressed by the committee.

Formatting Requirements

- 12-point font, double-spaced Times New Roman
- 1-2 pages per topic (excluding Works Cited page)
- A Works Cited page with citations in MLA format
- Files submitted in .pdf format with title "GTMUN25_{short committee name}_{assigned country name}.pdf"
- e.g., "GTMUN25_DISEC_GERMANY.pdf" or "GTMUN25_UNOOSA_United_States.pdf"

START EACH TOPIC PAGE WITH

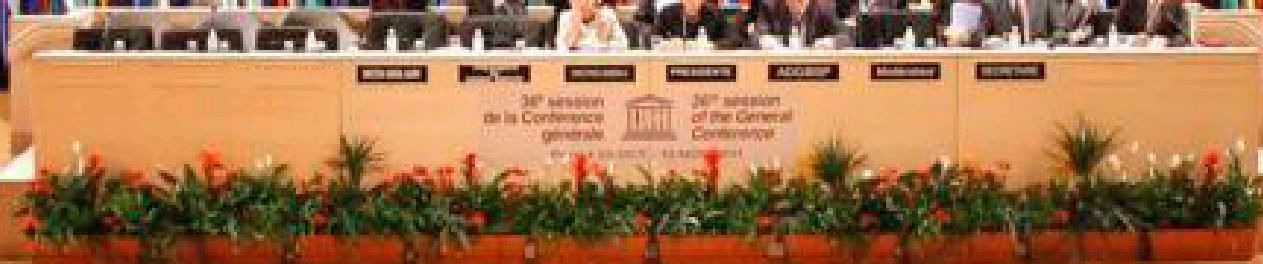
- Committee: [Name of committee]
- Delegation: [Name of delegation]
- Topic: [Topic name/description]

In order to be eligible for awards, delegates must submit a position paper and receive a score of at least **12/20 (for single-topic committees)** or **24/40 (for double-topic committees)**.



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	Great (5)	Good (4)	Adequate (3)	Poor (1)
Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detailed description of the topic (including dates and stakeholders) Several facts and statistics Discusses many relevant UN documents and resolutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic description of topic (including some dates and stakeholders) Some facts and statistics Discusses some relevant UN documents and resolutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal description of topic (with no or few dates and stakeholders) Few facts and statistics Misses some key relevant UN documents and resolutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unclear or incorrect description of topic Incorrect or missing facts or statistics No mention of relevant UN documents and resolutions
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country's detailed history with issue Detailed present position (or a strongly-defended inferred position) of country Several references to statements from appropriate officials or documents Several facts and statistics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country's basic history with issue Present position (or reasonable inferred position) of country Some references to statements from appropriate officials or documents Some facts and statistics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sparsely describes country's history with issue Present position (or basic inferred position) of country Few references to statements from appropriate officials and documents Few facts and statistics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorrect or missing description of country's history with issue Incorrect present position (or unreasonably inferred position) of country No references to statements from appropriate officials and documents Incorrect or missing facts and statistics
Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detailed personal objectives Proposes well-supported potential solutions Identifies delegates to work with and provides strong reasoning for selections Actionable, reasonable solutions which are within the scope of the committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expresses personal objectives Proposes reasonable potential solutions Identifies delegates to work with and provides reasonable justification for selections Actionable solutions within the scope of committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> States personal objective Proposes potential solutions Identifies delegates to work with Actionable solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No proposed goals or plans No potential collaborators mentioned Implausible or missing actionable solutions
Mechanics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No grammar, spelling, or punctuation errors Numerous and diverse citations from appropriate sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few grammar, spelling, or punctuation errors Citations from appropriate sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some grammar, spelling, or punctuation mistakes One or two citations from inappropriate sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many grammar, spelling, or punctuation mistakes No citations from appropriate sources





Introduction to Committee

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seeks to “contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law, and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the charter of the United Nations.”

Disclaimer

Model United Nations provides an opportunity for delegates to engage diplomatically with topics of global importance and explore possibilities for conflict resolution in a meaningful way. Many of the topics at hand may involve sensitive or controversial subject matter. We ask delegates to be respectful and professional when engaging with their committee and communicating with fellow delegates and GTMUN Conference staff. The content warning below is meant to warn you of potentially controversial topics that are present in the content of this background guide, as well as content that may appear in other aspects of the committee (e.g. debate, speeches, directives), so that you can prepare yourself before reading this background guide and participating in the committee.

At GTMUN, we take equity violations very seriously and require delegates to fully comply with our equity guidelines. Failure to do so will result in an immediate disqualification from awards, and you may be asked to leave the conference. Please remain respectful in committee, and avoid overgeneralizations as well as take into account individual

differences and contexts during your speeches. If you have any questions regarding our equity guidelines, we encourage you to contact one of our staff members.

If, because of this committee's content warning, you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to our staff via email at gtmunconference@gmail.com.

History of Committee

Founded in 1945, UNESCO was established and founded on the belief that we can work together as a global community, using education, culture, science and information to drive meaningful peace and contribute to a more inclusive global community for everyone.

UNESCO was founded following two devastating world wars (world war 1 and world war 2) in an effort to protect and safeguard culturally important heritage/meaning, promoting peace and international cooperation through education to foster dialogue, empathy, connection and deeper cultural understanding/awareness.

The constitution of UNESCO was signed in London on November 16th, 1945 by 37 countries, and came into force with the ratification of its 20th member state nearly a year later on November 4th, 1946.

The main predecessors of UNESCO were the International Institute Of Intellectual Cooperation (IICI) and the International Bureau of Education (IBE).

The IICI existed in Paris from 1925 to 1945 and was considered part of the International Committee Of Intellectual Cooperation, a committee of the League Of Nations.

Topic 1

The Future Of Global Education



Key Terms and Acronyms

Global Education

An interdisciplinary approach that equips learners with the knowledge, skills, and perspectives to understand and address issues in an interconnected world, emphasizing cultural diversity, human rights, and global responsibility.

Digital Connectivity

The infrastructure and systems enabling devices, networks, and users to connect and share information, primarily via the Internet, supporting communication and collaboration.

Inward vs Outward-facing Education Systems

Inward-facing systems focus on self-assessment and maintaining established practices, while outward-facing systems seek collaboration, external input, and global benchmarking to improve performance.

Brain Drain

The emigration of skilled professionals from one country to another for better opportunities, often leaving the origin country with reduced human capital.

Learning Poverty

The share of children unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10, including those out of school and those in school but lacking basic literacy.

Educational Resilience

The ability of learners or education systems to adapt to and recover from disruptions while maintaining effective learning.

Western Education System

The mass education of people, usually children, which involves taking them out of the community and placing them in a classroom under the direct supervision of a teacher. This education is provided free of charge and standardized, to create citizens capable of serving their community and government.

Introduction

In the 21st century, the world is more interconnected than ever before. As barriers between people and nations fade, the need for a globally aware, culturally competent population has become increasingly urgent. Global education responds to this need by broadening the traditional scope of schooling. It involves teaching students about diverse histories, geographies, cultures, and current issues from every region of the world. This philosophy seeks to promote a deep understanding of the complexity and interdependence of the global system. Global education highlights both diversity and interconnectedness, fostering a mindset that values global responsibility and mutual respect.



Global education focuses on cultivating skills, perspectives, and knowledge to understand problems in an interconnected world

Global Education

The growing diversity in local communities reflects broader global dynamics. With migration, international trade, digital connectivity, and global crises shaping daily life, education systems must adapt to prepare students for this reality. Global education encourages learners to become informed, compassionate individuals



The UNESCO World Heritage Education Programme, initiated as a UNESCO special project in 1994, gives young people a chance to voice their concerns and to become involved in the protection of our common cultural and natural heritage

who are capable of navigating and contributing to a shared global future.¹

At its core, global education is guided by several interrelated principles. First is interconnectedness, which refers to the idea that the world's social, economic, environmental and political systems are deeply linked. Events in one part of the world often have ripple effects elsewhere.² Second is interdependence, which emphasizes that individuals and nations rely on one another through trade, migration, climate cooperation, or shared security concerns. This understanding encourages students to think beyond national interests and consider the collective good.² The third principle is that of cultural understanding, which teaches students to value and respect the multiplicity of traditions, experiences, and perspectives that exist globally. It fosters empathy, dialogue, and the ability to navigate difference. The last principle is active citizenship, which involves equipping students with the skills and ethical foundation to engage in global challenges through environmental activism, civic participation, or international cooperation.³



A United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) instructor teaching a group of Karimojong youths in northeastern Uganda. The Karimojong are a seminomadic pastoral herding society

This system marks a shift from inward-looking education systems to outward-facing ones. It is not merely from studying about other countries in isolation, but about recognizing the influence of one's own actions on the wider world. This shift supports the development of global competence as a framework that encourages critical engagement with the world, cross cultural communication, and a sense of shared responsibility.⁴ Its goal is to better prepare students in the face of global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, technological disruption, and migration with empathy and informed decision-making.

16

Critiques of the Global Education System

While global education offers a compelling vision, it is not without criticism. One concern is the dominance of Western educational models in global discourse. These models often involve the mass institutionalization of young people into standardized

and state-controlled systems that were originally designed to produce citizens who serve the state, sometimes at the cost of cultural diversity and local knowledge.⁵ This dynamic leads to the imposition of Western-centric worldviews, which may not align with the values or lived realities of students in non-Western settings. Overreliance on standardized testing, for instance, can discourage creativity and critical thinking, while educational content may sideline indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and cultural practices.⁶

Additionally, the promise of globalization in education has proven uneven, as access to educational technologies and global networks remains limited in many regions, particularly in the Global South.⁷ Despite appearances, the world's population is not equally connected, and education's global reach remains selective rather than inclusive.⁷



Students in a room taking a standardized test



Indian children attend a school run under a bridge in New Delhi

Access to quality education remains a major challenge. While the United Nations Human Rights Council affirms education as a fundamental right, millions of children (particularly in rural areas, conflict zones, and under-resourced regions) lack teachers, infrastructure, or basic learning materials. Meanwhile, the evolving demands of the labor market are reshaping what it means to be “educated”.

As educational systems confront the demands of an increasingly globalized world, the concept of global education provides both an opportunity and a challenge. On one hand, it offers a framework for nurturing globally competent, empathetic, and informed individuals. On the other, it requires ongoing efforts to ensure that global learning is truly inclusive, respects traditions and avoids perpetuating systemic inequalities. Delegates must consider how to balance these tensions and promote a future of education that is equitable, culturally responsible, and genuinely global in scope.

Current Challenges

Barriers to Access and Equity

Despite the growing emphasis on global education, many of the same challenges that affect conventional education systems persist, particularly regarding equity and access. Socioeconomic disparities often dictate the quality of education a student receives. Families with greater financial resources are more likely to afford better



Girls sit for lessons on a stairwell inside a school building. Overcrowding—compounded by the demand for gender segregation—means that schools typically divide their days into two or three shifts, resulting in a school day too short to cover the full curriculum

learning environments, private tutoring, and access to international or specialized courses. Meanwhile, students from low-income households often attend underfunded schools and lack access to critical resources such as experienced educators or advanced coursework. Racial and ethnic disparities compound this issue. In many educational systems, structural racism and historical inequality have

created vast differences in school quality, teacher preparedness, and academic outcomes for students of color.⁸ This systemic imbalance directly hinders social mobility and reinforces patterns of inequality. Geographic location also plays a major role, since schools in affluent areas tend to receive more funding, while those in rural or marginalized regions often struggle with limited infrastructure and staffing.⁸

Globalization and Technological Gaps

Globalization has had a complex impact on how education is delivered and perceived. On one hand, it has expanded access to information and interdisciplinary learning. Students today can learn from and with peers around the globe, access



Two children, sitting on the ground, holding laptops, and laughing with each other

vast databases, and participate in online learning environments. On the other hand, globalization has introduced significant disparities in the delivery of this education.

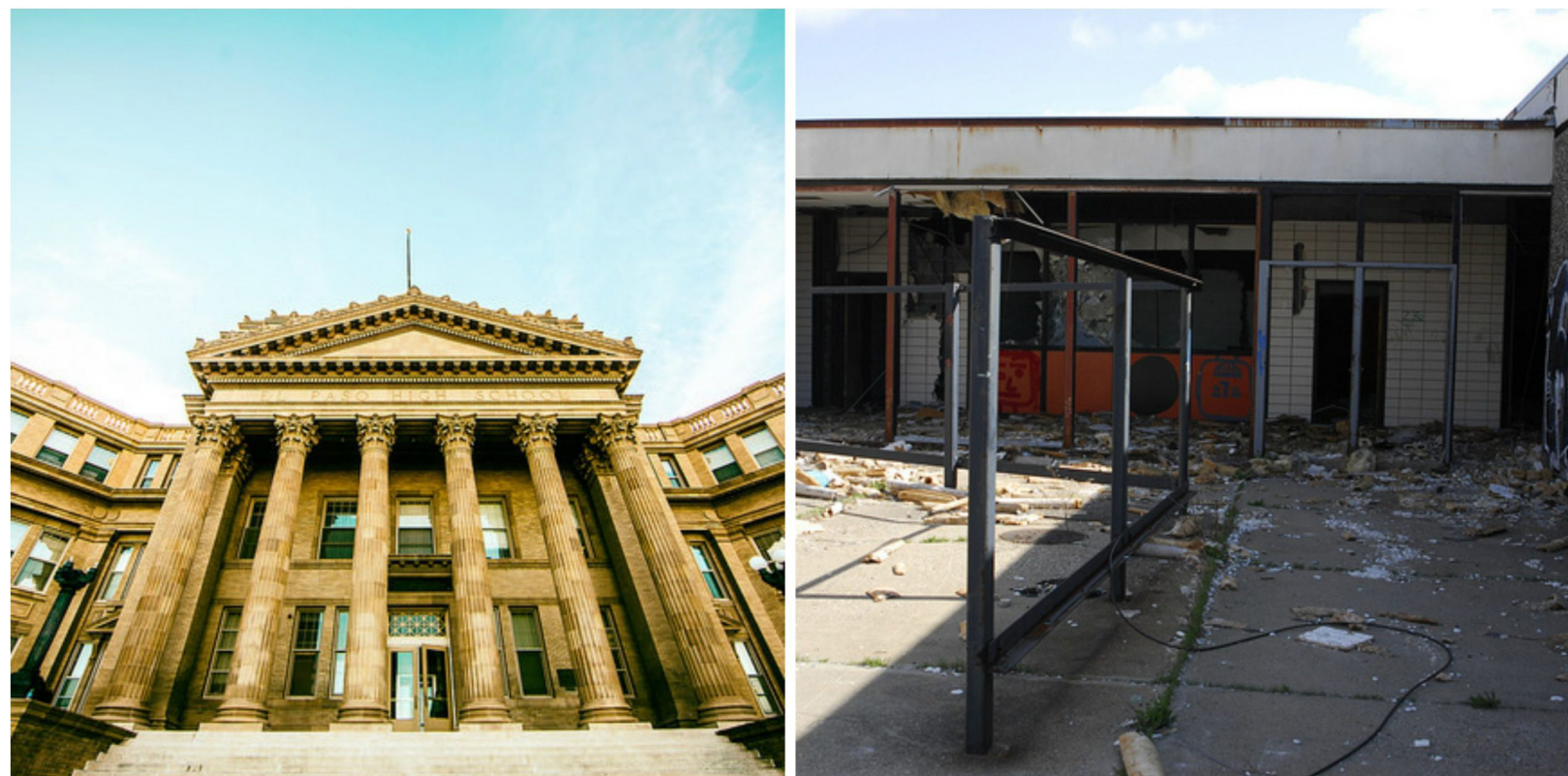
The digital divide, referred to as the widening gap between those with access to digital tools and those without, exemplifies this problem. Digital literacy is no longer a luxury, but a prerequisite for meaningful participation in global education. Many students worldwide still lack reliable internet, adequate devices, or the digital fluency to use these tools effectively.⁹ This divide limits not only access to content, but also the ability to collaborate across borders and develop skills essential for the modern workforce.

Inclusive digital tools that highlight representation have been shown to improve the learning environment and promote open-mindedness <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/projects/education-for-inclusive-societies.html>. However, marginalized groups, including indigenous populations and linguistic minorities, continue to face cultural and technological exclusion. Educational platforms often fail to reflect or support diverse languages and cultural identities. Without efforts to incorporate these identities into digital spaces, global education risks reinforcing systems of exclusion.¹⁰

19

Economic Disparities and the Risk of Brain Drain

Economic inequality continues to shape the outcomes and accessibility of global education. While one of the goals of global education is to promote inclusion,



El Paso High School in Texas (left) and a school in Detroit, Michigan (right)

it often inadvertently reproduces economic divides. Students from wealthier countries or communities benefit disproportionately from study abroad programs, globally recognized diplomas, and advanced educational technologies. In contrast, those from less-developed regions may face insurmountable financial and logistical barriers to participation.¹¹

This disparity is exacerbated by the phenomenon of brain drain, where highly educated individuals leave their home countries in search of better employment or research opportunities abroad. While this may benefit the individual, it can hinder development in their country of origin, which loses skilled labor and intellectual capital.¹² It may be argued that globalization has created a volatile labor market that demands constant adaptation and lifelong learning, which may overwhelm individuals seeking stability and long-term economic security.⁵

Cultural Homogenization and Identity Loss

One of the most contentious criticisms of global education is its potential to dilute or erase local cultural identities. As western models of education and globalized content become dominant, there is growing concern that non-Western languages, traditions, and epistemologies are being pushed to the margins. Cultural homogenization is particularly visible in the global spread of Western entertainment, consumer habits, and even dietary preferences. This phenomenon is mirrored in education through the privileging of English-language instruction, western curricula, and global standardized testing.¹³



Teacher and students studying the globe in a classroom

While the widespread use of English in global education facilitates communication and knowledge sharing, it can also exclude populations that lack access to quality language instruction. This linguistic divide reinforces global inequalities and contributes to cultural alienation. Many learners become fluent in global discourses without ever being physically or culturally connected to the cultures they are expected to understand.¹⁴



Empty classroom in the University of Colorado Boulder

Pandemic-Era Learning Losses and Structural Weakness

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and worsened existing inequalities in education, especially in countries where infrastructure was already fragile. During school closures, millions of children lost months, or even years, of learning, particularly those in low

and middle-income countries. A joint report by UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank warned that the share of children in these regions living in learning poverty could rise to 70% due to prolonged school closures.¹⁵ This setback threatens to erase decades of educational progress and raises urgent questions about how future global education initiatives can better withstand systemic shocks.

Standardization and Innovation Stifling

The push for globally consistent education systems often places a heavy emphasis on standardization through international assessment, shared curricula, and global performance benchmarks. While these systems aim to provide measurable outcomes and facilitate cross-national comparisons, they can also narrow the scope of learning and limit educational innovation. In many cases, schools prioritize preparing students for exams rather than encouraging creativity, independent thought, or context-specific approaches to problem solving.

This focus on uniformity disproportionately affects students who require specialized or differentiated learning. Children with disabilities, neurodivergent learners, or those who learn best through alternative methods are often overlooked in standardized frameworks. These students may struggle to perform well on traditional assessments, not due to lack of ability, but because the format fails to accommodate their unique learning needs. Moreover, the rigid pace and content structure of standardized curricula can leave little room for flexibility, making it difficult for educators to provide individualized support.



Close up photo of a student's standardized exam answer sheet

Directives / QARMAs

How can UNESCO and member states ensure equitable access to quality global education for marginalized, rural, and low-income populations?

What strategies can close the digital divide and guarantee culturally and linguistically inclusive learning environments?

How can global education frameworks promote cultural preservation and diversity while avoiding the dominance of Western-centric models?

What policies can prevent brain drain and ensure that global education benefits both the individual and their communities?

How can education systems balance international standards with flexibility to meet specialized learning needs?

What measures can strengthen educational resilience and continuity during global crises?

Topic 2

Reevaluating the Process Behind World Heritage Sites



Key Terms and Acronyms

World Heritage Sites World Heritage Sites are heritage landmarks or areas deemed by UNESCO to be important for cultural or natural reasons and covered under international treaties.

World Heritage Convention Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, also referred to as the World Heritage Conventions, was the initial treaty adopted by UNESCO in 1972 that established the World Heritage Sites system.

World Heritage Fund The World Heritage Fund is the fund used by UNESCO for World Heritage Sites. It amounts to 5.8 million dollars for the biennium 2024-2025, plus 0.4 million dollars for Emergency assistance.

ICOMOS International Council on Monuments and Sites, or ICOMOS, is a partner organization to UNESCO responsible for advisory on cultural elements of the World Heritage Sites system.

IUCN International Union for Conservation of Nature, or IUCN, is a partner organization to UNESCO responsible for advisory on natural elements of the World Heritage Sites system.

ICCROM International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, or ICCROM, is the primary partner in training for the preservation of cultural heritage

Nubian Monuments Campaign International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia, often referred in this guide as the Nubian Monuments Campaign in interests of succinctness, is the campaign to rescue monuments from the construction of the Aswan High Dam..

Introduction

“It is not easy to choose between a heritage of the past and the present well-being of a people, living in need in the shadow of one of history’s most splendid legacies, it is not easy to choose between temples and crops.”

- Vittorino Veronese, former Director-General of UNESCO¹

Noble goals do not always entail noble execution. In 1972, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) initiated the World Heritage Sites program for the “identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity.”² In the fifty plus years since its inception, more than a thousand sites from around the world have been listed and incredible efforts have been undertaken to protect our natural and cultural heritage from destruction.

25 The well-intentioned nature of the program is known, but are the ramifications of the World Heritage site in line with its original intention? With issues regarding commercialization, racism, politics, and developmental tradeoffs, the World Heritage Site is much more than merely just a conservation effort. And, are the interests of cultural preservation paramount—if not, how should the tradeoffs be balanced?

Background

UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites was created with the adoption of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage—also known as the World Heritage Convention—in 1972 (with the first World Heritage Site designated in 1975), but the push that set it in motion happened 13 years earlier...³

The Aswan High Dam Rescue

In history, conservation efforts are more often than not spurred through regret; however, the establishment of the World Heritage Site system is not one of them. Instead, the World Heritage Site system traces back to the successful rescue of irreplaceable archeological sites from the creation of the Aswan High Dam along the Nile River in 1954.⁴

Though historically a stable river, the periodic gentle flooding of the Nile is the trademark feature of the Nile and laid the foundations of the pyramids and dynasties that thrived on the fertile soil along the delta. However, famines also occurred periodically at the mercy of nature with flooding on high-water years and drought on low years.⁵ The construction of the monumental dam was a critical component



Abu Simbel during and after relocation

of Egypt's industrialization efforts and massively improved the quality of life of its people following its construction.^{6,7}

- 26 The construction of one of the largest dams in the world along one of the most historically significant river banks in the world raised significant alarms among archaeologists and the global public alike. The flooding from the dam would threaten the countless critical architectural sites that accumulated along the Nile River bank over its millennia of history. In response, in 1959, the governments of Egypt and Sudan petitioned UNESCO and the international community to assist them in rescuing the sites.⁴

Through the International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia, 50 countries aided Egypt with both monetary support (over \$40M dollars / around \$400M in 2025) and technical expertise to relocate 22 monuments and architectural complexes from the flooding including the famed Abu Simbel complex by cutting up the monuments and relocating them away from flood zones. While not all of the monuments were fully relocated (such as the Fortress of Buhen and certain areas of Qasr Ibrim and Bigeh) and the relocations could not be completed non-destructively, the coordinated effort was still considered a spectacular success. By the time the reservoir was filled to maximum capacity in 1976, nearly all of the major architectural sites relocated from the critical flood zones, and reassembled by 1980.⁸

The international rescue effort prompted new interest and awareness of these

irreplaceable heritage sites and laid the foundations for the World Heritage Convention in which the World Heritage Sites system was initiated. Ten of the the relocated monuments nearby were accepted to be World Heritage Sites in 1979, twenty years after its location that spurred the creation of the program.⁹ In the modern day, the relocated monuments are not just giants in Egypt's already opulent cultural history but also in one of its largest industries: tourism. No longer just cultural sites, they are tourist sites critical to the economy in the area and the nation as a whole.

The origins of the World Heritage Sites are important not just because of its strengths but also its weaknesses. With over a thousand World Heritage Sites in the world currently, the core mission in the rescue of the Nubian monuments are shared with the current World Heritage Sites systems, but so are the faults. The history of the rescue was a spectacular one, but one that can not be viewed merely just from a cultural perspective; the lens of cultural and natural heritage preservation were and are tainted by the political and economical interests that drive it.



Temple of Bigeh before and after the construction of the Aswan High Dam Canon DIGITAL IXUS 850 IS

27

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World Heritage Sites

With the adoption of the World Heritage Convention by UNESCO in 1972, the path set by the Nubian monuments campaign proceeded to its next milestone with the creation of the World Heritage Site system to both celebrate and preserve sites of natural and cultural heritage.

World Heritage Missions¹⁰

1. Encourage countries to sign the World Heritage Convention and to ensure the protection of their natural and cultural heritage;
2. Encourage States Parties to the Convention to nominate sites within their national territory for inclusion on the World Heritage List;

3. Encourage States Parties to establish management plans and set up reporting systems on the state of conservation of their World Heritage sites;
4. Help States Parties safeguard World Heritage properties by providing technical assistance and professional training;
5. Provide emergency assistance for World Heritage sites in immediate danger;
6. Support States Parties' public awareness-building activities for World Heritage conservation;
7. Encourage participation of the local population in the preservation of their cultural and natural heritage;
8. Encourage international cooperation in the conservation of our world's cultural and natural heritage.

Although most people associate World Heritage Sites with just cultural preservation, the World Heritage Sites system actually covers two types of sites: cultural sites and natural sites. For a site to be considered a World Heritage Site, it must qualify for at least one of these ten selection criteria (six cultural and four natural). It is possible for a site to qualify under both natural and cultural criteria such as Machu Pichu.¹¹

28

Selection Criteria¹⁰

Cultural

- (I) to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- (II) to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
- (III) to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;
- (IV) to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological



Taj Maha, a cultural sitel in India selected under criterium i

ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;

(V) to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;

(VI) to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);

Natural

(VII) to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;

(VIII) to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;

(IX) to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;

(X) to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

Selection Process

To place a site on the World Heritage Site list, a country must first put it on the Tentative List before nominating sites by putting it into a Nomination File, which is evaluated by two advisory bodies: the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) These advisory bodies then advises UNESCO on whether the nominations passes through



Victoria Falls, a natural site in Zambia selected under natural criteria vii, viii

to become World Heritage Sites.¹²

These bodies notably are not a part of UNESCO nor the United Nations as a whole. However, both are established third-party organizations from before the World Heritage Convention's signing, and both have been long standing partners in assessment of the nominations. ICOMOS, which consists of over 10,000 experts in 153 countries qualified in fields such as architecture, paleontology, engineering, and history, advise UNESCO in qualifying nominated cultural sites as World Heritage Sites.^{12,13} IUCN, which comprises over 1,400 member organizations (such as states, government agencies, and NGOs) and consists of over 18,000 scientists and experts in nature conservation, advise UNESCO in qualifying nominated natural sites as World Heritage Sites.^{12,14}

In addition to the two advisory bodies aiding the selection of the sites, there is a third advisory body to the World Heritage Site, the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and

Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), which is the primary partner in training for the preservation of cultural heritage.¹²

30



Benefits

The designation as a World Heritage Site grants the site numerous benefits, including increased global recognition and prestige, access to crucial funding and technical assistance for conservation under the World Heritage Fund, and a significant boost in tourism and economic development for local communities.¹⁵ The designation also provides enhanced legal protection and promotes the preservation of local culture and identity. It facilitates international cooperation in heritage protection and advances scientific research and education by serving as key centers for study and learning.¹²

Current Problems

Global North and Politicking



Map of World Heritage Sites

World Heritage Sites have been accused of geographical biases or even colorism and racism. With the roots of the organizations affiliated in Europe, the vast majority of cultural sites in particular are in Europe, North America, and East Asia, all in the global North.^{16,17} Especially with the nature of World Heritage Sites, the geographical bias in sites unfortunately pushes a narrative of certain cultures being valued over others. While racism could and very likely be a possible cause of this outcome, the bias also reveals another dark side of the system: politics.

- 31 With various political and economic benefits for World Heritage Sites, there exists a lobbying industry tied both with politics and money to advocate for actions regarding World Heritage Sites. It is important to note that “actions” may not be pro-preservation. Notably, Australia has lobbied to keep the Great Barrier Reef away from the Endangered Sites list because of tourism and image reasons despite the rising human-induced damages to it.^{18,19} With more prosperous developed nations having more of both resources to push their interests and the known developmental bias towards the Global North, less prosperous nations often in the Global South struggle to have enough resources to lobby support for their sites as in the case with Asmara in Eritrea which succeeded after years of lobbying.²⁰ The development and prosperity of a nation fundamentally should not be tied to whether a culture is “worth” being preserved, but this is easier said than done.

Tourism

While a World Heritage Site designation often brings increased recognition and pride, it also frequently leads to a surge in tourism, creating a complex set of challenges. The



An example of Asmara's Modernist architecture



Tourists at the ancient of Petra in Jordan

influx of visitors, while economically beneficial, can put immense pressure on the sites themselves, leading to physical degradation through increased foot traffic, pollution, and the erosion of delicate structures or natural habitats.²¹ Additionally, the economic interest of heritage sites could go against the original point of conservation. Some

examples include the ancient city of Petra in Jordan facing damage to its sandstone facades from millions of visitors, and the Great Barrier Reef which suffers from coral degradation because of increased boat traffic and human contact.^{22,23} Over-tourism can also detract from the authentic experience for visitors and negatively impact the local communities, disrupting daily life, driving up costs, and commercializing cultural practices.²⁴ Balancing the economic advantages of tourism with the imperative of preserving the integrity and authenticity of World Heritage Sites remains a significant and ongoing concern.

Developmental Tradeoffs

32

“It is not easy to choose between temples and crops.”¹

The words spoken by the Director-General of UNESCO in the opening of the Nubian monuments campaign reflects the dilemma that has been intertwined with conservation since its inception. Despite the Herculean effort by the international community to save the endangered Nubian monuments, the temples were nonetheless permanently cut up and permanently relocated from its original location. The Nubian efforts were reactive rather than preventative with the campaign initiated only after the construction of the dam. If the campaign initiated nowadays, would the international response be one of praise or the one of outrage for the construction of the dam? If it was already not easy to choose between the temple and crops back then, the post hoc campaign set along preventative measures that strongly discourages similar developments in future. At the end of the day, how must we balance conservation with the well-being of the people around? How must we justify sacrificing the well-being of people for the artifacts of people long departed?

Delisted Sites

Of over a thousand World Heritage Sites, only three have been delisted. Each delisting was a response to a deliberate choice by the governments to permanently

alter the sites for developmental or economic purposes.

Of the three, Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City and the Dresden Elbe Valley in UK and Germany respectively were both former cultural sites delisted due to developments in the region. In Liverpool's situation, the new developments of modern buildings and a sports arena in the docks region spearheaded increased investment in the area that "lain neglected and semi-derelict for decades" but which ultimately cost its delistment in 2021.²⁵ In Dresden, the bridge over the Elbe river seeking to relieve urban congestion cost the region the status in 2009.. In both cases, the developments were overwhelmingly popular among the locals in the region

and played a role in the development of the region.²⁶

"Places like Liverpool should not be faced with the binary choice between maintaining heritage status or regenerating left-behind communities and the wealth of jobs and opportunities that come with it" - Liverpool City Region Mayor Steve Rotheram.²⁵

The last site, the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary in Oman was the first and only natural site to be delisted. A nature preserve for wild critically endangered

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How Liverpool's waterfront has changed



Changing setup of Liverpool's waterfront

Arabian Oryxes, it was delisted in 2007 after the area was reduced by 90% after the discovery of oil in the area.²⁷

Disconnect with Local Population

The developmental tradeoffs can often be grouped into a wider and overarching issue: the disconnect of the sites with those that live there. This disconnect can occur due to various reasons, such as national governments pushing for World Heritage Site designation without considerations for locals living there or a shift in interest and support for World Heritage Site designations as with the situation in Liverpool.²⁶ While the tourism issues regarding World Heritage Sites permanently altering the lives of local populations are obvious and abundant, there are also other ways that such sites overlook the lives of the locals. Interestingly, extensive vandalism in the site Tadrart Acacus was attributed to local tour guides frustrated with the fencing of the sites by the authorities.²⁸ While these issues regarding cultural sites are obvious, this is arguably the most serious with natural sites. IUCN

and UNESCO have faced criticism for prioritizing the environment and natural conservation over the indigenous peoples living at World Heritage Sites. Efforts to conserve nature have directly led to indigenous populations being expelled from the areas they call home, notably occurring in many occasions with the Maasai people of Kenya and Tanzania. Though the displacement conflict predates the World Heritage Site system, the issue remains to this day and is still occurring.²⁹ While IUCN and UNESCO did not endorse such forced displacement and expressed deep concern against it, its recommended measures to control human population growth in protected areas like Ngorongoro Conservation Area have led local governments to use it as justification for these human rights violations in the name of conservation.^{30,31}

34



Relocation from the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Arusha Region to Msomera village, Tanga Region, Tanzania

Directives / QARMAs

The goal of this UNESCO committee is not to debate on the value of one site over another nor comparing different cultures with each other—the notion of cultural relativism is highly relevant here and should not be challenged. Instead, the goal is to evaluate the whole process of World Heritage Sites critically and propose changes to improve it. It is strongly encouraged for the exploration of the topic to go further past well-explored and surface level issues with tourism and site degradation. We hope the discussion and debate over something so seemingly palatable and clear cut shines light into other aspects of the world and develops an appreciation of insight into how and why things are.

Are the ramifications of the World Heritage site in line with its original intentions?

Are the interests of cultural preservation paramount—and if not, how must the tradeoffs be balanced?

35

How should tourism be managed with World Heritage Sites to not cause further damage?

How should the system be amended to lower barrier entry for less developed nations?

What reforms should be done with the World Heritage Sites system?

What is the value of cultural heritage in the face of the well-being of the locals?

With many decisions being made not by the current locals of the site, how can we mend the disconnect and ensure their voices are also heard?

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