Heritage, Pride and Place

Exploring the contribution of World Heritage Site status
to Liverpool's sense of place and future development

Executive Summary

Project Research Team

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Introduction

The decision by UNESCO to place the Liverpool World Heritage Site on the 'List of World Heritage in Danger' has left the future of the site in serious doubt. Yet the very real possibility of removal from the World Heritage List has so far failed to persuade local authorities to revise or reconsider the controversial Liverpool Waters redevelopment plans that led to UNESCO's decision, whilst also appearing to have done little to galvanise local public support for the site. This rather apathetic response to the potential delisting of the site, which has been discernible not only among members of the public but also among local politicians and business people, arguably reflects a widespread perception that there have been few significant benefits of the designation. However, these perceptions are underpinned by a seemingly weak awareness and knowledge of the site, with few efforts having been undertaken thus far to assess the actual value of the site to the city region.

Against this backdrop, the current study offers a valuable and timely assessment of the impact of the WHS designation and considers opportunities and challenges for the city to make the most of its World Heritage Site. Employing a holistic approach to assessment that acknowledges the essential value of the social and cultural dimensions of the WHS, in addition to their instrumental role in facilitating desirable economic impacts, the study seeks to answer the following four key research questions, each of which addresses an issue of particular salience within the current policy context:

- Does Liverpool's WHS contribute to the **sense of pride of place** that local people and communities feel for their city?

- What are the **cultural, economic and image-related impacts** of the Liverpool WHS?

- What more could be done in the future to **capitalise on WHS status**?

- What **risks** are posed by the **potential loss of WHS status** for the city?

In order to tackle these research questions, the study took its lead from the methodologies applied by the *Impacts 08* research programme into the multiple impacts of the Liverpool European Capital of Culture 2008. The mixed method approach used by the study, which allowed the contextualisation and collation of a broad range of views regarding the Liverpool WHS, involved six parallel data collection methods:

- A **literature review** that included reports, academic articles and books that examine the World Heritage programme at a national and international level

- **Promotional analysis** of material where the Liverpool WHS was likely to be featured as a tool for the promotion of tourism or city branding

- **Media analysis** of 337 press articles on the Liverpool WHS between August 1998 and June 2012

- **Stakeholder interviews** with 15 people that contribute to Liverpool's brand positioning and image narrative – these stakeholders include those involved in the management and promotion of Liverpool's visitor economy, estate agents, developers and journalists

- Three **focus groups** with Liverpool citizens (one in the Anfield area of North Liverpool and two in the city centre), which explored attitudes to the WHS and the wider heritage asset base of the city

- An **online citizen survey** of people residing in the city, which also gauged attitudes to the WHS and the wider heritage base of the city, whilst at the same time seeking to measure respondents' knowledge of the title

The following sections summarise the key findings from this study, with detailed findings from each of the research methods available as dedicated appendices.

Headline findings

Sense of pride in the city

- **The Liverpool WHS contributes significantly to people's sense of pride** in the city, which is something they feel they can celebrate more openly as the city's reputation improves.

- However, the degree to which the WHS contributes to a **sense of pride in the city varies dramatically**, with women, for example, far more likely than men to feel that Liverpool's World Heritage status contributes to their sense of pride.

- Although pride in the city's heritage is strong across all communities, the degree of support for the WHS as an added value to the city varies by location, with **stronger levels of attachment among city centre residents** and **weaker levels of attachment in deprived communities** located outside the city centre.

- These disparities reflect a **profound sense of alienation within outer-city neighbourhoods** such as North Liverpool, where the WHS is dismissed as yet another scheme concentrating attention on the city centre at the expense of other areas and other heritage values.

- There was **no evidence to suggest that residents' knowledge of the WHS is significant in shaping sense of pride in the city**. Rather, the evidence suggests that relatively high levels of pride in the WHS appear to exist *despite* low levels of knowledge in relation to the site.

Cultural, economic and image-related impacts

- World Heritage status is perceived by local people to have **improved the city's image** in the UK and internationally, and to have raised public awareness of the city's historical significance.

- Among articles from the UK regional and national press, the lack of negative coverage of the city in relation to the WHS suggests that designation has had at least a **modest positive impact on the city's image nationally**, with any negative coverage reserved for the city's much-maligned management of the site. However, the volume of regional and national press coverage is modest compared to the coverage by local newspapers.

- There have been very few press articles, overall, where the WHS has been used for city branding or to promote tourism and events in the city – with most of these being neutral in terms of tone. This suggests that the designation has **not been fully capitalised upon in terms of its image and place-making possibilities**.

- **Local opinion is divided on the economic value of the title**: residents feel that the site is good for tourism but are unsure as to whether World Heritage status promotes jobs and growth; whilst many interviewed stakeholders **struggled to identify any clear economic benefits of inscription**, and felt that this needed to be better articulated.

- However, the few academic studies that have attempted to measure the impact of World Heritage inscription on tourism revenues at individual sites suggest that designation can be a **significant factor in attracting international tourists**, and the little data available relating to Liverpool appears to support the notion that World Heritage status is an **important brand for the city that international tourists are influenced by**.

- Although the title has had a significant impact to date, the **widespread lack of WHS knowledge** and awareness among the public, which has been caused, in part, by insufficient investment in the branding and promotion of the site, has **prevented existing**

benefits from being widely recognised and **made it impossible to actualise other potential benefits** that require the engagement of the public as a prerequisite. Besides preventing the fulfilment of the potential of the site, **lack of awareness is also actively contributing to its destabilisation** by facilitating and perpetuating the simplistic 'heritage versus development' discourse that dominates in the local press.

Capitalising on World Heritage Site status in the future

- Although support for the site among local people remains strong (with three quarters of survey respondents agreeing that World Heritage status is good for Liverpool), there are a number of problems in the way that the site is managed and marketed by city authorities, which could be addressed by a raft of measures falling under the following five interdependent themes.

- City authorities must **communicate more effectively with the local public**, using a combination of educational and promotional initiatives to increase knowledge and awareness of the city's World Heritage status, and build support for the site among residents that are currently either ambivalent or hostile towards it. Greater levels of WHS literacy are essential to the site's future sustainability, and would help to promote not only a more informed and inclusive public debate, but also greater appropriation of the potential economic uses of the title.

- Data from survey respondents and focus group participants suggests that many are unsure as to whether the city council is forthcoming and open on its management strategy for the WHS and development, in general. A greater degree of **transparency** than that currently exercised by the local authorities would no doubt further **enhance**

levels of WHS knowledge and understanding, whilst at the same time serving as a prerequisite for the dissemination of World Heritage-related information that does not currently get released into the public domain.

- **The social, cultural and educational values of the WHS title should be harnessed by city authorities**, rather than neglected in favour of strategies which prioritise economic goals and measures. At present, the supporters of the Liverpool WHS must continually justify its existence based on what it does – or potentially could do – for the city region economically, despite the fact that the cultural, social and educational values of the title are crucial in the transmission of the site's 'Outstanding Universal Value' to future generations and the realisation of a variety of other positive outcomes.

- A **revised impact assessment framework** would ideally reflect the acknowledgement of the social, cultural and educational values of the WHS, and mark a departure from the current preoccupation with socio-economic indicators alone. At the same time, the assessment framework for the WHS must not rely solely on 'hard' statistical indicators but also use 'soft' contextual research to complement and enrich research findings.

- It is increasingly recognised within mainstream debates concerning the World Heritage programme that the '**democratisation' of heritage is essential to the future sustainability of urban sites such as Liverpool.** Yet it is clear, despite this, that the Liverpool WHS has so far failed to capture local people's imaginations and be fully appropriated by communities in the city region – particularly in deprived areas. The extension of the geographic scope of the WHS to be more inclusive of neighbourhoods surrounding the city, coupled with a more democratic managerial framework for the site, could help to promote the engagement of these local communities, whilst at the same time achieving a number of other goals.

Figure 1: Visualising alternatives to the current heritage strategy for the city region
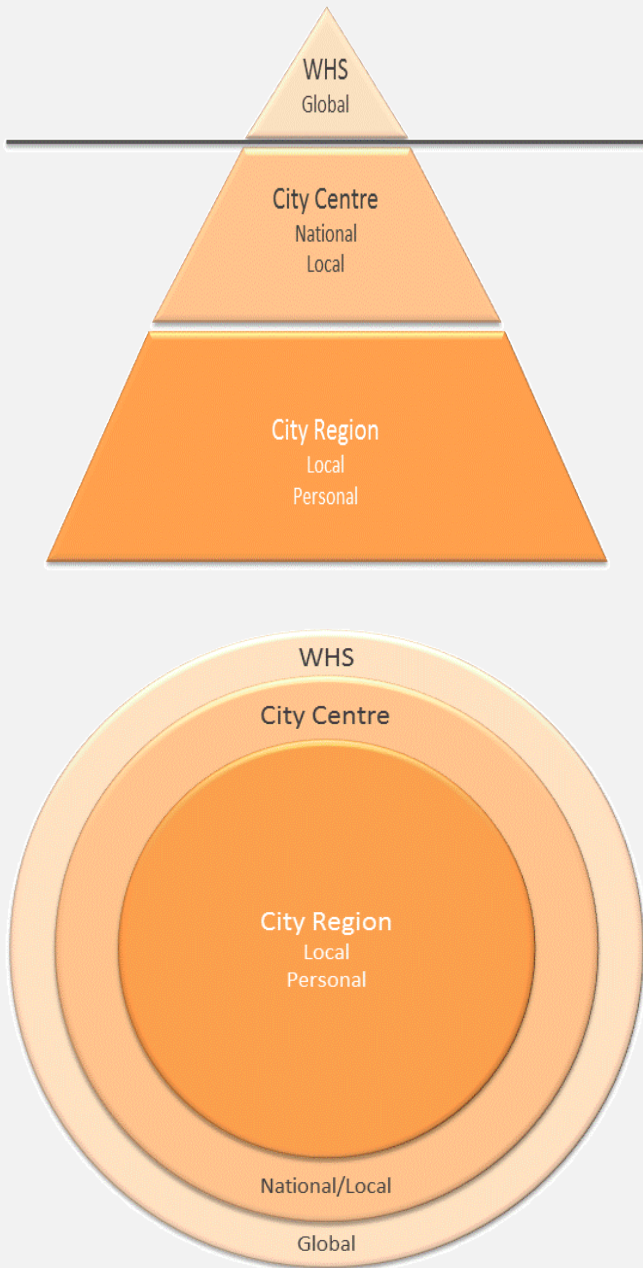
Representing the current position of the World Heritage Site in relation to the wider heritage assets of the Liverpool city region is the 'heritage iceberg' (the first of the two diagrams), which disconnects major heritage locations from other regional heritage identities and places.

A reconfiguration of these layers, in the form of a 'heritage wrapper' (the second diagram), would aim to position major heritage assets *around* local and personal heritage, and as a major foreground or first point of contact for external parties.

Risks posed by the potential loss of WHS status

- In the absence of a truly exhaustive assessment of the value *created* by the Liverpool World Heritage Site, the impacts of the potential loss of the title are difficult to estimate.

- The loss of World Heritage status would likely *not* have a significant adverse effect on promoting Liverpool's cultural assets, largely due to the fact that, to date, the site has not been used for such purposes to any great extent. However, it is clear from the data collected by this study that **most city residents and stakeholders believe that the title's loss would add to the negative image the city has had to contest with domestically since the 1980s**, whilst at the same time jeopardising some residents' newfound confidence in their heritage and their city.

- Indeed, many survey respondents estimated that the loss of the WHS title would adversely affect not just the city's image, but also areas such as the **preservation of historic buildings**, **tourism**, **awareness of the city's history**, **the city's skyline**, and **growth and jobs**. There were very few respondents, by contrast, who vociferously held the *opposite* view: namely, that the impact of the WHS has been overwhelmingly negative, and that its loss would be a very positive development for Liverpool.

- Concerns over the **implications of any potential loss of the title do not appear to be evenly distributed**, however, with relatively more affluent city centre residents generally far more concerned about the potential effects of delisting than those in outlying and deprived city areas, such as Anfield, where the proposed Liverpool Waters development was more likely to be welcomed as a much-needed and long-overdue stimulus for neighbourhoods in north Liverpool.

Conclusions

The experience of the Liverpool World Heritage Site and other sites has shown that inscription onto the World Heritage List offers a host of potential benefits to the public authorities, commercial enterprises and local communities responsible for managing and promoting a site. Yet it is clear, despite this, that **Liverpool is a city which has not fully capitalised on its World Heritage status**. The title has not been appropriated as a tool for branding the city to an outside audience, or as a mechanism to foster enterprise or social engagement in the city; and these failures are likely to be at least partly responsible for the **low levels of WHS literacy and awareness observable both among the general public and city stakeholders**. The low visibility of the site, in general, is not only an impediment to realising the potential of the designation; it is also a factor which has **gravely undermined and destabilised the World Heritage status of the city**. With few tangible benefits or defining features associated with the site in the minds of the local population due to low levels of WHS literacy, the title has become primarily conceived in terms of what it is seen to hinder: namely, development. Yet by being constantly juxtaposed to development, **the significance of the title as a cultural accolade has diminished**, and an assumption has grown among stakeholders and the public too, to a lesser extent, that the title must justify itself solely in terms of its economic contribution to the city.

It is evident, furthermore, that the **value currently generated by World Heritage status** is not only depreciated and inhibited, but also **concentrated disproportionately within the city centre**, at the expense of disenfranchised areas surrounding the city. In the focus groups conducted by the study, it was clear that whilst the regeneration of heritage assets within the WHS and its buffer zone has rejuvenated city centre residents' pride in the city, for other communities, the resources and attention dedicated to the site, rightly or wrongly, represented **a devaluation of their own local heritage**. Although support for the WHS among residents remains strong overall, a concentration of resources on the WHS, to the neglect of other heritage assets in the city, therefore appears to have galvanised a section of the public that regards World Heritage status with active hostility, whilst in contrast welcoming the Liverpool Waters development as a scheme perceived to be of direct value to deprived areas in the north of the city.

As the most vehement voices in the conservation and development camps continue to dominate and polarise the debate in the local media at the expense of a more nuanced public debate regarding the city's regeneration and future, some communities and stakeholders are beginning to envisage a Liverpool without its WHS. Indeed, with planning permission now granted to Peel Holdings to commence work on the Liverpool Waters development, there is a **real risk that the city will 'sleepwalk' into a situation where UNESCO feels obliged to exercise its right to remove the Liverpool WHS from the World Heritage List altogether**. The evidence presented in this study suggests that such an outcome would be detrimental to Liverpool's long-term development and the so far successful efforts to counter long-standing negative imagery associated with the city – a viewpoint seemingly shared by most of the local residents who participated in the online survey conducted by the study. However, as the recommendations put forward by this study demonstrate, it is still within the power of the city, not only to retain World Heritage status by reconciling the heritage and development camps, but to **reform the site in such a way that unlocks its vast potential and extends this value to neglected areas of the city's periphery.**