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World Heritage Sites and the question of scale in governance and politics: A study of Stonehenge

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Abstract

In July 2021, Liverpool was removed from the prestigious List of World Heritage Sites, sending shockwaves around the global heritage community. More recently, the spotlight has shifted to another world famous site also located in the United Kingdom. During the same 44th Session of the World Heritage Committee, UNESCO threatened to place Stonehenge on the List in Danger if the required changes to a significant billion-pound road enhancement project were not implemented. Given what happened in Liverpool, there are fears that Stonehenge is in danger of moving towards delisting. An interesting critical line of inquiry to emerge from Liverpool, and other World Heritage Sites, concerns the local, national, and international 'politics at the site'. This article develops this debate by analysing the role of different scalar actors involved in the Stonehenge World Heritage Site. More specifically, our article examines how the Stonehenge Alliance sought to engage in, what we define as, scalar manoeuvres that is evidenced by scale jumping and scalar alignments with more powerful players further up the heritage hierarchy in order to effect leverage over the future status of the World Heritage Site.

Keywords: heritage; scale; governance; politics

Introduction

November 2022 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) World Heritage Convention.¹ In a recent issue of this journal, leading authors reflect on the socio-political context of this flagship initiative.² Adopting the same line of careful reflection, we analyze the current controversy surrounding the Stonehenge World Heritage Site (WHS) in England, United Kingdom, by focusing on the question of scale in the governance and politics of this cultural property. Another important temporal factor informing this article is that, in July 2021, Liverpool became the first UNESCO WHS to be delisted in the United Kingdom; as noted by another set of key commentators, "deletion now presents as the ultimate

¹ Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Heritage and Natural Heritage, 16 November 1972, 1037 UNTS 151.

² Meskell and Liuzza 2022.

potential sanction.”³ The decision to remove Liverpool – an alleged “miscarriage of justice”⁴ – shows a rarely seen side to UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee (WHC). One interpretation is that it indicates an exception to the dominant trope that the WHC is subjected to, and conditioned by, the strong political and diplomatic forces of European governments. In so doing, it reveals a willingness to take decisive action against recalcitrant state parties that ignore, or do not closely follow, its recommendations on the impact of major planning projects affecting the Outstanding Universal Value of WHS properties. Moreover, “the decision to remove World Heritage Status on the basis of how heritage is managed appears to shift UNESCO’s focus to a management-monitoring function, rather like blue flag status for beaches.”⁵

Following Liverpool’s delisting, the spotlight shifted to another world famous site. At the same meeting in Fuzhou, China, the WHC threatened to place Stonehenge on the List in Danger if the required changes to a controversial billion-pound road enhancement project were not implemented.⁶ In the context of a final decision on Stonehenge’s WHS status in September of this year (when the forty-fifth session of the WHC takes place), the following article considers the role of different stakeholders in contesting a major planning proposal around Stonehenge in light of the controversial delisting of Liverpool. An interesting critical line of inquiry to emerge from studies of WHSs concerns the local, national, and international “politics at the site,”⁷ which we explore more fully in this article: “[W]hether states respond to ‘the shame’ of an In Danger listing is likely ... to turn largely on the nature of the local politics at that particular site. In the case of the delisting of the Dresden⁸ Elbe Valley (Germany), for example, local communities protested against UNESCO oversight. Even the threat of inclusion on the IDL [In Danger List] was insufficient to stop the development by the local government.”⁹

We are appreciative of the politics of the local sites in which WHSs are based – and the multiple political attributes, ideologies, and resources that infuse these sites – as echoed in our recent work on the delisting of Liverpool.¹⁰ This article further develops the literature on WHSs by analyzing the strategic engagement of actors at different scalar resolutions relevant to the Stonehenge WHS. More specifically, our attention focuses on one local stakeholder that was formed in 2001 in opposition to the Highways Agency’s initial proposals to widen the A303 road that runs along Stonehenge. As a non-profit organization consisting of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individuals, the Stonehenge Alliance relies on donations from campaign supporters and volunteer activists. According to its website, the pressure group is active in lobbying various tiers of government, challenging Highways England, collaborating with the National Trust, engaging with like-minded campaigners in countries around the world, and raising funds for the Save Stonehenge WHS legal challenge in the High Court (more on this later). The ultimate objective of the Stonehenge Alliance is to “raise awareness” about the implications of ignoring UNESCO’s advice regarding the latest A303 road proposals and the concomitant danger of losing WHS status. Moreover, the Stonehenge Alliance is a member of World Heritage Watch. An international NGO that supports UNESCO in obtaining information on what is happening

³ Hamman and Hølleland 2023, 87.

⁴ Rodwell 2022. He argues that the key problem surrounded the changing use and interpretation of urban landscape in key International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) / World Heritage Committee (WHC) documentation relating to major regeneration along Liverpool’s waterfront.

⁵ Chetwin 2021, 39.

⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) WHC 2021a.

⁷ Hølleland Hamman, and Phelps 2019; Zhang and Brown, 2022.

⁸ The first European city to be delisted by UNESCO WHC and second ever to be delisted after the Arabian Oryx. For a full discussion of their respective delistings, see Hamman and Hølleland 2023.

⁹ Hølleland Hamman, and Phelps 2019, 54.

¹⁰ Boland et al. 2022.

in WHSs around the world, they also assist local people in protecting their properties and, more generally, make the public aware of threats to the “common heritage of humanity.”¹¹

This article examines how the Stonehenge Alliance engaged in multiple scalar maneuvers evidenced by an agility and competency to jump scale, upscale, and achieve scalar alignment with more powerful players further up the governance hierarchy to effect political leverage over the future status of the WHS. In our discussion, we suggest that the “politics at the site” is key to the development of these tactics. We also consider the implications of Liverpool’s delisting on the outcome of these tactics. The article ends with a discussion of the implications for policy and practice and the pragmatic lessons that Stonehenge offers for other cultural properties around the world that are involved in niggly negotiations with UNESCO and face the prospect of being placed on the List in Danger.

Methods

The methodology for this article draws exclusively upon secondary sources. The first stage of the research process connected with the academic – theoretical – literature on the governance of UNESCO, the politics surrounding its decision-making processes, and the controversies regarding WHS designation, the List in Danger, and delisting. As the WHS literature is diverse, we consulted articles from a range of disciplines – including several published in this journal – that examined the experiences of WHSs from around the world. Given the UK focus of this article, and the global media story that followed its delisting, Liverpool was a useful case study that helped to contextualize what is happening in Stonehenge and, more importantly, what might happen in the future for this iconic cultural property. We gained interesting insights into the issues in Liverpool prior to and post delisting. Another important set of writing that we consulted concerns debates on geographical scale, its application to heritage studies, and, more specifically for this article, its applicability to WHSs. This provided the core conceptual framing for the article.

Moving beyond academic work, the next stage of the research process involved a detailed desk study of grey literature. Adopting a thematic and discourse analysis approach we analyzed reports, strategies, plans, minutes of meetings, press coverage, websites, and blogs from international and national organizations, regional and local stakeholders, and other involved parties. Some of this covered relatively recent historical issues, but most of it related to more contemporaneous events concerning the new road proposal for the A303. In total, our analysis drew upon thirty sources of information. We reviewed key policy and development documents for Stonehenge and the County of Wiltshire (the regional jurisdiction within which Stonehenge sits). This was supplemented by studies of Stonehenge, plus national media coverage and local reactions in Wiltshire through websites relating to the A303 planning proposal and its implications for the site. A valuable source of secondary data was the UNESCO website.¹² Here we accessed the minutes of WHC meetings, reports on properties on the WHS List in Danger, and, crucially, Monitoring Mission reports on Stonehenge. Finally, we made extensive use of the Stonehenge Alliance website¹³ to access various documents, reports, statements, and blogs relating to the actions they have undertaken in response to the new road proposal as well as their social media accounts.¹⁴

¹¹ *World Heritage Watch*, <https://world-heritage-watch.org> (accessed 1st May 2023).

¹² UNESCO, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/373/> (accessed 1st May 2023).

¹³ *Stonehenge Alliance*, <https://stonehengealliance.org.uk/> (accessed 1st May 2023).

¹⁴ “Save Stonehenge,” *Instagram*, https://www.instagram.com/savestonehenge_whs/ (accessed 1st May 2023); “Save Stonehenge,” *Twitter*, <https://twitter.com/SaveStonehenge> (accessed 1st May 2023); “Stonehenge Alliance,” *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/stonehengealliance> (accessed 1st May 2023).

Theoretical framework: the scalar politics of WHSs

WHSs are a celebrated UNESCO initiative designed to protect the Outstanding Universal Value of the world's heritage assets.¹⁵ In terms of geographical reach, WHSs “are found all over the globe, and they cover all periods and numerous types of monuments, buildings, locations, and landscapes.”¹⁶ Due to their international brand status, WHSs are highly prized and are promoted by local and national stakeholders as destinations for global tourism and inward investment.¹⁷ This is an example of what has previously been called the “economic uses” of heritage,¹⁸ and, more contemporaneously, it is particularly evident in the elevation of “economic value” in heritage planning.¹⁹ In a UK context, WHSs are viewed as “a remarkable opportunity – a sleeping giant of cultural and economic potential.”²⁰ Connecting to broader debates, WHSs are regarded as engines of economic growth,²¹ and they are increasingly attached to the hegemonic logics of neoliberal urbanism and city competitiveness.²²

Over time, various debates have emerged over WHSs. Most prominently, these include the tension between heritage conservation and economic growth,²³ the politics surrounding WHS designation processes, and the legitimacy and geographical composition of the WHS list.²⁴ Reflecting upon the latter, the focus is on how “World Heritage sites are managed” and the “controversies about the acceptability of spatial developments in World Heritage sites that threaten the Outstanding Universal Value of these sites.”²⁵ Leading to our discussion, attention is directed to evidence of “intensified politics ... [the] inscription and the protection and management system ... have typically been the most contentious.”²⁶ A recent article in this journal discusses the politics surrounding our area of interest – the WHS List in Danger and the processes leading to delisting.²⁷ On this, our own work contributes to recent examinations of the “politics at the site” and the contentious delisting of Liverpool's WHS.²⁸

As with the WHS designation process, the List in Danger is equally intriguing. There are currently 52 properties “in Danger in accordance with Article 11(4) of the Convention.”²⁹ Of direct relevance to Stonehenge, and Liverpool previously, are the “serious and specific dangers” relating to “large-scale public or private projects or rapid urban or tourist development projects.”³⁰ An important point to make here is that inscription on the List

¹⁵ “Global Strategy,” UNESCO, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/globalstrategy/> (accessed 2nd June 2022); Zhang and Brown 2022; Dattilo, Padovano, and Rocaboy 2023.

¹⁶ Wienberg 2021, 197–98.

¹⁷ Frey and Steiner 2011; Bertacchini et al. 2016; Birendra 2021; Chauma and Ngwira 2022; Rodwell 2022.

¹⁸ Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000.

¹⁹ Stegmeijer, Veldpaus, and Janssen 2021; Veldpaus et al. 2021.

²⁰ World Heritage UK 2019, 10.

²¹ Zhang, Cheng, and Zhang 2023.

²² Meskell 2021; Boland et al. 2022.

²³ Rao 2010; Sykes and Ludwig 2015; Rodwell 2018; Dawson 2021; Veldpaus et al. 2021.

²⁴ Meskell 2012; Bertacchini, Liuzza, and Meskell 2017; Brown, Liuzza, and Meskell 2019; Hølleland Hamman, and Phelps 2019; Liuzza and Meskell 2023; Brumann and Gfeller 2022.

²⁵ Patiwaal, Groote, and Vanclay 2022, 254.

²⁶ Zhang and Brown 2022, 579.

²⁷ Liuzza 2021.

²⁸ Boland et al. 2022; see also Rodwell 2022.

²⁹ “Danger,” UNESCO, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/danger/> (accessed 2nd May 2023).

³⁰ Other examples include disappearance caused by accelerated deterioration; destruction caused by changes in the use or ownership of the land; major alterations due to unknown causes; abandonment for any reason whatsoever; the outbreak or the threat of an armed conflict; calamities and cataclysms; serious fires, earthquakes, and landslides; volcanic eruptions; changes in water level, floods, and tidal waves. “Article 11(4),” UNESCO, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/#Article11.4> (accessed 2nd May 2023).

in Danger, in theory, should reflect the “most imperiled” sites.³¹ However, this is not always the case, and inscription on the List in Danger rarely results in delisting.³² Moreover, properties that are considered for inscription on the List in Danger are subject to the same state party high and low politics that affect the designation process. State diplomats and other representatives engage in “aggressive lobbying” and “political manipulation” to affect leverage over which sites are included on the List in Danger, notably using “bargaining power” to ensure their own sites are not inscribed.³³ For example, it is noted that properties within European countries – such as the United Kingdom – and America “enjoy impunity” by “escaping sanction” of inclusion on the List in Danger or, alternatively, endure lengthy periods of inclusion on the list without suffering the abasement of delisting.³⁴

It is important to note that Dresden and Liverpool are obvious exceptions to this European impunity.³⁵ Moreover, these cases reveal how “the deletion procedure has been more closely linked with the practice of Reactive Monitoring and the IDL [In Danger List].”³⁶ An interesting line of investigation that can be used to unpack the List in Danger concerns the relationships between international, national, and local stakeholders involved in the different layers of governance affecting the future of WHS properties. This takes us into the next section addressing debates on a geographical scale.

Scale jumping and scalar maneuvering

Over two decades ago, academics highlighted the “increasing prominence of scalar concepts.”³⁷ This reflected growing exchanges between authors from different disciplines who ruminated on the epistemological and ontological status of scale. Amongst the key contributors were geographers, sociologists, and planners.³⁸ Empirically and theoretically, scale is a heuristic device for understanding social, political, and economic events, structures and processes at various spatial hierarchies.³⁹ Initially, the debate focused on scale as fixed into “bounded territorial units” or “periodically transformed” – that is, constructed through social struggle – into “nested,” “ladder-like,” “jostling” hierarchies.⁴⁰ Developing the theorization, others advocated the relational and unboundable nature of scale due to the “mutual constitution” of the local and the global.⁴¹ Danny MacKinnon’s reappraisal of these scalar debates, notably synthesizing the political-economic and post-structural theoretical traditions, offers useful insights for this study: “I propose to replace the politics of scale with the concept of ‘scalar politics’, arguing that it is often not scale *per se* that is the prime object

³¹ Brown, Liuzza, and Meskeil 2019.

³² Birendra 2021. Apart from Liverpool, only two other sites have been delisted. In 2007, Oman’s Arabian Oryx Sanctuary was the first site to be removed from UNESCO’s World Heritage Site (WHS) list. The decision was taken after Omani authorities reduced the size of the site’s protected area by 90 percent, in contravention of the Operational Guidelines of the World Heritage Convention (Lee 2009). In 2009, Dresden Elbe Valley was delisted due to concerns over the

³³ Bertacchini, Liuzza, and Meskeil 2017; Hølleland, Hamman, and Phelps 2019; Liuzza 2021; Liuzza and Meskeil 2023; Meskeil 2021.

³⁴ Brown, Liuzza, and Meskeil 2019.

³⁵ Gaillard and Rodwell 2015; Boland et al. 2022.

³⁶ Hamman and Hølleland 2023, 194.

³⁷ Brenner 2001, 594.

³⁸ Smith 2003; Healey 2004; Collinge 2005.

³⁹ Jonas 2006.

⁴⁰ Marston 2000; Brenner et al. 2003; Howitt 2003; Paasi 2004; Smith and Low 2006.

⁴¹ Amin 2004; Massey 2004. Sally Marston, John Jones, and Keith Woodward (2005) questioned scalar thinking that privileged the global over the national and local, and, such was their dissatisfaction with extant research, they spoke of abandoning hierarchical scale. In its place, they mused on the merits of a flat ontology of scale (422–26); in so doing, they induced pro-scale responses from Chris Collinge (2006) and Andrew Jonas (2006).

of contestation between social actors, but rather specific processes and institutionalized practices that are themselves differentially scaled. ... The concept of scalar politics focuses attention on the strategic deployment of scale by various actors, movements and organizations.”⁴²

Spurred by this body of theory, and earlier work by Brian Graham, Greg Ashworth, and John Tunbridge,⁴³ cultural heritage scholars entered the scalar stage.⁴⁴ Their efforts helped to develop debates on the relationship between scale and politics through researching the heritage-scale relationship. The first point to make is that scalar politics is important to heritage studies, in general, and to UNESCO WHSs, in particular.⁴⁵ For example, authors argue that we should “consider the important questions of *scale* ... something which permeates a number of [WHS] cases.”⁴⁶ It is also claimed that the different scales of heritage construction and management are often heavily politicized.⁴⁷ Drawing upon this work, “heritage seems to matter more in both governmental and economic concerns at a variety of scales”⁴⁸ – that is, local place making, national values, and UNESCO’s universalism. An important point is that “scale itself is a potent source of heritage dissonance. Heritage developed at different levels may not be complementary and harmonious.”⁴⁹ Moreover, when considering the hierarchical dimensions of heritage, it is important to be cognizant of the “capacity for conflict” – for example, how the actions of certain stakeholders disrupted the hierarchies of scale over the WHS designation of the Ningaloo Coast in Australia.⁵⁰

Tuuli Lähdesmäki, Yujie Zhu, and Suzie Thomas offer valuable insights into scalar relations and the production and meaning of heritage.⁵¹ The first point is that inscription on the WHS list “gives a site significance at different scales.”⁵² Second, returning to the important issue raised above, processes of heritage are “inherently political” due to “uneven power relations” and “hierarchical power structures.” This leads academic attention to the conflict concerning the meaning, ownership, preservation, and management of heritage. On this, analysis focuses on “the power struggles during the processes of production, reconfiguration and contestation within and amongst scales of heritage.”⁵³ In the spirit of this focus on scale in the politics and governance of heritage, our study focuses on the scalar politics at play at Stonehenge WHS. We place emphasis on the agency of a key local stakeholder and their efforts to leverage support and action from higher-scaled institutional actors at the national (UK High Court) and international (UNESCO WHC) levels. Linking the heritage-scale relationship to this study, we direct our focus to “how scale and heritage work together.”⁵⁴ More specifically, our interest lies in relatively underexplored work on heritage actors’ ability to shift scale, jump scale, upscale, and downscale.⁵⁵

⁴² MacKinnon 2011, 22, 32.

⁴³ Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000.

⁴⁴ Harvey 2015; Jones, Jones, and Hughes 2016; Lähdesmäki, Zhu, and Thomas 2019; Gea, Martínez-Hernández, and Gómez 2021.

⁴⁵ Debarbieux and Munz 2019; Debarbieux et al. 2023.

⁴⁶ Hamman and Hølleland 2023, 189.

⁴⁷ Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000.

⁴⁸ Harvey 2015, 577.

⁴⁹ Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000, 181.

⁵⁰ Jones, Jones, and Hughes 2016.

⁵¹ Lähdesmäki, Zhu, and Thomas 2019.

⁵² Lähdesmäki, Zhu, and Thomas 2019, 2.

⁵³ Lähdesmäki, Zhu, and Thomas 2019, 3.

⁵⁴ Gea, Martínez-Hernández, and Gómez 2021, 2.

⁵⁵ Harvey 2015; Jones et al. 2016; Lähdesmäki, Zhu, and Thomas 2019.

Scale jumping is defined as “the ability of certain social groups and organizations to move to higher levels of activity – for example, the urban to the national – in pursuit of their interests.”⁵⁶ The concept was originally coined by Neil Smith in his study of homeless survival strategies – that is, the use of supermarket trolleys – in New York.⁵⁷ Krzysztof Wodiczko’s artistic representations of the *Homeless Vehicle* and the *Poliscar*⁵⁸ “enable[d] evicted people to ‘jump scales’ – to organize the production and reproduction of daily life and to resist oppression and exploitation at a higher scale.”⁵⁹ Another elucidation of scale jumping and upscaling concerns water politics in Spain.⁶⁰ Accession to the European Economic Community in 1986 created a new scalar fix: “[T]he rescaling of authority ‘down’ to local and regional actors, on the one hand, and ‘up’ to international institutions.”⁶¹ That “hydro-territorial configurations ... [became] sites of political contestation” is relevant to this study.⁶² More recently, a study of the Chinese city of Lijiang reveals “how local struggles emerge to negotiate with heritage authorities through jumping among scales.”⁶³ In terms of WHS research, there is a need to develop our understanding of jumping scales – in particular, how local actors attempt to “re-scale an issue,” upscale, and/ or downscale in pursuance of their own interests.⁶⁴

This literature can be connected to emergent research on the local, national, and international “politics at the site.”⁶⁵ While local-national governance relations are obviously significant, it is equally important to consider the local-national-international context of WHSs and the actions of, and interrelationships between, local organizations, state parties, and supranational institutions. For this study, a multi-scalar analysis of cultural heritage politics in Germany and the United Kingdom attaches importance to scalar linkages/alignments between different actors that populate the heritage hierarchy: “When the World Heritage Committee places a site on the World Heritage in Danger list, this might, for instance, undermine the linkage between UNESCO and the respective national or local government. At the same time such a decision can strengthen other alignments within the regime, for example between UNESCO and local interest groups.”⁶⁶

Synthesizing and developing these approaches, we advance in the next section our focus on scalar maneuvering. More specifically, we analyze the Stonehenge Alliance’s agility and actions at different spatial resolutions that were designed to exert influence over the “political contestation” concerning a major road project linked to the Stonehenge WHS.⁶⁷ Moreover, we interrogate how their engagement in scale jumping⁶⁸ and scalar alignment,⁶⁹ with more powerful national and supranational institutions, was “strategically deployed”⁷⁰ to affect leverage over the future status of this world famous site.

⁵⁶ MacKinnon 2011, 24.

⁵⁷ Smith 1992, 1996.

⁵⁸ Wodiczko’s second “vehicle for the evicted” was the *Poliscar*. This was a hybrid combination of a Dalek from the British Broadcasting Corporation’s *Doctor Who* series and a World War I “cubist tank.” Its aim was to “take much more seriously homeless people’s need for security and privacy” (Smith 1992, 59).

⁵⁹ Smith 1992, 70.

⁶⁰ Swyngedouw 2014.

⁶¹ Swyngedouw and Williams 2016, 65.

⁶² Swyngedouw and Boelens 2018, 117.

⁶³ Zhu 2019, 22.

⁶⁴ Debarbieux and Munz 2019.

⁶⁵ Hølleland Hamman, and Phelps 2019; Boland et al. 2022; Zhang and Brown 2022.

⁶⁶ Zwegers 2022, 15.

⁶⁷ Swyngedouw and Boelens 2018.

⁶⁸ Smith 1992; Debarbieux and Munz 2019; Zhu 2019.

⁶⁹ Zwegers 2022.

⁷⁰ MacKinnon 2011.

Planning for the Stonehenge WHS: scalar maneuvering

Recent studies reveal how major planning and regeneration interventions cost Liverpool its WHS in 2021.⁷¹ Stonehenge, Avebury, and Associated Sites (to give the WHS its full name) has the potential to follow Liverpool.⁷² Located in Wiltshire in Southwest England, the WHS was inscribed in 1986 after satisfying three of UNESCO's ten key criteria for WHS eligibility.⁷³ The most famous part of the site is situated in south Wiltshire, covering 26 square kilometers and is centered on the prehistoric monument of Stonehenge (see [Figure 1](#)). Ownership is shared between key national and local stakeholders (that is, English Heritage, National Trust, Ministry of Defence, and Wiltshire Council) and smaller private interests (for example, landowners and farmers). The lesser well-known part of the WHS is Avebury, located 17 miles north of Stonehenge, covering 22.5 square kilometers and is centered on the prehistoric Avebury Henge. In combination, the WHS contains the world-renowned monuments located at Stonehenge and concentrations of equally exceptional archaeological artifacts at Avebury dating back thousands of years.

Thus, as in Liverpool, the WHS is a significant heritage asset for national and international tourism, with Stonehenge attracting over a million visitors each year.⁷⁴ Given this, Stonehenge is one of the country's "most visited destinations or 'icons'."⁷⁵ Additionally,



Figure 1. Stonehenge (courtesy of <https://unsplash.com/s/photos/Stonehenge> [1st May 2023]).

⁷¹ Boland et al. 2022; Rodwell 2022.

⁷² Hamman and Hølleland 2023.

⁷³ Criteria I: the sites demonstrate outstanding creative and technological achievements in prehistoric times; Criteria II: it provides an outstanding illustration of the evolution of monument construction and continual use and shaping of the landscape from the Neolithic period to the Bronze Age; Criteria III: the monuments provide an exceptional insight into the funerary and ceremonial practices in Britain in the Neolithic and Bronze Age. "Stonehenge, Avebury, and Associated Sites," <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/373/> (accessed 2nd May 2023).

⁷⁴ Wiltshire Council 2015.

⁷⁵ World Heritage UK 2019, 25.

Wiltshire's Community Plan states that the WHS "landscape is of national and global significance."⁷⁶ Finally, the UNESCO website captures the international significance of the WHS: "Stonehenge and Avebury, in Wiltshire, are among the most famous groups of megaliths in the world. The two sanctuaries consist of circles of menhirs arranged in a pattern whose astronomical significance is still being explored. These holy places and the nearby Neolithic sites are an incomparable testimony to prehistoric times."⁷⁷

Politics at the site: scale jumping and scalar alignment

The long-standing planning problem for the WHS property is that unsustainable car use in and around Stonehenge has become an "intractable issue."⁷⁸ The A303 road is a popular commuter belt for travelers heading between the southwest and southeast of England. This, and the global tourist attraction that is Stonehenge, has led to heavy congestion and rat running surrounding the WHS.⁷⁹ Today, traffic levels are twice the design capacity for the road.⁸⁰ Given this, the UK state party acknowledges that the A303 "has become of increasing concern ... traffic flows [have] ... increased the adverse impact on the integrity of the site."⁸¹ It is labelled as "Britain's most picturesque traffic jam ... which passes 200 yards from England's – and possibly the world's – most famous prehistoric monument."⁸² Since the 1990s, a number of infrastructure initiatives were proposed (over fifty) to ameliorate these traffic issues, but they either never received full planning permission, political support, or the required funding and so were not implemented.⁸³

The main priority for the local authority and other responsible stakeholders, as in Liverpool, is protecting the Outstanding Universal Value of the property against inappropriate development. As such, "[t]he council will ... continue to work with partners to ensure that any future improvements to the A303 do not compromise this important World Heritage Site."⁸⁴ However, the inability to find a viable and agreed solution to this major planning problem has become highly politicized. Connecting to extant debates on the local "politics at the site,"⁸⁵ reference is made to increasing "frustration for local residents, particularly as a number of schemes have been proposed and withdrawn over many years."⁸⁶

The World Heritage Site Management Plan provides a long-term strategy to protect the property's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).⁸⁷ It has been endorsed by Wiltshire Council as a material consideration in determining planning applications affecting the WHS. The key objectives are to manage the level of international and domestic tourists visiting the site (that is, traffic congestion and negative impacts of road use) and to enhance the tourist experience (that is, a new visitor center). Interestingly, running contrary to a point raised earlier, there are claims that the economic impact of mass tourism has not been maximized.

⁷⁶ Wiltshire Assembly 2011, 9.

⁷⁷ "Stonehenge, Avebury, and Associated Sites."

⁷⁸ Witcher 2021.

⁷⁹ On digital heritage site experiences, see Marek 2022.

⁸⁰ Hull 2023.

⁸¹ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2022, 2.

⁸² "The Battle of Stonehenge: What to Know About the Controversial £1.7bn Tunnel Project," *The Week*, 2021, <https://www.theweek.co.uk/news/environment/953669/the-battle-of-stonehenge> (accessed 3rd April 2022).

⁸³ Baxter and Chippindale 2000; Fielden 2000, 2018, 2019; Wainwright 2000; Stone 2006; Knowles 2013; Simmonds and Thomas 2015; Marshall 2021.

⁸⁴ Wiltshire Council 2015, 71.

⁸⁵ Hølleland Hamman, and Phelps 2019; Boland et al. 2022.

⁸⁶ Simmonds and Thomas 2015, 75.

⁸⁷ Simmonds and Thomas 2015.

According to the Council's Core Strategy, which is the local planning document guiding future development, "there is a lack of capital made on this unique opportunity locally. There is little evidence of the attraction having any real economic benefit for Amesbury or the surrounding villages."⁸⁸ The problem is the ephemeral nature of tourist visitation – that is, the predominance of day visitors and the lack of overnight stays and spend in the local economy.

Within Wiltshire's Core Strategy, Policy 59 is directly focused on the WHS. Recognizing the international and national significance of this heritage asset, the council is "obliged to protect, conserve, present and transmit to future generations its WHS."⁸⁹ Importantly, this obligation must be given priority when determining planning decisions and development management issues within the property. In particular, managing the competing demands of tourism and protecting the OUV of the WHS. As such, "the World Heritage Site ... requires protection as inappropriate development ... can have an adverse impact on the site and its attributes of OUV."⁹⁰ However, connecting to the literature, planning proposals for road improvements have politicized the WHS property.

Recent plans involve a two-mile bored tunnel and four-lane dual carriageway along the A303 that is designed to ease traffic congestion and associated noise impacts near Stonehenge. As the UK state party has explained, it "would remove most of the A303 within the WHS from view."⁹¹ Although some form of tunnel had been suggested in the past, this version attracted strong local and – as we will see later – international opposition. The extent of the local "politics at the site" was epitomized by calls for Stonehenge to be placed on UNESCO's WHS List in Danger. For example, back in 2018, Kate Fielden, who is honorary secretary to the Stonehenge Alliance, felt this radical course of action was the only available option to prevent deleterious damage to the property. Connecting back to theory, this is the first instance of Smith's scale jumping. This is evidenced by local activists seeking movement to a "higher level of activity" in order to "pursue their interests"⁹² by requesting intervention from a powerful international organization – that is, an attempt at scalar alignment⁹³ to deal with a local-national issue. Referencing the plans for the A303 tunnel and road improvements, and a future report from UNESCO, Kate Fielden stated: "Should the UK Government [national] continue to press ahead with the A303 'preferred route', we [local] hope that the Mission [supranational] will be minded to recommend to the 2018 meeting of the WH Committee [supranational] that the WHS should be placed on the List of WH in Danger. Such an action might help to achieve a better outcome for the WHS and its proper enjoyment by future generations."⁹⁴

Here, we notice how the Stonehenge Alliance elevates the local "politics at the site" over the road proposal to a higher placed organization within the heritage hierarchy and invites the WHC to place Stonehenge on the List in Danger. Ultimately, this attempt at scalar alignment is intended to affect political leverage over the UK Government. This is illustrative of scale jumping through an attempt to shift influence over a local issue to the supranational scale. Moreover, aligning itself with a more powerful scalar player, the Stonehenge Alliance was inviting a severe sanction for this cultural property to serve its own ends – that is, halting the A303 road proposals. Notwithstanding this local and

⁸⁸ Wiltshire Council 2015, 79.

⁸⁹ Wiltshire Council 2015, 291.

⁹⁰ Wiltshire Council 2015, 292.

⁹¹ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2022, 2.

⁹² MacKinnon 2011.

⁹³ Zwegers 2022.

⁹⁴ Fielden 2018, 159.

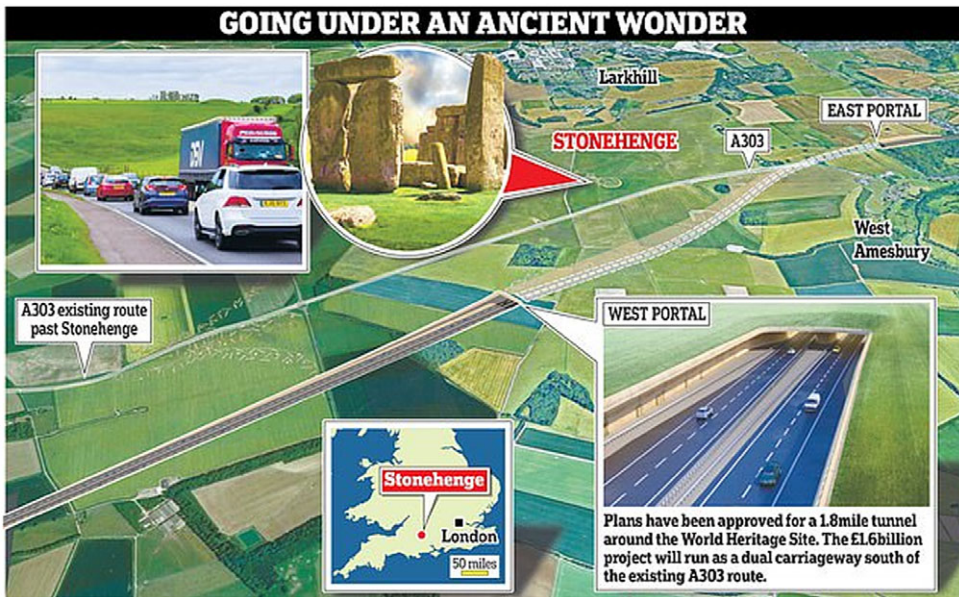


Figure 2. Plans for the A303 near Stonehenge (courtesy of Daily Mail via Google Images).



Figure 3. Plans for the A303 near Stonehenge (courtesy of Somerset Live via Google Images).

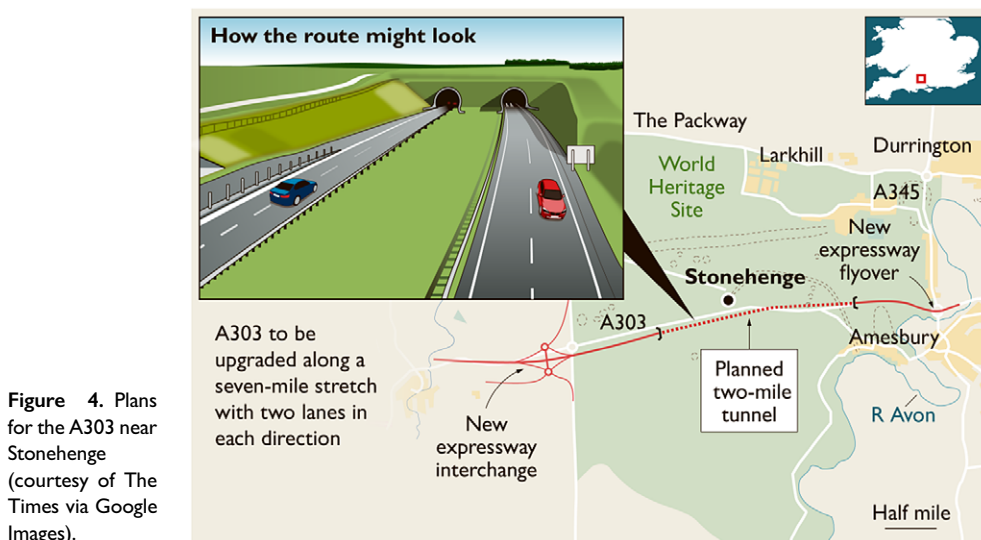


Figure 4. Plans for the A303 near Stonehenge (courtesy of The Times via Google Images).

supranational pressure, in November 2020, Grant Shapps, then Secretary of State for Transport, granted a Development Consent Order for the A303 proposal (see Figures 2, 3 and 4). The £1.7 billion upgrade to the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down is part of a broader £27 billion national road network improvement package that is financed by the UK Government.⁹⁵ The Stonehenge Alliance claim costs have now escalated to £2.5 billion and “are only likely to soar with current inflation.”⁹⁶ Connecting back to debates in the literature on the interface between heritage and economy, Robert Witcher explains: “In addition to relieving traffic congestion and reducing journey times, Highways England identifies a number of environmental, community and cultural heritage benefits. The scheme promises ‘green bridges’ to allow people and wildlife to cross over the unburied sections of road, the restoration of chalk downland and the creation of jobs and economic growth.”⁹⁷

In contrast to the above text, however, recent “research shows that road schemes ... show little evidence of economic benefit to local economies.”⁹⁸ Nevertheless, based on these anticipated economic benefits, it is striking that the Transport Secretary overruled a recommendation from five planning experts that the proposed project should not proceed in its current form as it would cause “permanent, irreversible harm” to the WHS.⁹⁹ Similarly, a UNESCO / International Council on Monuments and Sites’s Advisory Mission in 2018 had expressed serious concerns over the impact of the proposals on the property: “The tunnel would remove the road from the central part of the Stonehenge component of the WHS but the construction of four-lane highways in cuttings at either end of the tunnel would adversely and irreversibly impact on the integrity, authenticity and Outstanding Universal Value of the WHS, particularly through disrupting the spatial and visual links between monuments, and as a result of its overall visual impact.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ For a critical view of major road construction projects, see Campaign to Protect Rural England 2017.

⁹⁶ Freeman and Todd 2023, 4.

⁹⁷ Witcher 2021, 3.

⁹⁸ Campaign to Protect Rural England 2017, 3.

⁹⁹ Planning Inspectorate 2020; Marshall 2021; Witcher 2021.

¹⁰⁰ UNESCO / International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) 2018, 6.

The Mission therefore argued that the proposed scheme “should not proceed in its current form.”¹⁰¹ Instead, it called for a longer tunnel to protect the OUV of the property, and that surface routes for the new dual carriageway should be reconsidered outside the WHS. The same concerns were reemphasized during the forty-third and forty-fourth sessions of the WHC.¹⁰² In response, the UK state party has consistently claimed that a longer bored tunnel “would not secure sufficient additional benefits to justify the additional costs.”¹⁰³ UNESCO adopts a rather different view – that is, not based on a cost-benefit analysis – whereby it “considers that the appropriate ‘test’ is not whether there is a net benefit to OUV, but rather how adverse impact on OUV can be avoided.”¹⁰⁴ Additionally, the Stonehenge Alliance allege that the methodology underpinning the cost-benefit analysis was fundamentally flawed and therefore ought to be “treated with caution.”¹⁰⁵ Connecting to the literature, the decision to ignore both UNESCO and professional planners intensified the “politics at the site.” One aspect was evidenced by local expressions of anger and frustration amongst politicians, archaeologists, environmentalists, historians, and Druids¹⁰⁶ for whom Stonehenge is a sacred site.¹⁰⁷

In our view, Shapps’s decision stimulated the Stonehenge Alliance into pragmatic scalar maneuvering, akin to a scalar gymnastics. First, at a local level, it launched its Save Stonehenge World Heritage Site campaign, notably amassing some 137,000 objections to the proposals. It then vaulted to the international scale. In the quote below, once again, there were calls for the WHC to place Stonehenge on the WHS List in Danger. Connecting to the literature, this is evidence of how the Stonehenge Alliance upscaled¹⁰⁸ the “politically contested” road proposals.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, it reveals how they “strategically deployed”¹¹⁰ the international scale through a second attempt at scalar alignment¹¹¹ with a more powerful organization higher up the heritage hierarchy to affect the decision-making over the future status of the WHS: “We believe that such an about-turn might be achieved, were the World Heritage Committee to place Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites on the List of World Heritage in Danger. We respectfully request that this option might be considered at the 44th Committee meeting. *International condemnation would send shock waves to the UK heritage sector and perhaps persuade the UK Government to listen to UNESCO.*”¹¹²

However, a drastic call such as this requires a closer reading of what actually happened in Liverpool after it was placed on the List in Danger in 2012. In the case of Liverpool, this shift did not have the desired effect for UNESCO because an extensive and expensive urban development project – Liverpool Waters – still managed to secure planning permission from the local authority. This, and plans for a new football stadium on the waterfront, ultimately

¹⁰¹ UNESCO / ICOMOS 2018, 8.

¹⁰² UNESCO WHC 2019, 2021a.

¹⁰³ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2020, 3.

¹⁰⁴ UNESCO / ICOMOS 2018, 7.

¹⁰⁵ Freeman and Todd 2023.

¹⁰⁶ A druid was a member of the high-ranking class in ancient Celtic cultures. Druids were religious leaders as well as legal authorities, adjudicators, lorekeepers, medical professionals, and political advisor. The current druid leader is Arthur Uthur Pendragon. “History of Wales: Druids,” *Historic UK*, <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofWales/Druids/> (accessed 2nd April 2022).

¹⁰⁷ “The Battle of Stonehenge”; see also “Save Stonehenge,” *Instagram*; “Save Stonehenge,” *Twitter*; “Stonehenge Alliance,” *Facebook*.

¹⁰⁸ Smith 1992.

¹⁰⁹ Swyngedouw and Boelens 2018.

¹¹⁰ MacKinnon 2011.

¹¹¹ Zwegers 2022.

¹¹² Fielden 2021, 13 (emphasis added).

resulted in Liverpool being delisted as a WHS.¹¹³ Therefore, the lesson from Liverpool,¹¹⁴ and Dresden,¹¹⁵ is that placement on the List in Danger, and the associated attempt at “naming and shaming,”¹¹⁶ does not guarantee delivery of the desired outcome for those who initiate inscription on the List in Danger. Clearly, there is a similarity between Liverpool and Stonehenge in that “the perceived impact of some new major development proposals has been controversial and [wa]s scrutinized by UNESCO, with UNESCO Missions visiting and reporting on Sites including ... Stonehenge and Avebury ... [and] Liverpool.”¹¹⁷ However, there is an important difference between Liverpool and Stonehenge. In the former, the source of contestation involved very different views over a major regeneration project between Liverpool City Council and UNESCO. In contradistinction, in the latter case, the tension over a major regeneration project involves local stakeholders and the UK Government, with UNESCO seen locally as a potential – international – scalar savior for the site’s authenticity, integrity, and OUV. Additionally, it is noticeable that the Conservative-dominated Wiltshire Council supported the UK Government’s proposal.¹¹⁸

Drawing upon support from around the world and public donations, the Stonehenge Alliance was able to fund a legal challenge against the Secretary of State’s ruling.¹¹⁹ This is further evidence of scalar maneuvering. This time, successfully downscaling the contentious road proposals from the international scale to the national legal system. On 30 July 2021, concluding a judicial review at the High Court in London,¹²⁰ Justice Holgate quashed the Development Consent Order granted by the Transport Secretary for the A303 road project.¹²¹ The judge ruled that Shapps had acted “irrationally and unlawfully” when he approved the project because he failed to consider alternative schemes as required by law;¹²² the judge also found that the decision-making process failed to include evidence of the impact on each individual asset located at the WHS property.¹²³ As such, the judge

¹¹³ Chetwin 2021; Wray 2021a, 2021b.

¹¹⁴ Boland et al. 2022.

¹¹⁵ Gaillard and Rodwell 2015.

¹¹⁶ Hølleland Hamman, and Phelps 2019.

¹¹⁷ World Heritage UK 2019, 19.

¹¹⁸ Wiltshire Council has 98 councillors: 61 Conservatives, 27 Liberal Democrats, 7 Independents, 3 Labour, <https://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?FN=PARTYandVW=TABLEandPIC=1> (accessed 3rd June 2023). That corresponds to 62 percent of councillors who are Conservatives and just 3 percent who represent the Labour Party. Moreover, all seven of Wiltshire’s Members of Parliament represent the Conservative Party.

¹¹⁹ Kate Fielden (2018, 158) explains: “We have built a strong community of individual supporters through our national and international petitions available in a number of languages, with over 32,000 signatures of people of all ages and walks of life and from more than 40 countries. Our website is a point of reference with news, videos, articles, and copies of our correspondence.” On the “domestic legal battle” in Dresden, see Hamman and Hølleland 2023, 212–15.

¹²⁰ “The role of the court is not to re-make the decision or consider the merits of the scheme, but to assess whether the process of the decision-making followed correct procedure.” Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2022, 20.

¹²¹ “Stonehenge Campaigners Will Court Battle,” *BBC News*, 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-wiltshire-58024139> (accessed 4th April 2022); “Stonehenge Tunnel Project Blocked as Campaigners Win High Court Battle,” *ITV News*, 2021, <https://www.itv.com/news/2021-07-30/stonehenge-tunnel-project-blocked-as-campaigners-win-high-court-battle> (accessed 4th April 2022); contrastingly, see Hamman and Hølleland 2023, 218 (who reveal that Germany’s courts ruled that the controversial bridge in Dresden should be constructed).

¹²² On the alternatives, see Horgan 2022; Moore 2022.

¹²³ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2022; Steven Morris, “Stonehenge Road Tunnel Go-Ahead Unlawful, High Court Told,” *The Guardian*, 23 June 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jun/23/stonehenge-road-tunnel-grant-shapps-go-ahead-unlawful-high-court-told>; Kevin Rawlinson and Gwyn Topham, “High Court Victory for Stonehenge Campaigners as Tunnel Is Ruled Unlawful,” *The Guardian*, 30 July 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jul/30/high-court-victory-for-stonehenge-campaigners-as-tunnel-is-ruled-unlawful>.

upheld two of the five grounds that had been submitted to the court. Notwithstanding the legal setback, the UK state party maintained “its view that rather than being a potential threat to the property, the scheme is capable of delivering significant enhancements for the WHS, its characteristics, and importantly, its integrity.”¹²⁴ Given this, Stonehenge ought not to be placed on the List in Danger.

Reflecting on these statements reveals a conflict between the local and national scales of heritage. At the local scale, the Stonehenge Alliance was advocating that the property should be placed on the List in Danger to protect its OUV; in so doing, upscaling contentions over road proposals to the supranational scale through an appeal to the more powerful WHC. While at the national scale, the UK state party was strongly resistant to such action, arguing that sufficient safeguards were in place to protect the integrity of the property should the proposed renovation to the A303 receive renewed Development Consent and proceed as planned. Interestingly, despite Wiltshire being a politically strong Conservative heartland, the case of Stonehenge reveals a schism between the local and national levels over the future of this major regeneration project. In this instance, it places local activists in alliance with an international organization – that is, scale jumping and scalar alignment, pitting both of them against the national and local government (both Conservative); the National Trust, which own 800 hectares of land surrounding Stonehenge; and English Heritage, which runs the site.¹²⁵ Clearly, this is a very different situation to that what transpired in Liverpool.

Although the legal challenge was an incredible victory for local campaigners, it left the road plans for Stonehenge unresolved. Immediately after the court ruling, the Department for Transport expressed its disappointment with the decision claiming the existing plans remained the best option for the WHS.¹²⁶ The Department of Transport and National Highways¹²⁷ then entered into discussions about how to amend the project and proceed with the next stage of the redetermination process.¹²⁸ The Department for Transport began mulling over whether it should appeal the court decision. At the time, it was reported that National Highways were to go ahead with securing contracts for the procurement work of digging the tunnel.¹²⁹ Additionally, the UK state party stated that, should an appeal be successful and Development Consent be granted for a second time, it was capable of delivering the required changes to the road infrastructure without compromising the OUV of the WHS property.¹³⁰

In June 2022, the forty-fifth session of UNESCO’s WHC was due to meet in the Russian city of Kazan. However, the invasion of Ukraine led to intense pressure from global cultural organizations, and the meeting was subsequently postponed indefinitely.¹³¹ The WHC is now scheduled to meet in September 2023 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia,¹³² when a decision as to

¹²⁴ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2022, 21.

¹²⁵ “The Battle of Stonehenge.”

¹²⁶ Miranda Bryant and Steven Morris, “Stonehenge Tunnel Plans Continue Despite High Court Ruling,” *The Guardian*, 4 August 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/aug/04/stonehenge-tunnel-plans-continue-despite-high-court-ruling> (accessed 4th April 2022).

¹²⁷ National Highways, formerly the Highways Agency and later Highways England, is a government-owned company with responsibility for operating, maintaining, and improving motorways and major A roads in England. “National Highways,” <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/> (accessed 3rd June 2023).

¹²⁸ National Highways 2022.

¹²⁹ Bryant and Morris, “Stonehenge Tunnel.”

¹³⁰ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2022.

¹³¹ Wallace Ludel, “UNESCO Indefinitely Postpones Planned World Heritage Meeting in Russia,” *The Art Newspaper*, 22 April 2022, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/04/22/unesco-postpones-world-heritage-meeting-russia> (accessed 4th April 2022).

¹³² “Extended 45th Session of the World Heritage Committee,” UNESCO, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/45COM/> (accessed 3rd June 2023).

whether Stonehenge will be placed on the WHS List in Danger could be made. At the time of finalizing this article (15 July 2023), the UK Government had announced, for the second time, that Development Consent had been granted – with minor modifications – for the A303 road project.¹³³ The Stonehenge Alliance stated that it was “extremely disappointed” by the decision and warned that approving the project could lead to Stonehenge losing WHS status.¹³⁴ Of note, Wiltshire Council reaffirmed its backing for the scheme indicating a scalar alignment¹³⁵ between the Conservative national government and the Conservative local government on the economic and archaeological merits of the project. Councilor Caroline Thomas, cabinet member for transport, explained:

We’re delighted that consent has been granted once again for the A303 Stonehenge project and it can now move forward. This huge infrastructure project represents a significant investment in Wiltshire that will boost the economy of both our county and the wider region, unlocking jobs and investment. Along with the construction, there will also be comprehensive programme of archaeological mitigation, which will enhance our understanding of the World Heritage Site.¹³⁶

In response, Kate Fielden of the Stonehenge Alliance, made the announcement that the organization was seeking legal advice on the Government’s decision before deciding on their next steps. She opined: “We are shocked that the Government is prepared to implement a £2.5 billion road scheme when the country is in dire need of expenditure on far more important things. UNESCO, the UN’s heritage body, previously warned that Stonehenge will be placed on its In Danger List if the tunnel goes ahead, and could lose its status entirely. Such an outcome would be a national disgrace. Stonehenge is probably one of the most prominent heritage sites in the world.”¹³⁷ In two short reflective pieces, an experienced planning professional reflected on the lessons from Liverpool for Stonehenge and other UK WHSs.¹³⁸ He referred to the suggestion that WHSs should, in future, be formally included in the United Kingdom’s planning policy and given statutory status. A change, he argued, that would go some way to overcoming the difficulties encountered in Liverpool and Stonehenge. Additionally, heritage issues currently fall between two departments of state – that is, those responsible for culture and planning. Therefore, he ended by posing this question: “Is there a case for moving the sites, along with heritage in general, from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to [the] ... Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities?”¹³⁹ Having a single department at the national scale dedicated to heritage and planning is a sensible way forward in circumventing some of the key problems that occurred in Liverpool, those that are currently occurring in Stonehenge, and those that may occur in other UK WHSs in the near or distant future.

¹³³ Siba Jackson, “Stonehenge: Plans to Build Road Tunnel near English Heritage Site Approved,” *Sky News*, 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/stonehenge-plans-to-build-road-tunnel-near-english-heritage-site-approved-12920943> (accessed 3rd June 2023); Gwyn Topham, “Stonehenge Road Tunnel Plans Approved by Transport Secretary,” *The Guardian*, 14 July 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jul/14/stonehenge-road-tunnel-plans-approved-transport-secretary-concent-widen-roads?CMP=share_btn_link (accessed 5th July 2023).

¹³⁴ Sammy Jenkins, “Stonehenge Tunnel Is Approved by Government,” *BBC News*, 2023, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-wiltshire-66201424> (accessed 5th July 2023).

¹³⁵ Zwegers 2022.

¹³⁶ Cited in Jenkins, “Stonehenge Tunnel.”

¹³⁷ Cited in Jenkins, “Stonehenge Tunnel.”

¹³⁸ Wray 2021a, 2021b.

¹³⁹ Wray 2021a, 398.

Conclusions

To conclude this article, we broaden out the spatial focus to argue that there are important implications for policy and practice that have emerged from this study. There are pragmatic lessons that Stonehenge, and Liverpool, offer for other cultural properties around the world that face the prospect of being placed on the List in Danger and, even more dangerously, of being delisted as a UNESCO WHS. First, an interesting finding from this article concerns the role of the state party. Liverpool is a largely working-class, Left-leaning Labour Party stronghold that has, over time, been at odds with successive Conservative governments. Given this historical context, it is suggested that the perceived inaction of the then Conservative Government under previous leader Boris Johnson was a contributing factor in Liverpool losing its UNESCO WHS status in 2021.¹⁴⁰ As noted above, the county of Wiltshire is dominated by the Conservative Party and therefore has a very different political geography. This local-national ideological scalar alignment¹⁴¹ is reflected in central and local government support for the controversial project; we also note that in Wiltshire the state party (arguably) adopted a more interventionist role compared to Liverpool.

Moreover, the “object of contestation” and “institutionalized practices” linked to scale are different in Liverpool and Stonehenge.¹⁴² Liverpool involved a local-international axis of political contestation and accusations that the – national – state party did not intervene effectively enough to prevent the delisting of the property. Whereas in Stonehenge, the source of the contestation was between local activists and the state party, with UNESCO regarded as a potential – international – scalar savior to prevent deleterious damage to the OUV of the property. Another point of difference was that, in Stonehenge, local activists, through the Stonehenge Alliance, openly appealed to UNESCO to place the WHS on the List in Danger, through scale jumping and upscaling an important local issue, in order to force the national government to change its road plans for the property.

This takes us to our second conclusion. Through our analysis of Stonehenge – and of Liverpool¹⁴³ – we suggest that the conceptual lens of the “politics at the site” is key to understanding the effectiveness of local resistance to major planning interventions significantly affecting the future of WHSs. More specifically, analyzing how different scalar alignments¹⁴⁴ take place and how effective they are offers an important lesson for other WHSs. For example, in Liverpool, there is clear evidence that the controversy over the huge Liverpool Waters regeneration project “undermined the linkage” between UNESCO and the local government – Liverpool City Council – and resulted in the delisting of that property. In contradistinction, the controversial A303 road plans in Stonehenge not only “undermined the linkage” between UNESCO and the national government but also, exhibiting another dimension to the scalar politics, “strengthened alignments” between UNESCO and a local interest group – the Stonehenge Alliance. What this adds to the extant literature is that controversial planning projects are likely to collide with, and potentially provoke, geographically distinct “politics at the site,” resulting in different scalar alignments between local, national, and supranational stakeholders.

Most evidently, in the Stonehenge case, the strength of the scalar alignments created by a local stakeholder effectively stalled a major planning project. Moreover, we demonstrate how different institutional actors associated with the UK state – such as the Department for Transport – failed to realize planning visions as a result of pressure and criticism generated,

¹⁴⁰ UNESCO 2021a, 2021b; Boland et al. 2022.

¹⁴¹ Zwegers 2022.

¹⁴² MacKinnon 2011.

¹⁴³ Boland et al. 2022.

¹⁴⁴ Zwegers 2022.

in large part, due to scale jumping activities initiated by the Stonehenge Alliance. In that sense, the lesson from Stonehenge for local stakeholders in other WHSs that object to major planning proposals is clear. Creating scalar alignments with more powerful actors further up the heritage hierarchy increases the ability to successfully challenge controversial national planning and regeneration projects that may deleteriously affect the WHS. Given this, we add more nuance, depth, and substance to existing knowledge on the question of scale in the governance and politics of WHSs.

This research yields significant insights into critical areas where, to date, there has been a dearth of investigation – namely, theory and practice; the findings, therefore, have implications not only for future research but also for policy making. In terms of a theoretical contribution, we have revisited the concept of scale – specifically, scale jumping – to explain how different institutional actors influence and contest the governance of local places ordained with WHS status. In this case, a highly localized set of actors – the Stonehenge Alliance – have been shown to pressurize and ultimately block national-level transport visions and heritage protection strategies through scale jumping – in particular, invoking pressure at the international level via the UNESCO WHC and successful planning objections at the national level of the UK High Court. These actions are especially interesting in the context of Liverpool and reveal how campaigning efforts and their success is likely to vary depending, very much, on the “politics of the site.” Thus, whereas planning permission for Liverpool’s waterfront development proceeded in the interests of inward investment and economic growth – ultimately, resulting in the delisting of the WHS – the “politics of the site” in the rural, politically Conservative setting of Stonehenge resulted in wholly different realities in terms of planning and governance outcomes.

The contrasting outcomes and strategies played out in the respective sites of Stonehenge and Liverpool suggest a need for further study of diverse cases with a view to better understanding the implications of WHS status on planning praxis and resistance. For example, the UK Government recently revealed seven new places it is backing to win future UNESCO WHS,¹⁴⁵ including Birkenhead near Liverpool (the People’s Park), York, and the Zenith of Iron Age Shetland (combining three sites on the Shetland Islands). Notwithstanding the prospective economic benefits of WHS status, the experience of Stonehenge suggests inclusion into the WHS club represents a potential resource for campaigners, through which WHSs may be used as a bulwark for resisting unwanted planning applications (that is, those perceived to affect the cultural-historical interests of the sites). Moreover, future high-profile disputes invoking UNESCO and landmark delisting events, we suggest, support the vision that major policy changes are inevitable if events at Liverpool and Stonehenge are replicated at new sites in the future.¹⁴⁶

Reflecting the literature, this article is not about the role of scale in “heritage making”; rather, we see it as contributing to debates on heritage scale as a “category of practice.”¹⁴⁷ In terms of our own contribution to knowledge, we have advanced the concept of scalar maneuvers. We have analyzed how the Stonehenge Alliance created local agitation against a major road development linked to the WHS, reported to the national government criticizing the road plans and successfully challenged their road proposals in the UK High Court, and pleaded with supranational UNESCO to place Stonehenge on the List in Danger. We regard this activity as displaying more than scale jumping. As these acts were performed in sequence to resist a planning proposal from a higher scale¹⁴⁸ and designed to affect leverage

¹⁴⁵ “Seven Sites Confirmed in the Running for UNESCO World Heritage Status,” *UK Government*, 10 April 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/seven-sites-confirmed-in-the-running-for-unesco-world-heritage-status> (accessed 5th July 2023).

¹⁴⁶ Wray 2021a, 2021b.

¹⁴⁷ Debarbieux and Munz 2019; Debarbieux et al. 2023.

¹⁴⁸ Smith 1992.

over the future status of the WHS, it amounts to what may be considered to be scalar maneuvering akin to scalar gymnastics.

In conclusion, this article contributes to knowledge on the “act of remaking the geographical scale of daily social and political intercourse” and, more importantly, “alerts us to the fact that ‘jumping scale’ is a political activity.”¹⁴⁹ In so doing, we have developed an understanding of the nuanced and complex relationship between heritage, scale, and politics. In particular, we have responded to calls for a more informed “understand[ing] [of] how social actors choose to re-scale an issue, whether up or down, following their own interests.”¹⁵⁰ Finally, framed through the case study of Stonehenge, the findings from this article highlight the “messy affairs with politics at various scales”¹⁵¹ and, more importantly, will “enable[e] more profound and lasting productive interactions within and between practice and research” relating to the future of WHSs in the United Kingdom and around the world.¹⁵²

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¹⁵² Stegmeijer, Veldpaus, and Janssen 2021, 18.

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