

**IMT Institute for Advanced Studies, Lucca
Lucca, Italy**

**Visitor Understanding of the UNESCO World
Heritage Brand: A Comparative Analysis**

**PhD Program in Management and Development
of Cultural Heritage
XXVII Cycle**

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2014**

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Abstract

The UNESCO World Heritage List has been lauded as a successful tourism attraction brand that motivates site nominations. However, there has been relatively little research that deals specifically with World Heritage brand attraction effects, and what does exist shows conflicting results. Therefore, there is a significant research gap in terms of visitor awareness of the World Heritage brand and its potential impact on visitation.

This study aims to understand the impact of the World Heritage brand on visitation through a comparative analysis of three case studies that were selected based on differences in their geographical location, cultural context, and level of social and economic development as measured by the Human Development Index. Surveys were distributed at three sites: Independence Hall, USA; Studenica Monastery, Serbia; and The Archaeological Site of Volubilis, Morocco.

Visitors to Serbia and Morocco are much more World Heritage aware, implying that they know both the World Heritage List and the site's status prior to visiting, in comparison with the USA. At all sites, these World Heritage aware visitors indicate that they have previously visited World Heritage sites. However, visitors are not motivated to visit individual sites based on World Heritage status. Additionally, while there is a definite segment with awareness of the World Heritage List and its sites, members of this group are not motivated by such awareness to actually visit the site.

It is concluded that World Heritage may be a placebo brand, and that its importance may be tied more to political interests than economic advancement. Thus, dependency on the World Heritage List for tourism development may potentially be detrimental for locations in the long-term.