

The XIV International Economic History Congress (IEHC), Helsinki, Finland, 21 to 25 August 2006.

Session 48: Attractions and Experiences: The Uses of History in Tourism Development (Auvo Kostiainen & Taina Syrjämaa).

### **World Heritage, tourism, and change**

Tanja Vahtikari

University of Tampere, Department of History

[tanja.vahtikari@uta.fi](mailto:tanja.vahtikari@uta.fi)

There is a complex inter-relationship between conservation and consumption, and preservation and presentation of heritage.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps nowhere else is this more true than related to cultural sites designated by UNESCO on the World Heritage List, since often World Heritage sites are both model cases for conservation and popular tourist destinations. Several scholars have underlined the paradox that follows the World Heritage listing in relation to tourism development – the designation may expose the site to the very dangers it was supposed to prevent, as gaining the status often means, not surprisingly, increased visitor numbers, and thus growing ‘wear and tear’ of the site. Furthermore the lack of necessary coordination in the every day administration of the sites between conservation and tourism authorities has been pointed out.<sup>2</sup> In this paper my aim is to explore some further aspects of the inter-relationship of preservation and presentation in context of World Heritage. This will be done by using examples from both UNESCO (World Heritage Committee and ICOMOS) discourse on World Heritage and a more locally based analysis of a Finnish World

---

<sup>1</sup> For discussion see for example Graham .B., G. J., Ashworth & Tunbridge, J. E., *A Geography of Heritage: Power, Culture and Economy*. London: Arnold 2000, 236255. In the context of urban heritage Ashworth & Tunbridge have used the concept ‘tourist-historic city’ to underline the complex inter-relationship. G. J. Ashworth, & J. E. Tunbridge, *The tourist-historic city*. London/ New York: Belhaven Press, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Shackely (ed.), *Visitor management: case studies from World Heritage Sites*. Oxford: Centre for Tourism and Visitor Management, Nottingham Trent University, 1998, 204; Bianchi, Raoul & Boniface, Priscilla, 'Editorial: the politics of World Heritage'. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 8 (2), 2002, 80.

Heritage site Old Rauma<sup>3</sup>. Five points can be distinguished.

**1. Even though forcefully arguing in favor of the protection of the cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value, the Convention text itself, drafted during the 1960s and adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1972, articulated an ambiguous relationship between conservation, heritage, tourism, and change.**

During the 1950s and 1960s, the so called second destruction of monuments that went well beyond the Second World War demolition, took place in European cities as a result of modernization.<sup>4</sup> The World Heritage Convention was drafted in a situation where it was necessary to counter this fast and forceful change, which rather than gradual and process-like development, aimed at the complete replacement of the existing urban fabric. Not surprisingly, **change and tourism (the word tourism is mentioned only once in the Convention text) were viewed mainly negatively in the Convention text.** The preamble of the Convention notes that “the cultural heritage and the natural heritage are increasingly threatened with destruction not only by the traditional causes of decay, but also by changing social and economic conditions which aggravate the situation with even more formidable phenomena of damage or destruction”, and the **Article 11 goes on** specifying these **dangers**, such as “the threat of disappearance caused by accelerated deterioration, large-scale public or private projects or rapid urban or tourist development projects; destruction caused by changes in the use or ownership of the land; major alterations due to unknown causes; abandonment for any reason whatsoever; the outbreak or the threat of an armed conflict; calamities and cataclysms; serious fires, earthquakes, landslides; volcanic eruptions; changes in water level, floods

---

<sup>3</sup> Rauma, which received its town charter in 1442, is one of the six medieval towns in Finland. Today it is a port and a (post-)industrial town with approximately 37,000 inhabitants. The area today known as Old Rauma, which comprises the centre of Rauma, equals to the area surrounded by a customs fence until the early nineteenth century. Apart from the late-fifteenth century monastery church of the Holy Cross and the ruins of the mid-fifteenth century church of the Holy Trinity, the buildings in Old Rauma – mostly built in wood – date from the time after 1682 when the entire city was burned to the ground in a devastating fire. The conceptual formation of Old Rauma as historic city began in the early twentieth century, when a group of prominent Finnish artists provoked the preservation of the few medieval towns in the country. Instead of just being the commercial and administrative centre of the city, Old Rauma was from then on perceived also as *a historic city*. In Old Rauma the World Heritage related processes have occurred in a fairly uncontested manner. Yet Old Rauma provides an interesting case study to such themes as the co-existence of preservation and presentation of heritage in a living urban setting, interpretation of heritage for tourism purposes, ‘touristification’ of urban space, and the locals’ perceptions towards their own heritage in context of an international recognition.

<sup>4</sup> The term “second destruction” was first used in relation to the Federal Republic of Germany by Erwin Schleich. Op. cit. Koshar, Rudy, *Germany’s Transient Pasts. Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century*. Chapel

and tidal waves”.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, however, in several parts of the Convention text the goal of the World Heritage organization was defined as “identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations” of heritage of outstanding universal value<sup>6</sup> – presentation, by implication, referring to presenting the designated site for outside visitors, i.e. tourism. In line with this thinking common heritage of the mankind would not mean only common duty but free access (physically or in a virtual space). Heritage always is someone’s heritage – local heritage local people’s, national heritage nation’s, and accordingly, global heritage international community’s – who should have access to it. According to Graham et al. “the inexorable growth of foreign tourism, and the importance of culture, heritage and art to that industry, is the most powerful expression of the existence of a common global heritage as the property of all peoples.”<sup>7</sup>

**2. The inter-relationship between preservation and presentation of heritage, and the change it implies, was only recently acknowledged in the implementation of the Convention by the World Heritage Committee and ICOMOS<sup>8</sup>.**

The identification of heritage of ‘outstanding universal value’ issued in the Convention, in practice, meant the establishment of the World Heritage List. Since the first 12 designations on the List in 1978, the number of selected sites has gradually increased reaching the current (April 2006) 812. While implementing the Convention – in context of including new sites in the World Heritage List and the so-called periodic reporting – the World Heritage Committee repeatedly has had to deal with severe pressures on heritage caused by violent change. Understandably, in these situations of immediate, major threats, it has been important to underline the stability of heritage sites and to consider change negative – development has been identified with demolition. As a by-product, however, somewhat problematic relationship with change has resulted. More than often, all change has been viewed negatively.

The early-1990s meant the conceptual widening of the World Heritage in several respects. In 1992

---

Hill / London: University of North Carolina Press 1998, 290.

<sup>5</sup> *Convention concerning the protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*. Paris: UNESCO 1972.

<sup>6</sup> *Convention*. See for example Articles 4,5,6.

<sup>7</sup> Graham et al., 238.

a new nomination category of cultural landscapes was adopted for the implementation of the Convention.<sup>9</sup> In 1994 the so called *Global Strategy* urged the adoption of a less monumental, and more anthropological, multi-functional, universal, and contextual view towards cultural heritage.<sup>10</sup> Also in 1994 the *Nara Conference on Authenticity* convened to better define the problematic concept of authenticity – the test of which, “in design, material, workmanship or setting”, the cultural sites must meet properly in order to be included in the World Heritage List.<sup>11</sup> All these processes allowed a more flexible interpretation related to change in World Heritage sites. At the same time there was a shift in Committee's position towards tourism. Instead of viewing tourism development as a simply negative impact on the sites, the Committee began to encourage State Parties to socio-economically and ecologically sustainable tourism management.<sup>12</sup>

### **3. World Heritage designation 'produces' tourist sites, tourism 'produces' World Heritage sites?**

In case of historic cities their exact numbers of visitors are difficult to determine given that there usually are no entrance fees or equivalent that would help to monitor these figures. Even so, in them too tourism officials usually report increased visitor numbers due to World Heritage status.<sup>13</sup> For Old Rauma especially the amount of daily visitors, and foreign tourists has increased since the designation. Also the balance between business travel and leisure tourism has shifted in favour of the latter, and Old Rauma has become the almost sole focus of Rauma tourism promotion, which it still wasn't in the 1980s.<sup>14</sup> The World Heritage site status has not brought with it a vast

---

<sup>8</sup> ICOMOS is the organization responsible for the evaluation of cultural heritage sites for their ‘World Heritage value’.

<sup>9</sup> World Heritage Committee, 16<sup>th</sup> Session, Santa Fe, United States of America, 7-14 December 1992. WHC-92/CONF.002/12, 14 December 1992, 55.

<sup>10</sup> Expert Meeting on the “Global Strategy” and thematic studies for a representative World Heritage List, 20-22 June 1994. WHC-94/CONF.001/INF.4. Paris, 28 June 1994.

<sup>11</sup> Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, Article 24.b; *Nara Conference on Authenticity: Proceedings*. Knut Einar Larsen (ed.). Trondheim: UNESCO, ICOMOS & ICCROM 1995.

<sup>12</sup> See for example *Managing tourism in natural World Heritage sites. International workshop held in Dakar, Senegal 1993*.

<sup>13</sup> There are several studies that have examined the influence of World Heritage listing to tourism development. These usually report growth in visitor numbers. Shackley, however, points out that this is not necessarily the case but visitor numbers in World Heritage sites depend on number of factors such as marketing and access. Shackley 1998, 200.

<sup>14</sup> Interviews (together 26) were conducted between 2001 and 2003 with different urban actor groups in Rauma. The tapes are in the author’s possession. Urban actor groups include e.g. Old Rauma inhabitants, Old Rauma shopkeepers,

international fame for Old Rauma – already due to the geographical location of the city this would be highly unlikely – yet, it has had an important effect on how the local population perceives the historic city.

Old Rauma was considered a national and local (Rauma) scale tourist-site already since the 1920-1930s. In connection of the nomination to a World Heritage site and after it, Old Rauma has been for the first time, regarded as a site that is a subject to international tourism. For many of the interviewed citizens of Rauma the increase of international tourism has been the most visible consequence of the new status. Sometimes they interpret the tourism following the nomination as a negative consequence – as a phenomena that increases commercialization and as something that would distort the traditional structure of Old Rauma's commerce – despite this international tourism is almost solely regarded as a positive phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> This signifies that tourism and heritage can be interlinked in a positive way. Through the interest demonstrated by international tourists, one can be proud of one's own heritage. As one home-owner in Old Rauma put it; "once there were two couples here on the street and they asked about Naulamäki [area inside Old Rauma] in German. I had spare time so I took them there. They took a lot of photos and asked a lot about the buildings – that's when I ran out of knowledge. But it was actually an interesting experience, because apparently it was in itself exceptional, that they were interested in the old and they particularly wanted to see that specific area. Then I felt actually a little proud, that as a citizen of Rauma, I can show Germans, that we too have a place like this."<sup>16</sup> Clearly, within the World Heritage framework Old Rauma has been transformed into a more established space of tourist consumption, both inside the national 'hierarchy' and in terms of international tourism. World Heritage designation, thus, 'produces' tourist sites.

Furthermore it may be argued that tourism can 'produce' World Heritage sites. This is well illustrated by Kathleen Adams with reference to Indonesian Toraja village of Ke'te' Kesu'. Adams suggests that "most locales which successfully gain candidacy for UNESCO World Heritage site status are places that have undergone similar trajectories [as Ke'te' Kesu'], where local, national, and international forces have conspired, wittingly and unwittingly, to project these 'endangered' sites

---

Rauma conservation authorities, Rauma politicians etc.

<sup>15</sup> Interviews, see note 14 above.

<sup>16</sup> Interviews, see note 14 above.

onto the global stage”.<sup>17</sup> Like Ke'te' Kesu' most other World Heritage sites, in order to become prominent candidates for World Heritage status, had to be 'found' by tourists or scholars (historians, anthropologists).

#### **4. Gaining locally the World Heritage status usually improves the level of conservation in the designated site. This ‘naturalizing’ of the conservation dimension often supports certain functions and uses of the area, while marginalizing others.**

In case of Old Rauma, the designation of World Heritage status after the early-1990s strengthened the conservation and heritage-oriented discourse, which suggest further naturalization of the ‘historic city narrative’, and an increase in the local conservation authorities’ ‘symbolic ownership’ of Old Rauma. And even though the local conservation and planning authorities are committed to maintaining the functional diversity of Old Rauma, the predominant conservation discourse tends, at least implicitly, to support the residential and tourist use of the area. Consequently, this formation of the ‘tourist-historic city’ involves a challenge to the traditional and long-in-the-making role of Old Rauma as a central business district of the city of Rauma. Although the total number of shops located in Old Rauma has remained relatively unchanged (200), the structure of commercial services is becoming more tourist-oriented, even if slowly when compared to the commerciality and turistification of ‘great World Heritage cities’. Consequently, there are more restaurants, cafes, and gift, craft and art shops in Old Rauma now than thirty, or even ten years ago, and fewer shops selling groceries or domestic appliances. For example, there were ten grocery shops in the old town area in 1975 compared to three in 1991<sup>18</sup> and none today. Thus, one line of critique against Old Rauma’s World Heritage designation on the part of some Old Rauma shopkeepers relates to the understanding of the designation as one factor decreasing the liveliness and authenticity of the area, and transforming commercial activities from being every-day life oriented to more tourist-oriented.

#### **5. The expectations of tourism can 'rewrite' the historical narrative of the World Heritage site**

Two-thirds of the houses in Old Rauma were furnished with the Neo-Renaissance lining at the end

---

<sup>17</sup> Adams, Kathleen M., ‘The politics of heritage in Tana Toraja, Indonesia: Interplaying the local and the global’. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 31, No. 89, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Koivula, Jukka et al. (eds), *Old Rauma*. Rauma: Rauman museo 1992.33-34.

of the nineteenth century. It is natural that this style which is related to the end of the 'great' sailing-ship era in Rauma, has a prominent role as part of the presentation of the World Heritage site Old Rauma for purpose of tourism.<sup>19</sup> Yet, some interviewees see a danger in over-emphasizing of the 1890s' Neo-Renaissance in restorations and interpretations of Old Rauma at the expense of other periods and styles, such as the early-twentieth century Jugend.<sup>20</sup> For example, a Jugend style lining of an Old Rauma building was converted into an earlier Neo-Renaissance appearance at the end of 1990s,<sup>21</sup> a rare but powerful symbolic example of attempting to make the built urban structure better fit the established image.

From the early-1990s there has also been a tendency to restore the over-large shop-windows from the 1950s and 1960s to their earlier, usually early-twentieth century appearance. So far, these measures have been welcomed by the conservation authorities as clear improvements in terms of the townscape, which they undoubtedly are, especially when connected to the overall restoration of the buildings. Replacing all the 1950s and 1960s shop windows would mean, however, the disappearance of one historic layer, the expansion of commerce in the old town after the Second World War, even if this phase appears architecturally unattractive from today's perspective.

---

<sup>19</sup> Rauma tourism brochures.

<sup>20</sup> Interviews, see note 14 above.

<sup>21</sup> *Toiveet ja todellisuus. Satakunnan rakennusperinnön hoito –projekti 1998-2000*, 82.