World Cultural Heritage as a starting point for sustainability education

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Starting point

„Global issues – such as climate change – urgently require a shift in our lifestyles and a transformation of the way we think and act. To achieve this change, we need new skills, **values and attitudes** that lead to more sustainable societies.“
(UNESCO, 2017)

Culture and especially physically present heritage sites provide opportunity to debate and critically reflect these new values and attitudes (Sorgo, 2011). Under these premises, culture and cultural education significantly contribute to our efforts to create a society that values sustainability and acts according to this principle. To reach this goal we have to think about how cultural information and processes can and should be taught in different educational systems.

Key Questions

1. How do young people (15-17 years) evaluate world heritage sites in regards to the sites' individual, regional and universal values?
2. Do discussions about world cultural heritage influence the reflection of the young people's attitude system and the development of their awareness of the value of the heritage sites?

Methods

Qualitative part

- Focus groups
- Reflexive photography

Sample:

- 12 groups
- 43 participants

Quantitative part

- Teaching unit (90 minutes)
- Questionnaires

Sample:

- 8 classes
- 214 participants
- 131 present at all 3 times of measurement

Quantitative Part

Teaching unit topics: expectations about characteristics, criteria of UNESCO, the red list, local and international consequences of destruction of heritage sites

Questionnaires: demographic data, factual knowledge, semantic differential, interest; attitude, experiences with heritage, EMU (Helmke et al., 2013), assessment of the project

Results

71,8% of the participants reported that they did not deal with cultural heritage before. Often the reason is lacking interest (46%) or too little time (24%). Nevertheless, students rated their general attitude towards world cultural heritage significantly more positive after than before the project [$t(130)=-5,861, p=.000$].

Their own characteristics for world cultural heritage and the listed heritage sites are the same in both the classes and the small groups of the qualitative part. Some features that the students named for world heritage sites are not in accordance with selection criteria from UNESCO. This leads to the students classing sites as belonging to UNESCO world heritage that are not part of it. There are no significant differences after the project. The value systems did not change.

Outlook

Even though most of the students did not deal with world cultural heritage before, it seems that the topic captivated them. The reported higher attitude values indicate that there is great potential in this approach for future education.

The differences between the perspective of these young people and the official criteria can be a useful starting point for critical discussions about and analyses of the value of heritage sites and culture in general. The teaching should built on the interests and value systems of the young people. The goal is to create an open space where students do not just learn but also get the chance to create, edit, develop and criticize their own value system. The next step should involve these findings to create such a space.

Reported characteristics of World Cultural Heritage

Time of measurement 1			Time of measurement 3		
	Frequency	Percentage of all answers		Frequency	Percentage of all answers
Age (f.e. old; antique)	37	14,6%	History (f.e. historical value)	53	14,2%
History (f.e. historical value)	37	14,6%	Unique (f.e. be special)	46	12,3%
Unique (f.e. be special)	27	10,6%	Culture (f.e. culturally influencing)	39	10,5%
Historic events (f.e. represent the century)	20	7,9%	Age (f.e. old; antique)	32	8,6%
Culture (f.e. culturally influencing)	19	7,5%	Historic events (f.e. represent the century)	28	7,5%
General Importance (f.e. important, significant)	13	5,1%	Well preserved (f.e. original condition)	23	6,2%
Universal importance (f.e. relevant for the world)	10	3,9%	Architecture (f.e. extraordinary construction)	17	4,6%
Regional importance (f.e. important for the village)	9	3,5%	General Importance (f.e. important, significant)	16	4,3%