

Research

## UNESCO world heritage branding: learning from some cases in Asia

Johannes Widodo <sup>1,\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> National University of Singapore; 4 Architecture Drive, Singapore 117566;  
jwidodo@nus.edu.sg; ORCID number 0000-0003-2522-7351

\* Correspondence: [jwidodo@nus.edu.sg](mailto:jwidodo@nus.edu.sg)

Received Date: March 15, 2023

Revised Date: July 31, 2023

Accepted Date: July 31, 2023

Cite This Article:

Widodo, J. (2023). UNESCO world heritage branding: learning from some cases in Asia. *Journal of City: Branding and Authenticity*, 1(1), 12-23.

<https://doi.org/10.61511/jcbau.v1i1.2023.21>



Copyright: © 2023 by the authors.

Submitted for possible open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

### Abstract

UNESCO World Heritage listing is often misunderstood as branding to promote mass tourism or as a vehicle for economic development by a city or the state party. The reflection is aimed to shed light on the fundamental principles that underlie the listing and the integration of the World Heritage scheme with the Sustainable Development Policy. The reflection is done through the case study method of a specific real-life phenomenon in Asia to gain insights into complex and intricate situations and highlight the common misunderstanding through several cases. The study found the policy bias towards investment and tourism agenda and not towards the fulfilment of public welfare, often without ethics applying the top-down policy. The study also found evidence of irreversible damages to tangible and intangible aspects of cultural and natural heritage due to gentrification, commodification, decreasing carrying capacity, and loss of authenticity. The study aims to understand better the four pillars of integrating the World Heritage and Sustainable Development policy in achieving environmental sustainability, inclusive social development, inclusive economic development, and fostering peace and security.

**Keywords:** city branding; cultural heritage preservation; sustainable development; UNESCO World Heritage

### 1. Introduction

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, is known for its efforts in promoting and protecting cultural heritage and promoting sustainable development (Centre, n.d.-e). One way it does this is through "branding" initiatives, which aim to promote cultural heritage sites and practices to increase awareness, tourism, and economic opportunities while preserving and protecting cultural heritage.

In the Asian context, many cultural heritage sites have been branded using UNESCO World Heritage listing, such as the Angkor Wat in Cambodia, the Great Wall of China, and the Taj Mahal in India. These sites attract millions of visitors annually and generate significant economic benefits for the local communities. However, the branding of cultural heritage sites also raises important questions about the balance between preservation and development. On the one hand, branding can increase awareness and appreciation of cultural heritage, leading to better preservation and protection of these sites. On the other hand, it can also lead to over-tourism, degradation of the sites, and exploitation of local communities and cultural practices. Therefore, UNESCO's branding initiatives must consider the potential impact on cultural heritage sites and local communities. They should balance economic development and cultural preservation, promoting sustainable tourism practices that benefit tourists and the local communities.

UNESCO's branding initiatives have the potential to play a vital role in promoting cultural heritage preservation and sustainable development in the Asian context. Still, they must be

implemented carefully and thoughtfully to ensure their benefits outweigh their potential negative impacts. Branding should include more than well-known cultural heritage sites but have lesser-known cultural practices and traditions that are in danger of disappearing. This would help preserve these practices and provide economic opportunities for local communities.

Yet, for various reasons, UNESCO World Heritage status is sometimes misinterpreted as a branding tool to promote mass tourism or as a vehicle for economic development by a city or state party, leading to the commodification, exploitation, and neglect of cultural heritage sites (*World Heritage Watch Report – World Heritage Watch, n.d.*).

The UNESCO World Heritage label is associated with prestige and recognition globally. Many cities or state parties view the listing as a marketing tool to promote tourism, attract investment, and boost economic development. This approach often commodifies cultural heritage, reducing it to a product consumed by tourists rather than a site of significance for the local community. For example, the inclusion of Machu Picchu, a UNESCO World Heritage site, has led to the development of tourism infrastructure in the surrounding area, resulting in overcrowding, degradation of the site, and the displacement of the local population (*Larson & Poudyal, 2012*).



Figure. 1 (a & b) The ancient town was inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1999 as “an exceptionally well-preserved example of a South-East Asian trading port dating from the 15th to the 19th century”. It has been turned into a “theme park” for mass tourism.

(Source: Author. 2016)

The criteria for UNESCO World Heritage listing focus on the "outstanding universal value" of a site, which can be interpreted in many ways. In some cases, this has led to the nomination of sites with little cultural or historical significance but are included for their economic potential. This approach can lead to the over-inflation of a site's importance and,

in some cases, its exploitation. For example, in the case of the historic city of Dubrovnik in Croatia, its UNESCO listing has been used to promote mass tourism, leading to overcrowding, degradation of the site, and the displacement of the local population (*Uncontrolled Tourism Threatens Balkan UNESCO Sites | Balkan Insight, n.d.*).

Promoting a balanced approach prioritising cultural preservation, sustainable tourism practices, and community involvement is essential to prevent this. The UNESCO World Heritage status and the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are closely related (*THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development, n.d.*). The World Heritage sites have been recognised as important for achieving many SDGs, including Goal 11, which focuses on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. World Heritage sites can play a significant role in achieving this goal by promoting sustainable tourism, protecting cultural heritage, and promoting economic development that benefits local communities (*Goal 11, n.d., p. 11*). Additionally, preserving these sites can help promote education and awareness of the importance of cultural heritage and the need to protect it for future generations.

Furthermore, the World Heritage status is also related to other SDGs, such as Goal 4 on quality education, Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth, Goal 12 on responsible consumption and production, and Goal 13 on climate action. For example, preserving World Heritage sites can provide employment opportunities for local communities, contributing to economic growth and decent work (Goal 8). The sustainable management of these sites can also promote responsible consumption and production (Goal 12), reducing waste and promoting sustainable practices. Finally, the conservation of these sites can contribute to climate action (Goal 13), as they can serve as carbon sinks and promote biodiversity conservation (*Centre, n.d.-e*).

## 2. Methods

A case study method is a research approach that involves a detailed examination of a specific real-life phenomenon to gain insights into complex and intricate situations (*Calhoun, 2002*). In the case of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Asia, the case study method can be used to examine the complexities of cultural heritage preservation and sustainable development, particularly in relation to city branding and unsustainable development (*World Heritage and Sustainable Development, n.d.*)

One common misunderstanding of UNESCO World Heritage Sites is that they are often used as a branding tool for cities to promote tourism and economic development, leading to unsustainable development practices. To highlight this misunderstanding, we can examine several cases of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Asia and how they have been impacted by city branding and unsustainable development practices.

Melaka in Malaysia, Luang Prabang in Laos, Galle in Sri Lanka, and Lijiang in China are chosen as good examples of the complexity and pitfalls of implementing UNESCO branding in urban development and conservation in Asia for several reasons:

- a. Cultural diversity and complexity: Each destination has a rich cultural heritage that is complex and diverse. This can make reconciling tourism development with cultural preservation challenging, as the two can often be at odds. Additionally, competing interests and viewpoints within the local community can make it difficult to reach a consensus on the best way to proceed with development and conservation efforts.
- b. Balancing tourism development and conservation: These popular tourist destinations challenge balancing tourism development with conservation efforts. The influx of tourists can strain local resources, and development can sometimes be at odds with conservation efforts.

- c. Implementation and management: Implementing UNESCO branding in urban development and conservation requires effective management and governance. This includes ensuring that sustainable development and cultural preservation efforts are effective. It also requires effective communication and collaboration between stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, and international organisations.
- d. Pitfalls and challenges: Despite efforts to reconcile tourism development with cultural preservation and environmental conservation, challenges and pitfalls can still arise. These can include issues with governance and management, conflicts over resources and priorities, and challenges with implementing effective conservation measures.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Case Studies

The following case studies demonstrate the complexities of cultural heritage preservation and sustainable development in Asia, particularly in relation to city branding and unsustainable development practices. They also highlight the importance of using the case study method to gain insights into these complex issues and to challenge common misunderstandings related to UNESCO World Heritage Sites as branding tools for unsustainable development.

##### 3.1.2. Case 1: Melaka in Malaysia

Melaka is a city in Malaysia that, together with George Town, was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008 (Centre, n.d.-a). The city has a rich cultural heritage reflected in its architecture, traditions, and cuisine. However, the city's rapid development in recent years has raised concerns about preserving its cultural heritage and the sustainability of its development.

One of the complexities of cultural heritage preservation in Melaka is the tension between preserving the city's historic character and promoting economic development. The city has been marketed as a tourism destination, attracting millions of yearly visitors. However, the influx of tourists has put pressure on the city's infrastructure and caused damage to its historic buildings and cultural heritage sites. From December 2008 to December 2021, the average number of tourists visiting Melaka was 9,098,000 people, with a high of 13,979,000 people in 2019 and a low of 2,700,000 people in 2008. In 2021, the number was estimated to be 3,878,140. This is a drop from the prior 2020 estimate of 7,275,000 people (Malaysia Domestic Tourism: Number of Visitors: Melaka | Economic Indicators | CEIC, n.d.).

The city has faced significant challenges related to unsustainable development practices, including the destruction of historic buildings and violations within the core and buffer zones of the designated World Heritage site. The definition and designation of the city's historic core and buffer zone are erroneous and have failed to conserve the community's true heritage.



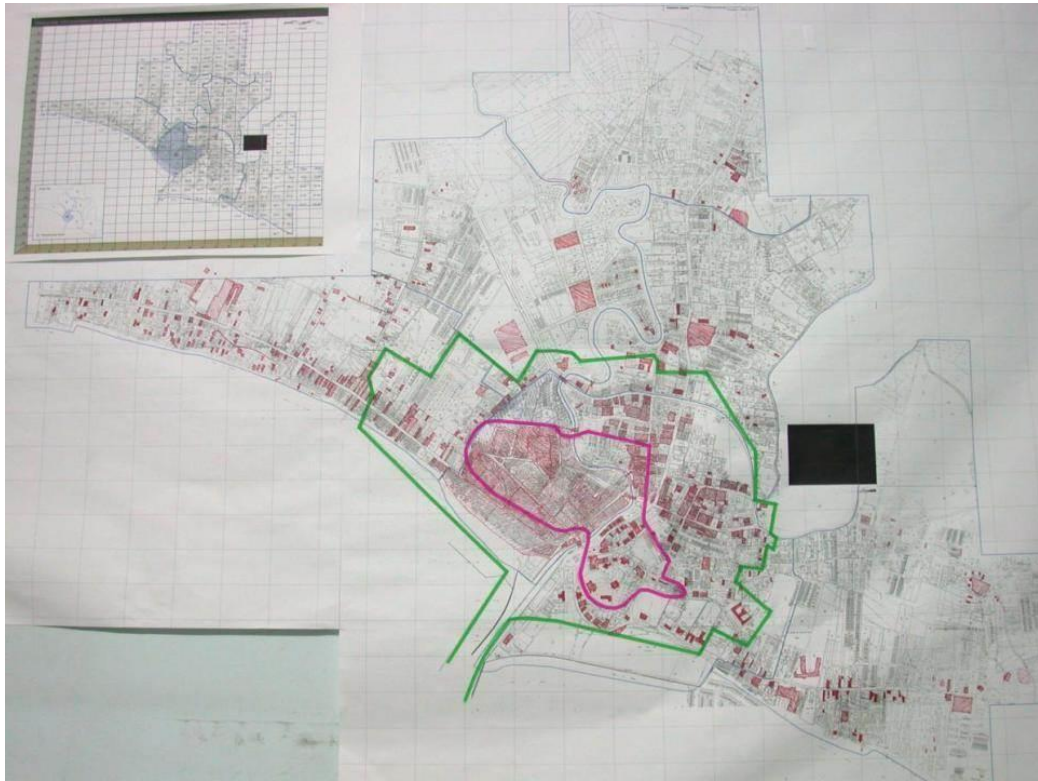


Figure 2. The map of a comprehensive bottom-up inventory of historically significant sites (pink) in Melaka, Malaysia, was carried out by mAAN (modern Asian Architecture Network) with the local community in 2003, shows misalignment with the superimposed top-down designation of the UNESCO World Heritage core and buffer zone area (pink and green lines) (Source: Author. 2004)

Weak heritage protection laws and regulations (such as the transfer of development rights, land-rent control, zoning regulations, etc.), weak implementation and monitoring, and speculative developments have allowed inappropriate transformations and uncontrolled development within the historic core and buffer zones. The historic "Padang Melaka" or "Padang Pahlawan" in Melaka, where Tunku Abdul Rahman, the founding father of Malaysia, made an official statement that the British had consented to grant independence Malaysia on 31 August 1957, has been turned into a large shopping mall (Widodo, 2011).

Melaka also has a complex relationship between cultural heritage preservation and sustainable development. While tourism has brought economic opportunities to the city, it has also contributed to environmental degradation and social inequality. The growth of the tourism industry has led to an increase in waste and pollution and traffic jams, especially during weekends and holidays, and the benefits of tourism have yet to be equally distributed among the local community.

### 3.1.2. Case 2: Luang Prabang in Laos

Luang Prabang is a city in Laos inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995 (Centre, n.d.-d). Its historic temples, colonial architecture, and traditional practices reflect the city's rich cultural heritage. However, the UNESCO branding initiatives in Luang Prabang have been criticised for contributing to the city's unsustainable development and cultural commodification.

One of the problems with the UNESCO branding in Luang Prabang is the emphasis on the city's "exotic" and "authentic" character, which has led to commodifying its cultural heritage. This has transformed traditional practices and customs into commercial products for the tourism industry. For example, traditional textiles and handicrafts are being produced on a larger scale and sold as souvenirs, leading to a loss of authenticity and cultural significance. Additionally, the UNESCO branding has contributed to the displacement of local communities and the loss of traditional practices and customs. The city's rapid development has resulted in the demolition of traditional houses and the displacement of local communities, leading to the loss of cultural identity and community cohesion.

Another area for improvement with the UNESCO branding in Luang Prabang is the emphasis on tourism development as a means of economic growth, which has resulted in increased waste and pollution. The construction of new hotels and commercial buildings has destroyed the city's historical and cultural heritage sites. However, on the social and economic sides, the city has been cited as a good example of the successful implementation of sustainable tourism. Luang Prabang has implemented community-based tourism initiatives that involve local communities in tourism activities, such as homestays and traditional handicraft workshops. The city promotes responsible tourism practices, such as reducing waste, conserving water and energy, and supporting local businesses and products. They have developed eco-tourism initiatives that promote the conservation of natural resources, such as wildlife and forests, through activities such as trekking and river cruises. The city has fostered developmental tourism by supporting small businesses, creating job opportunities, and investing in tourism infrastructure that meets tourists' needs while preserving the local environment and cultural heritage.

### 3.1.3. *Case 3: Galle in Sri Lanka*

Galle is a city in Sri Lanka inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1988 (Centre, n.d.-b). The city is known for its historic fortifications and colonial architecture, which reflect its rich cultural heritage. However, the UNESCO branding initiatives in Galle have been criticised for contributing to the city's unsustainable development and cultural commodification. The city has faced significant challenges related to unsustainable development practices, including the construction of high-rise buildings and the destruction of historic buildings.

One of the problems with the UNESCO branding in Galle is the emphasis on the city's colonial past, which has led to the marginalisation of its diverse cultural heritage. The emphasis on colonial architecture has overshadowed the city's diverse cultural heritage, which includes pre-colonial and indigenous traditions. This has resulted in a commodification of cultural heritage that prioritises Western tourists' interests, leading to the marginalisation of the local communities. Additionally, the UNESCO branding has contributed to the displacement of local communities and the loss of traditional practices and customs. The city's rapid development has resulted in the demolition of traditional houses and the displacement of local communities, leading to the loss of cultural identity and community cohesion.

Tourism growth has had some good effects on Galle Fort, such as the appearance of new business prospects, increased local income, enhanced employment chances, and attracting foreign investment opportunities. Nonetheless, property prices are inflated, tourism employment is seasonal, and the current pandemic has had a significant impact. Tourism money has resulted in the conservation and

preservation of Galle Fort, but it is also causing gentrification, which threatens the authenticity and integrity of the constructed and living culture there. Tourism has a detrimental effect, such as pollution from solid waste, an excessive amount of trash, a lack of awareness about littering, particularly among domestic visitors, an inadequate waste collection system, and an overuse of public transportation and road infrastructure (Libby Owen-Edmunds, AdLib Consulting, 2009).

However, Galle has successfully balanced its UNESCO city branding with conserving its cultural and natural heritage through sustainable tourism practices, cultural events, conservation efforts, and preservation of its historic fortifications. Today, the fortifications are well-preserved and glimpse the city's colonial past. Galle has implemented sustainable tourism practices that prioritise the conservation of its natural and cultural heritage. For example, the city encourages visitors to use bicycles and electric vehicles instead of cars, which reduces pollution and congestion in the city. The city hosts cultural events throughout the year that celebrate the city's diverse heritage. The Galle Literary Festival, for example, brings together writers, poets, and intellectuals from around the world to discuss literature and culture. Galle has also implemented conservation efforts to preserve its natural heritage. The city's marine conservation program protects coral reefs and marine life. The city also has a bird sanctuary that provides a habitat for various bird species.

#### 3.1.4. Case 4: Lijiang in China

Lijiang is a UNESCO World Heritage Site located in Yunnan Province, China, listed in 2012 (Centre, n.d.-c). It is known for its well-preserved ancient city and traditional Naxi culture. The city has experienced rapid development and urbanisation in recent years, resulting in concerns about preserving its cultural heritage and the sustainability of its development.

One of the complexities of cultural heritage preservation in Lijiang is the tension between preserving the traditional culture of the Naxi people and promoting tourism. The city has been marketed as a cultural and heritage hub, attracting millions of tourists yearly. according to the China Tourism Academy, Lijiang received over 23 million domestic and international visitors in 2019. This influx of tourists has put pressure on the city's infrastructure and caused damage to its historic buildings and cultural heritage sites. It's worth noting that due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the number of tourists may have changed significantly in recent times (Visitor Arrival: Yunnan: Lijiang | Economic Indicators | CEIC, n.d.).

Another complexity is the impact of urbanisation on the traditional culture of the Naxi people. The rapid development of Lijiang has resulted in the displacement of local communities and the loss of traditional practices and customs. Lijiang's relationship between cultural heritage preservation and sustainable development is also complex. While tourism has brought economic opportunities to the city, it has also contributed to environmental degradation and social inequality. The growth of the tourism industry has led to an increase in waste and pollution, and the benefits of tourism have yet to be equally distributed among the local community (Baoying & Yuanqing, 2007), (Su & Teo, 2008).

Like many other cities in China, Lijiang also faces significant pollution problems. One of the main sources of pollution in Lijiang is industrial activities, particularly in the nearby cities of Dali and Kunming. These cities have many factories that emit

pollutants into the air and water, which can travel to Lijiang and contribute to its pollution. Another major source of pollution in Lijiang is transportation. The city has experienced rapid growth in recent years, leading to an increase in the number of vehicles on the roads. As a result, the air quality in Lijiang has been severely impacted, with high levels of particulate matter and other pollutants. The pollution problem in Lijiang is not just limited to the air. Industrial activities and agricultural practices have also contaminated the city's water supply. In addition, the excessive use of pesticides and fertilisers in the region has led to soil pollution, which can also negatively impact the environment and human health (Xu et al., 2016).

Lijiang in China has faced some challenges that have put it at risk in recent years. These challenges include natural disasters, urbanisation, tourism pressure, and conservation. Lijiang is located in a region of China prone to earthquakes, landslides, and other natural disasters. In 2014, a magnitude 6.5 earthquake struck the area, causing damage to some of the city's historic buildings and infrastructure. The city has experienced rapid urbanisation recently, with new development and construction projects encroaching on the historic old town. This has raised concerns about the impact of modern development on the city's traditional architecture and cultural heritage.

Despite efforts to preserve Lijiang's heritage, there have been challenges in maintaining and restoring the city's traditional buildings and infrastructure. Some buildings have been renovated in ways that do not adhere to traditional building practices, raising concerns about the authenticity of the city's heritage.



Figure 2. Mass tourism in Lijiang, China  
(Source: Author. 2009)



While Lijiang is facing some challenges, efforts are being made to address these issues and preserve the city's heritage. The Chinese government has implemented measures to strengthen earthquake resilience in the area, and there have been efforts to promote sustainable tourism and involve the local community in conservation efforts. However, continued attention and efforts are needed to ensure the long-term conservation of this important World Heritage Site (McCartney & Chen, 2020).

The cases presented above highlight the complexities of cultural heritage preservation and sustainable development in the context of city branding and urbanisation. It underscores balancing economic development with preserving cultural heritage and promoting sustainable practices. The case also demonstrates the need for effective governance and planning to ensure that the benefits of tourism and urbanisation are shared equitably. That cultural heritage is preserved for future generations.

### 3.2. City Branding, UNESCO World Heritage & Sustainable Development Goals

The UNESCO branding has been problematic due to the commodification of cultural heritage, unsustainable development practices, and the displacement of local communities. It can also be problematic due to the marginalisation of diverse cultural heritage, unsustainable development practices, and the displacement of local communities. To address these issues, it is essential to prioritise sustainable and equitable development practices that respect and preserve the cultural heritage and identity of the city's local communities.

The number of UNESCO World Heritage sites that have been added to the World Heritage in Risk list continues to rise (Centre, n.d.-f). The list is designed to inform the international community of conditions which threaten the very characteristics for which a property was inscribed on the World Heritage List, and to encourage corrective action. During the General Assembly that took place in Mexico in 1999, ICOMOS members gave their approval to the Heritage@Risk programme. These papers have the purpose of identifying heritage places, monuments, and sites that are in danger, presenting typical case studies and trends, and exchanging ideas for resolving individual or global challenges to our cultural heritage (Heritage at Risk - International Council on Monuments and Sites, n.d.).

The UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of global goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015 to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all. The SDGs cover a range of issues, including poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace, justice and strong institutions, and partnerships for the goals.

City branding can be related to the SDGs as it allows cities to communicate their efforts and progress towards achieving the SDGs to residents and visitors. City branding can help raise awareness of the SDGs and encourage action towards achieving them by promoting sustainable practices, community engagement, and responsible tourism. For example, a city that promotes sustainable tourism and green infrastructure can contribute to achieving SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. A city that promotes gender equality and provides opportunities for women and girls can contribute to achieving SDG 5: Gender Equality. A city that promotes innovation and creativity can contribute to achieving SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.

Integrating the World Heritage status and Sustainable Development policy to achieve environmental sustainability and inclusive social and economic development is essential to foster peace and security (Centre, n.d.-e). The four pillars that are critical for achieving these goals are:

- a. **Environmental Sustainability:** Promoting sustainable development that addresses the challenges of environmental degradation, climate change, and biodiversity loss is essential. This can be achieved by adopting sustainable practices, such as reducing carbon emissions, promoting renewable energy, and protecting ecosystems and wildlife.
- b. **Inclusive Social Development:** It is essential to ensure that social development policies are inclusive and equitable, considering the needs and perspectives of different communities. This can be achieved by promoting social justice, gender equality, and human rights and ensuring all share development benefits.
- c. **Inclusive Economic Development:** Economic development policies must be inclusive and sustainable, promoting economic growth while creating opportunities for all. This can be achieved by promoting entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainable economic growth, creating jobs and promoting inclusive and sustainable tourism.
- d. **Fostering Peace and Security:** It is essential to ensure policies and practices are in place to promote peace and security, including conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives. This can be achieved by promoting social cohesion, cultural diversity, and intercultural dialogue and investing in education and research to promote understanding and cooperation.

Overall, the UN 17 SDGs provide a framework for cities to align their development efforts with global sustainability goals. In contrast, city branding can help communicate these efforts to residents and visitors, contributing to a more sustainable and equitable world. Developing sustainable tourism, eco-tourism, responsible tourism, and developmental tourism in UNESCO World Heritage cities require a holistic approach that considers the needs of the environment, the local community, and tourists.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Reflecting on UNESCO's "branding" in the light of cultural heritage preservation and sustainable development highlights the importance of balancing economic development with cultural and natural heritage preservation. While UNESCO branding can effectively promote cities and sites recognised for their cultural and natural significance, ensuring that this recognition does not lead to irreversible damages due to gentrification, commodification, decreasing carrying capacity, and loss of authenticity.

To achieve sustainable development and cultural heritage preservation, adopting a holistic and integrated approach that considers environmental sustainability, inclusive social development, inclusive economic development, and fostering peace and security is essential. This requires adopting sustainable practices, such as reducing carbon emissions, promoting renewable energy, protecting ecosystems and wildlife, promoting social justice, gender equality, and human rights, creating jobs and promoting sustainable tourism. It also requires policies and practices that promote social cohesion, cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, and investment in education and research to promote understanding and cooperation.

In conclusion, while UNESCO branding can be an effective tool for promoting cultural and natural heritage sites, it is essential to ensure that it is done in a way that supports sustainable development and cultural heritage preservation. This requires adopting a

holistic and integrated approach considering environmental sustainability, inclusive social and economic development, and fostering peace and security. By doing so, we can ensure that our cultural and natural heritage is preserved for future generations while promoting a more sustainable and equitable world.

The study has several limitations, such as limited geographical scope, which may not represent the diverse range of cultural and natural heritage sites worldwide. The study may have relied on secondary data sources, which may be biased towards the interests of certain stakeholders. The study may have relied on cross-sectional data, which may not provide insights into how the branding and development of cultural and natural heritage sites may change over time. The study may have faced challenges in measuring and evaluating the intangible aspects of cultural heritage, such as traditions, beliefs, and values, which may be difficult to quantify or measure. While the study provides valuable insights into the complexities and challenges of UNESCO branding in cultural heritage preservation and sustainable development, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations and consider them when interpreting the findings.

**Acknowledgement:**

Acknowledgement is given to reviewer and IASSSF team for the support of this paper.

**Author Contribution:**

J.W., carry out all the research processes from the preparation stage to the writing of the manuscript. Author has read and agrees to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:**

This research received no external funding.

**Ethical Review Board Statement:**

Not Applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:**

Not Applicable

**Data Availability Statement:**

No new data.

**Conflicts of Interest:**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**References**

- Baoying, N., & Yuanqing, H. (2007). Tourism Development and Water Pollution: Case Study in Lijiang Ancient Town. *China Population, Resources and Environment*, 17(5), 123–127. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1872-583X\(08\)60006-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1872-583X(08)60006-6)
- Calhoun, C. (2002). *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*. Oxford University Press.
- Centre, U. W. H. (n.d.-a). *Melaka and George Town, Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca*. UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Retrieved March 13, 2023, from <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1223/>
- Centre, U. W. H. (n.d.-b). *Old Town of Galle and its Fortifications*. UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Retrieved March 13, 2023, from <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/451/>
- Centre, U. W. H. (n.d.-c). *Old Town of Lijiang*. UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Retrieved March 13, 2023, from <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/811/>

- Centre, U. W. H. (n.d.-d). *Town of Luang Prabang*. UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Retrieved March 13, 2023, from <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/479/>
- Centre, U. W. H. (n.d.-e). *World Heritage and Sustainable Development*. UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Retrieved March 13, 2023, from <https://whc.unesco.org/en/sustainabledevelopment/>
- Centre, U. W. H. (n.d.-f). *World Heritage in Danger*. UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Retrieved March 15, 2023, from <https://whc.unesco.org/en/158/>
- Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities*. (n.d.). The Global Goals. Retrieved March 13, 2023, from <https://globalgoals.org/goals/11-sustainable-cities-and-communities/>
- Heritage at risk—International Council on Monuments and Sites*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2023, from <https://www.icomos.org/en/what-we-do/401-english-categories/what-we-do/heritage-at-risk>
- Larson, L. R., & Poudyal, N. C. (2012). Developing sustainable tourism through adaptive resource management: A case study of Machu Picchu, Peru. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 20(7), 917–938.
- Libby Owen-Edmunds, AdLib Consulting. (2009). *A critical review of the Responsible Tourism issues in Galle Fort, Sri Lanka using the triple bottom line approach*.
- Malaysia Domestic Tourism: Number of Visitors: Melaka | Economic Indicators | CEIC*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2023, from <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/malaysia/domestic-tourism/domestic-tourism-number-of-visitors-melaka>
- McCartney, G., & Chen, Y. (2020). Co-Creation Tourism in an Ancient Chinese Town. *Journal of China Tourism Research*, 16(2), 159–182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19388160.2019.1596856>
- Su, X., & Teo, P. (2008). Tourism Politics in Lijiang, China: An Analysis of State and Local Interactions in Tourism Development. *Tourism Geographies - TOUR GEOGR*, 10, 150–168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616680801999992>
- THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 24, 2022, from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- Uncontrolled Tourism Threatens Balkan UNESCO Sites | Balkan Insight*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 13, 2023, from <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/04/17/uncontrolled-tourism-threatens-balkan-unesco-sites-04-13-2017/>
- Visitor Arrival: Yunnan: Lijiang | Economic Indicators | CEIC*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 13, 2023, from <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/china/visitor-arrival-prefecture-level-city/cn-visitor-arrival-yunnan-lijiang>
- Widodo, J. (2011). Melaka—A Cosmopolitan City in Southeast Asia. *Review of Culture - International Edition* 40. [https://www.academia.edu/3665723/Melaka\\_A\\_Cosmopolitan\\_City\\_in\\_Southeast\\_Asia](https://www.academia.edu/3665723/Melaka_A_Cosmopolitan_City_in_Southeast_Asia)
- World Heritage and Sustainable Development: New Directions in World Heritage Management*. (n.d.). Routledge & CRC Press. Retrieved March 13, 2023, from <https://www.routledge.com/World-Heritage-and-Sustainable-Development-New-Directions-in-World-Heritage/Larsen-Logan/p/book/9781138091405>
- World Heritage Watch Report – World Heritage Watch*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 13, 2023, from <https://world-heritage-watch.org/content/world-heritage-watch-report/>
- Xu, D., Wang, Y., Zhang, R., Guo, J., Zhang, W., & Yu, K. (2016). Distribution, speciation, environmental risk, and source identification of heavy metals in surface sediments from the karst aquatic environment of the Lijiang River, Southwest China. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, 23(9), 9122–9133. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-016-6147-x>