

Germany's new Tentative List for World Heritage is a Step in the Wrong Direction

Germany must set other priorities

Berlin, December 6, 2023: World Heritage Watch considers Germany's new list of sites proposed for World Heritage nomination (the so-called Tentative List) just published by the Conference of Ministers of Culture of the Länder to be a misguided step.

It resembles a compulsive act more than an factually well-founded decision to continue nominating new World Heritage sites, driven by state governments and county chiefs who are often guided by motives that have nothing to do with the World Heritage Convention, such as the promotion of tourism or the acquisition of additional funding for monuments whose preservation could not be secured from their regular budgets. For the independent observer, many of the sites now nominated raise the question of where their "outstanding universal value" lies which would justify their classification as "common heritage of humanity".

With its policy, Germany is undermining UNESCO's goal of achieving a globally balanced number of World Heritage sites. For many years, the gap between the countries of the Global North, which already have a large number of World Heritage sites, and the Global South has been widening instead of closing. Germany actively contributes to this by regularly exhausting the maximum number of nominations allowed per year.

In addition, German nominations weaken the basic idea of the international World Heritage Convention that sites should be inscribed on the World Heritage List for which the international community assumes an obligation to save them when a country alone would be overwhelmed by this task. For a rich country like Germany, however, such a situation is inconceivable.

Many experts agree that the total number of World Heritage sites must be limited. The task of monitoring 1,199 sites worldwide is already pushing UNESCO to the limits of its capacity. Germany, which already has 52 sites on the World Heritage List, should therefore set an example and voluntarily refrain from further nominations.

Instead, an international discussion is needed on how a limitation of the list agreed by the entire international community can be achieved. Germany, with its soft power, would be one of the few countries in a position to initiate such a discussion.

The Tentative List also sets the wrong priorities, as Germany is increasingly failing to protect the sites already inscribed on the World Heritage List, such as the Wadden Sea, the Old Town of Goslar and the Upper Middle Rhine Valley. Germany has just been warned by UNESCO that the planned expanded oil and gas exploration in the Wadden Sea will lead to its inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger and eventual removal from the World Heritage List. Goslar, where 20-30% of the Old Town is dilapidated, is obviously overburdened with the maintenance of its World Heritage Site. The hundreds of thousands of Euros that each nomination now costs would therefore be better spent on preserving existing World Heritage

sites than on inscribing new ones, which would further increase Germany's international obligations.

In the case of the now nominated Waldsiedlung Zehlendorf, dogmatic conservationists have antagonized local residents, who have campaigned for a balance between climate-friendly renovation and monument protection, to such an extent that the majority of them now reject the World Heritage nomination which they initially supported. The Conference of Culture Ministers apparently believes that it can disregard the position of the population while UNESCO continues to call for an effective participation of the local population in World Heritage nominations.

World Heritage Watch urgently calls on the German federal states to revise their World Heritage policy, to refrain from further nominations, and to give higher priority to the preservation of existing World Heritage sites. We call on the Federal Foreign Office, as the ministry responsible for UNESCO matters, to refrain from submitting any further World Heritage nominations to UNESCO for the time being and instead take the lead in crafting a German World Heritage policy in line with international necessities and UNESCO decisions.

PS:

In order to counter the global biodiversity crisis, Germany should continue to nominate natural sites and cultural landscapes for the World Heritage List.

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