

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (UNESCO)

STUDY GUIDE

Safeguarding Archaeological and Historic Sites
through Sustainable Tourism and Community
Engagement to Ensure the Long-Term
Protection of Cultural Heritage

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MUNIFL'26

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Letters from the Secretariat

Letter from the Secretary General

Esteemed Delegates, Dear Academic Team, Hardworking Organization Team, Advisors, Staff and Partners,

I would like to welcome all of you to the third official session of the Model United Nations of Izmir Science High School! I am Hazal KUŞ and I am more than proud to serve as your Secretary General in this amazing conference.

Our aim is to ensure that all of your needs are covered. While preparing for the conference, our executive, organization and academic teams worked really hard to provide you with everything and I would like to express my biggest appreciations to them for their efforts. We are sure that MUNIFL'26 will be the best conference you've ever been in!

During the conference, you will not only be a part of diplomacy and discussing current topics, but you will also engage in meaningful debates, exchange diverse perspectives, and develop critical thinking and communication skills. At the same time, you will create strong bonds with others, build lasting friendships, and gain unforgettable experiences that go beyond the formal sessions.

As the Secretary General of this conference, I suggest you to read your study guides properly and do research about your agenda item as it will make your experience even more productive. I hope you all will have a fantastic conference full of unforgettable memories.

Best Regards!

Hazal KUŞ
Secretary General

Letter from the Under Secretary General

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. My name is Sabri Yiğit Pune, and I'm currently studying at Övgü Terzibaşioğlu Anatolian High School as a junior, and I will be serving as your Under Secretary General for the upcoming three days.

I am honoured to serve as an Under Secretary General in this conference and guide you through these critical issues that demand not only a deep understanding of international affairs but also creative problem-solving and collaboration.

This study guide provides a detailed overview of each topic, including lots of context, current challenges, and key perspectives. I encourage you to use it as a starting point for your research, while also delving into your assigned country's stance to craft well-informed and realistic policy proposals.

I'm looking forward to seeing your contributions at the conference !

Best regards,

Sabri Yiğit Pune

Under Secretary General

Letter from the Academic Assistant

Dear Delegates,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to the third official session of the Model United Nations of Izmir Science High School. My name is Yağmur Erdem, and I will be serving as your Academic Assistant throughout this conference. I am a junior at Cahide Ahmet Dalyanoğlu Anatolian High School.

Our goal is not only to debate, but also to find realistic and practical solutions to the issues in our agenda. I encourage you to share your ideas, listen to others, and work together in a respectful and cooperative way. I strongly believe that this committee will provide an environment where all delegates can express their ideas freely and contribute meaningfully to the discussions.

The agenda item for this committee addresses an important and current issue that requires international cooperation and creative solutions. For this reason, I strongly encourage all delegates to conduct thorough research, learn about their countries' policies in depth, and actively participate in the discussions.

As your Academic Assistant, I will do my best to support you throughout the conference. If you have any questions regarding the study guide, the research process, committee procedures, or the agenda item, please do not hesitate to reach out to me or any other academic member of this committee. We would be more than happy to help you.

I hope this conference will be both an educational and unforgettable experience for all of you. I look forward to meeting you all.

Sincerely,

Yağmur Erdem

Academic Assistant

Introduction of the Committee

Overview of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a United Nations corporation to protect the world peace and security with international cooperation in the educational, artistic and scientific spheres. UNESCO was established with the vision of ensuring the lasting peace in the minds of people after two World Wars in less than thirty years with the justification of the economic and political agreements between states were not enough. The law of the UNESCO was accepted in London in November of 1945 at a meeting participated by representatives of 44 countries. UNESCO is headquartered in Paris and works to achieve its objectives in the fields of education, science, and culture through National Commissions established in each member state.

World Heritage List



(2024-2025 World Heritage Map)

The list, established by UNESCO to introduce the world to cultural and natural sites of universal value recognized as the common heritage of all humanity, and to raise public awareness in order to facilitate the cooperation necessary for the protection of cultural and natural sites that have been damaged or destroyed for various reasons, is known as the World

Heritage List. The World Heritage List includes 1,248 sites that are considered part of the cultural and natural heritage possessing outstanding universal value. These include 972 cultural, 235 natural, and 41 mixed sites located in 170 State Parties. As of October 2024, 196 State Parties have ratified the World Heritage Convention.

Introduction of the Agenda Item

***Agenda Item:** Safeguarding Archaeological and Historic Sites through Sustainable Tourism and Community Engagement to Ensure the Long-Term Protection of Cultural Heritage*

Definition of Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage can be understood as the collection of both tangible and intangible elements that societies inherit from previous generations. However, it is important to note that not everything from the past is automatically considered “heritage.” Instead, cultural heritage reflects a conscious decision by societies to value, preserve, and pass on certain elements that shape their identity.

This heritage includes tangible aspects such as historic buildings, monuments, landscapes, artworks, and artifacts, as well as intangible elements like traditions, languages, folklore, and shared knowledge. In addition, natural heritage (such as culturally significant landscapes and biodiversity) also forms an essential part of this concept. Today, the term is often used in discussions about protecting the intellectual and cultural rights of indigenous communities.

Efforts to safeguard cultural heritage are commonly referred to as “preservation” or “conservation”. These efforts are supported by institutions like museums and cultural centers, which play a key role in maintaining and promoting heritage. At the same time, protected cultural heritage has become a major driver of global tourism, contributing significantly to local economies and community development.

Importance of Archaeological and Historic Sites

Archaeological and historical sites are important areas that provide us with direct insight into humanity's past. These sites serve as tangible evidence of ancient civilizations and enable researchers and historians to study ancient cultures, technologies, and ways of life.

Beyond their academic significance, such sites play a vital role in shaping the cultures of societies. Through these sites, people learn about and embrace their traditions, achievements, and values. For example, sites like Göbekli Tepe, Machu Picchu, and Petra are not only historical landmarks but also symbols of national and global heritage.

Additionally, archaeological and historical sites make significant contributions to economic development through tourism. By attracting millions of visitors each year, they generate revenue and support local businesses.

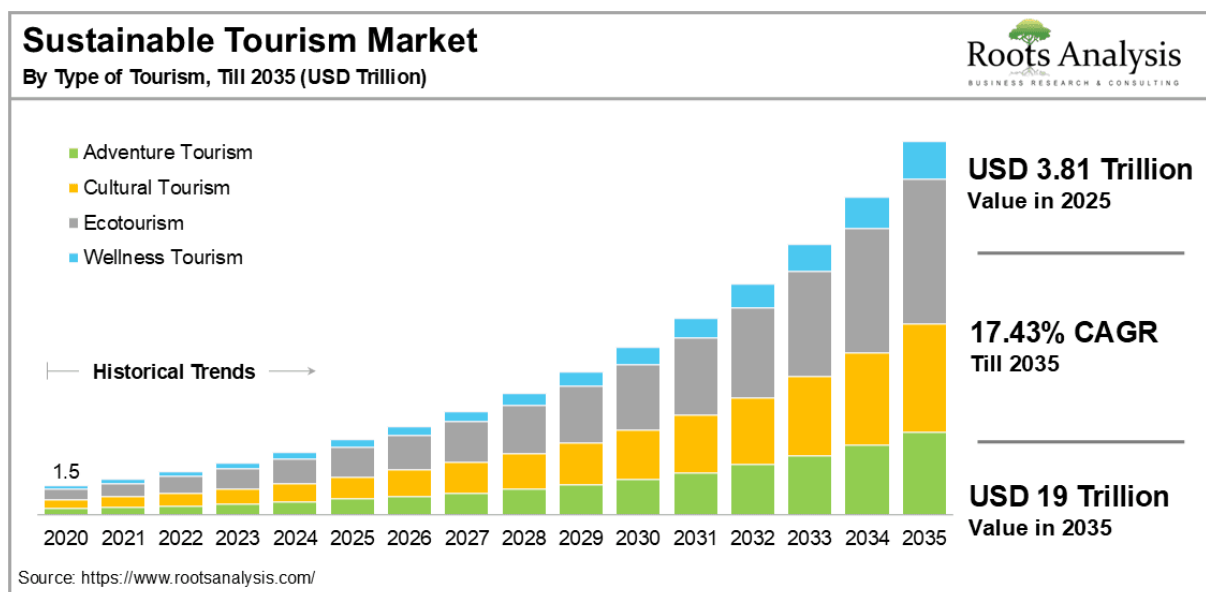
Finally, these sites hold educational and cultural value for future generations. They offer opportunities for intercultural dialogue and global awareness. Preserving them ensures that future societies can continue to learn from and appreciate the richness of human history; this makes their preservation not only a cultural necessity but also a shared global responsibility.



Overview of Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism refers to a form of tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and local communities without harming the ability of future generations to enjoy the same cultural and natural resources. Its main goal is to create a balance between economic development, environmental protection, and cultural preservation. Today, there is broad consensus that tourism must be sustainable. In fact, all forms of tourism have the potential to be sustainable when properly planned, developed, and managed. Tourism development organizations support sustainable tourism practices to mitigate the negative consequences resulting from tourism's growing impact, such as its environmental effects.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has highlighted these practices by promoting sustainable tourism as part of the Sustainable Development Goals through programs such as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism in 2017. There is a direct connection between sustainable tourism and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For the SDGs, tourism focuses on how it contributes to creating a sustainable economy through SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), and SDG 14 (life below water).



(Sustainable Tourism Market Overview)

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

1. No poverty
2. Zero hunger
3. Good health and well-being
4. Quality education
5. Gender equality
6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Affordable and clean energy
8. Decent work and economic growth
9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure
10. Reduced inequalities
11. Sustainable cities and communities
12. Responsible consumption and production
13. Climate action
14. Life below water
15. Life on land
16. Peace, justice, and strong institutions
17. Partnerships for the goals

Role of Community Engagement

Community participation plays a vital role in the protection and preservation of cultural heritage sites. Because these sites reflect the history, traditions, and cultural identity of local people, local communities are often the ones most closely connected to historical and archaeological sites. Therefore, involving local people in decision-making processes helps to create more effective and sustainable conservation strategies. When communities actively participate in heritage management, they are more likely to support conservation efforts and protect sites from threats such as vandalism, illegal excavations, and unregulated tourism. Community participation also fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility toward cultural heritage.

Furthermore, local participation can provide economic and social benefits. Sustainable tourism projects typically create employment opportunities for local residents through guiding services, traditional crafts, lodging, and cultural events. This allows communities to directly benefit from heritage conservation while preserving their cultural traditions.

Educational programs and awareness campaigns are also key components of community participation. By educating younger generations about the value of cultural heritage, communities can ensure the long-term preservation of historical and archaeological sites.

Historical Background

Evolution of Cultural Heritage Protection

The protection of cultural heritage became an international issue throughout the 20th century, especially as many historical sites were damaged or destroyed due to wars, urbanization, and environmental problems. With the advance of industrialization and modernization, many countries realized that important parts of human history could be lost if appropriate protection efforts were not made.

After World War II, the international community began to place greater value on the protection of cultural and historical values. In response to the damage caused by the war, UNESCO was established in 1945 to promote international cooperation in the fields of education, science, and culture. One of UNESCO's main responsibilities was to protect cultural heritage and encourage countries to work together to protect important historical sites.

In the following decades, awareness of heritage protection continued to grow. Governments, researchers, and international organizations began developing policies and projects aimed at protecting archaeological and historical sites from threats such as illegal excavations, environmental damage, armed conflicts, and neglect.

World Heritage Convention

The World Heritage Convention was accepted by UNESCO in 1972 with the aim of protecting cultural and natural heritage sites around the world. The Convention was established in response to growing international concern over the destruction of significant historical and natural sites caused by war, urbanization, pollution, and other human activities.

The World Heritage Convention: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/>

Current Situation

Threats to Archaeological and Historic Sites

There are many factors (some human-made and some natural) that threaten archaeological and historic sites. Some of these are:

Uncontrolled Tourism: Overcrowding, pollution, and littering harm the environment, while ongoing tourist activities can lead to structural damage and erosion. Additionally, acts of vandalism by visitors can cause permanent damage to valuable cultural heritage.

Armed Conflict and War: While conflicts can destroy monuments and historic cities, cultural objects are often stolen and illegally trafficked, leading to the loss of valuable historical and cultural objects.

Climate Change and Natural Disasters: Rising sea levels, floods, earthquakes, wildfires, and extreme weather conditions can damage ancient structures and speed up environmental damage, threatening the preservation of historical and archaeological sites.

Urbanization and Industrial Development: While construction projects and the expansion of cities and infrastructure can damage archaeological sites, historic districts are often ignored and lose their cultural value over time.

Illegal Excavation and Smuggling: Unauthorized excavations and the theft of artifacts cause valuable historical objects to be lost, while the damage to their context leads to the permanent loss of archaeological information.

Pollution: While air pollution damages stone structures, water pollution and industrial waste harm the historic environment and nearby archaeological sites.

Lack of Funding and Resource: Insufficient funding limits the scale of restoration projects, results in weak conservation techniques, and leads to poor site management, making it difficult to properly protect historic sites.

Lack of Public Awareness: The lack of public participation, ignorance about the value of cultural heritage, and weak educational programs are leading to the loss and even destruction of historic sites.

Unsustainable Tourism Practices: The commercialization of cultural sites, damage from tourism infrastructure, and disruption of local traditions and lifestyles all contribute to the degradation of historic and cultural environments.

Political Instability and Weak Governance: The lack of proper legal protection, the weak enforcement of heritage laws, and corruption or mismanagement increase the risk of damage to and abandonment of historic sites.

Impact of Mass Tourism

Mass tourism has become one of the most significant challenges facing cultural and historical heritage sites today. While tourism contributes to economic growth and raises global awareness of cultural heritage, uncontrolled and unsustainable tourism can lead to serious environmental, social, and cultural problems.

One of the most significant impacts of mass tourism is the physical damage to archaeological and historical sites. Large numbers of visitors can cause erosion, structural damage, pollution,

and vandalism, especially in sensitive areas not designed to handle high levels of tourist activity. Famous destinations like Machu Picchu and Venice have faced increasing pressure due to overcrowding and uncontrolled visitor numbers.

Lack of Local Community Involvement

The lack of local community involvement is one of the biggest obstacles to the effective protection of cultural heritage sites. Because these sites reflect the history, traditions, and cultural identity of local communities, local communities are often the groups most closely connected to archaeological and historical sites. When communities are excluded from decisions, protection efforts may become less sustainable and less successful in the long term.

A significant consequence of limited community participation is the weakening of public responsibility for heritage conservation. Without a sense of ownership, local residents may feel disconnected from protection projects and be less motivated to safeguard historic sites from threats such as vandalism, illegal diggings, or environmental damage.

The lack of community participation can also contribute to the loss of traditional knowledge and cultural practices. Therefore, encouraging local participation through education, employment opportunities, and cultural programs can strengthen both heritage conservation and the development of sustainable tourism.

Key Concepts and Terminology

Sustainable Tourism: Sustainable tourism refers to tourism practices that meet the needs of present tourists and local communities while protecting cultural and natural resources for future generations. It aims to balance economic growth, environmental protection, and cultural preservation by reducing the negative impacts of tourism.

Cultural Preservation: Cultural preservation is the process of protecting and maintaining cultural heritage, including historical sites, traditions, languages, artifacts, and cultural

practices. Its purpose is to ensure that valuable cultural elements are not lost or damaged over time.

Community-Based Conservation: Community-based conservation is an approach that actively involves local communities in the protection and management of cultural and natural heritage sites. This method encourages local participation, strengthens public awareness, and allows communities to benefit socially and economically from conservation efforts.

Heritage Management: Heritage management refers to the planning, protection, conservation, and administration of cultural and historical sites. It includes policies, legal regulations, restoration projects, tourism planning, and cooperation between governments, experts, and local communities to ensure the long-term sustainability of heritage areas.

Major Stakeholders

Governments and National Authorities

One of their primary responsibilities is establishing national laws and regulations related to heritage preservation. The laws may include restrictions on construction near historic sites, penalties for artifact smuggling, and policies supporting restoration and conservation projects. Governments also allocate funding for museums, archaeological research, and preservation programs.

International Organizations

- Blue Shield International
- International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)
- World Monuments Fund
- International Council of Museums (ICOM)
- International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM)

Local Communities

Their involvement helps ensure that conservation efforts are more realistic and culturally sensitive. Local people often have traditional knowledge about the land, materials, and historical practices that cannot be fully replaced by external experts. This knowledge can significantly improve how heritage sites are preserved and managed.

Private Sector and Tourism Industry

One of their main contributions is economic support. Tourism-related businesses generate income that can indirectly support conservation efforts by creating jobs, funding infrastructure, and increasing local revenue. In many regions, heritage tourism is a key part of the local economy, making the private sector an important stakeholder in preservation efforts.

Case Studies

Machu Picchu and Overtourism

Machu Picchu is a 15th century Inca archaeological site located in the Andes Mountains of Peru and is considered one of the world's most significant cultural heritage sites. Built during the reign of Inca Emperor Pachacuti, this site is renowned for its advanced stone architecture, agricultural terraces, and breathtaking mountain views. However, in recent years, Machu Picchu has become a clear example of the problems caused by overtourism; the high number of visitors places significant pressure on the site's fragile structures and the surrounding environment. Constant foot traffic contributes to the erosion of stone paths, while overcrowding strains both the site and the local infrastructure in nearby communities such as Aguas Calientes. In response, Peruvian authorities and UNESCO have implemented strict conservation measures (including daily visitor limits, timed entry systems, and regulated visitor routes) to reduce damage and ensure sustainable management.



(Picture of Machu Picchu, Peru)

Venice and Mass Tourism

Venice is a historic city in northeastern Italy built on more than 100 small islands connected by canals and bridges, making it one of the most unique urban settlements in the world. It developed as a powerful maritime republic during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, becoming a major center of trade, cultural exchange, and artistic development, which left behind an exceptional architectural heritage including palaces, churches, and Renaissance artworks. Today, Venice is also one of the clearest examples of how mass tourism can threaten a cultural heritage site, as millions of visitors each year create overcrowding in narrow streets, strain local infrastructure, increase waste, and contribute to the gradual erosion of historic buildings and canals. At the same time, rising housing costs and the commercialization of services have led many local residents to leave the city center, weakening its traditional community structure. Combined with environmental threats such as rising sea levels and frequent flooding, these pressures make Venice highly vulnerable. For this reason, organizations such as UNESCO and local authorities promote sustainable tourism measures, including visitor regulation, cruise ship restrictions, and conservation programs aimed at protecting both the physical city and its cultural identity.



(Picture of Venice, Italy)

Petra and Site Degradation

Petra is a world-renowned archaeological site in southern Jordan, famous for its rock-cut architecture carved into pink sandstone cliffs, including iconic structures such as Al-Khazneh, tombs, temples, and an advanced ancient water management system developed by the Nabataeans. However, the site is increasingly affected by degradation caused by both natural and human factors. Because sandstone is relatively soft, long-term erosion from wind, rain, and temperature changes gradually wears away carved surfaces, while flash floods can damage pathways and accelerate structural weakening. At the same time, high levels of tourism place additional pressure on the site through constant foot traffic, physical wear on pathways, and strain on fragile areas. Climate change further intensifies these risks by increasing the frequency of extreme weather events and altering environmental conditions that speed up deterioration. In response, Jordanian authorities and organizations such as UNESCO have implemented conservation measures, including visitor management strategies, monitoring systems, and restoration projects aimed at balancing sustainable tourism with the long-term preservation of Petra.



(Picture of Petra, Jordan)

Questions to Ponder

1. How can the international community define and prioritize the most urgent threats to archaeological and historic sites?
2. What regulations can effectively reduce overcrowding without limiting global access to heritage sites?
3. How can cultural heritage be better protected during armed conflicts?
4. How can heritage sites be adapted to survive rising sea levels, floods, and extreme weather?
5. How can historic districts be protected from modernization pressures?
6. How can governments balance economic development with the protection of archaeological sites?
7. How can international cooperation be improved to stop artifact trafficking networks?
8. How can developing countries be supported in conserving their heritage sites?
9. How can education systems better include cultural heritage awareness?
10. What strategies can increase youth participation in heritage protection?
11. How can tourism be redesigned to minimize damage to cultural identity and local traditions?

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