

External Examiner's Report on the Dissertation of Linda Kovářová
"UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES: WAYS OF PRESENTING & INTERPRETING THE
PAST. As seen in: Kutná Hora, Hiroshima and Villa Romana del Casale"
Submitted in 2017 at the *Department of History*

I. Brief summary of the dissertation

The thesis examines historical places, which are recognized as World Heritage sites by UNESCO. It intends to identify the main characteristics of the concept of UNESCO World Heritage and to present it as a specific cultural and social process of remembrance and that of the interpretation of the past. Consequently, the thesis is meant to be as a contribution to Cultural Heritage Studies, a relatively new academic field, which needs to be defined from the perspective of Historical Science too. Three case studies (the Czech medieval town of Kutná Hora, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park in Japan, the archaeological site of the Roman Villa del Casale, Sicily) are selected to analyse the commemorative techniques, which are used to represent the history of humankind by UNESCO.

II. Brief overall evaluation of the dissertation

The thesis is an attempt to understand and to categorize the reception of acknowledged World Heritage Sites through the analysis of three case studies. The analysis tries to bring together the different levels of World Heritage interpretations from local to global through regional and national. The other main question is how the re-interpretation of these sites can serve for the marketing purposes of various social agents. The theoretical part is based on a good selection of secondary literature, though the key differentiation of 'material and non-material' aspects of heritage does not prove to be either original or effective for the analysis. More recent literature on cultural heritage and, especially, the critique of heritage construction by cultural anthropologists would have been beneficial for the examination of the three sites and for their comparison. The structure and the formal presentation of the thesis is suitable for the requirements of a PhD dissertation.

III. Detailed evaluation of the dissertation and its individual aspects

1. Structure of the argument

The argumentation is based on the theoretical definition of cultural heritage for the purpose of a historical analysis. The author follows her determined path coherently and logically. The structure of the thesis is well-proportioned: Introduction (c.12 pages); Theoretical Part (c. 50 pages); Three case studies (c. 34–45–31 pages respectively); Conclusion (c.14 pages). The case studies are examined according to the same logic and their distinctive characteristics are emphasized too. The conclusion summarizes the results of the case studies and it seems to meet the objectives, which

are set in the theoretical part.

2. *Formal aspects of the dissertation*

The presented form of the thesis is satisfactory. The author is coherent in the use of abbreviations, syntax of bibliographical references and the transcriptions of foreign terms. The footnotes are formatted correctly. The language of the dissertation is grammatically correct and there are only a few linguistic infelicities, which are pardonable, since the author is not a native speaker of English. The dissertation is well-presented visually and well-formatted graphically. A fairly large number of illustrations assist the comprehension of the commemorative practices related to the three World Heritage Sites used as case studies.

3. *Use of sources and/or material*

The author work transparently with secondary sources. For the analysis of the three sites, a great number of relevant sources made use of, though the UNESCO documentation could have been exploited more in detail. Especially, these documents are in a comparable format, so they are ideal for a comprehensive analysis. For the description of the evolution of the concept of World Heritage, more standard-setting instruments could have been used. The primary sources used properly and reference made to their original language wherever appropriate. Apparently, the author reads not only English and Czech, but also Italian, which is an asset for the thesis. However, Japanese sources are not used for the case of Hiroshima that lessens the strength of the analysis. The sources employed in a methodologically correct manner. The individual steps in data analysis justified and well executed and the method of data collection and processing is in line with the main research question.

4. *Personal contribution to the subject*

The author employs the primary and secondary sources to propose her typology of the World Heritage Sites according to four aspects: (1) heritage type (architectural-intangible-archaeological); (2) geographical and cultural settings; (3) location and visiting pattern; (4) Historic time, remembered past and the purpose of remembering. In the conclusion, the extremely diverse characters of the three sites come to surface again, which raises some doubts about the utility of the hypothesis offered in the introduction. The author knows very well the three sites and the research results should encourage her to develop further the comparative methodology of World

Heritage Sites.

IV. Questions for the author

- Is the term postmodern is still applicable to the 21st century? This denomination was in vogue in the last third of the 20th century, but very rarely reflected since the late 1990s. What other theories could be applied to place current heritagization into a historical context?
- Can some of the heritage practices related to the three World Heritage Sites described in the thesis as heritage rituals? Especially in the case of Kutná Hora, where some continuity can be traced back. What is the role of ritualization in current identity constructions? Who are the custodians?
- On the basis of the examination of the three case studies, how can the author define a heritage community? What are the main similarities and differences in the three cases? Are there any suggestions to determine the essential elements of a functional (world) heritage community?

V. Conclusion

I recommend the submitted dissertation with the tentative grade of pass.

Budapest, 8th June 2017



Dr. Gábor Sonkoly, CSc