

Intangible Cultural Heritage and Soft Power – Exploring the Relationship

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the 'soft power' concept (Joseph Nye) and explores its relationship with the concept of intangible cultural heritage. Its main points of reference are thus the UNESCO 2003 *Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, the *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*, as well as two chosen 'soft power' rankings: *Soft Power 30* and the *Elcano Global Presence Index*. Member states of the European Union, as well as countries occupying important places in these rankings like the United States, the United Kingdom or China are of particular relevance. The author points out that a new kind of discourse has emerged alongside the 'Authorised Heritage Discourse' (Laurajane Smith) – the 'Intangible Heritage Discourse'. She argues that UNESCO plays the role of an arbiter in both of these discourses, and subsequently analyses their possible impact on the position of particular countries in the 'soft power' rankings.

Keywords

'soft power', European Union, UNESCO, Authorised Heritage Discourse, Intangible Heritage Discourse, China, United States, United Kingdom, Poland.

Introduction

Power is like the weather. Everyone depends on it and talks about it, but few understand it. Just as farmers and meteorologists try to forecast the weather, political leaders and analysts try to describe and predict changes in power relationships. Power is also like love, easier to experience than to define or measure, but no less real for that. (Joseph Nye)

'Soft power' as a term was introduced into the public and scientific discourse by Joseph Nye over 25 years ago (Nye, 1991). It postulates that the state's power is also based on its attractiveness and its appeal to shared values, which distinguishes this kind of power from 'hard power' which is based on violence, coercion, and the ability to deter, stemming from the country's military or economic

potential – the power of the fist, based on the policy of ‘carrot and stick’ (Nye, 2007, pp. 34-35). Joseph Nye states that *a country’s soft power is based on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policy (when others see it as legitimate moral authority)* (Nye, 2007, p. 40). As one of the pillars of ‘soft power’ is culture, so is culture’s essential counterpart, cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. A balanced combination of hard and soft power is nowadays considered a truly ‘smart power’ of the country (Nye, 2007, p. 188).

However, it has only been 10 years since the soft power concept started its international career: through its presence in the media, in the strategies adopted by the institutions of culture, in the growing popularity of states’ soft power rankings, and in the statements of politicians on the national level and of officials of international organisations, including UNESCO. Furthermore, cultural policy analysts have noted that in the 21st century, the states, aware of the prime role of their cultures, have begun to take part in the ‘global race for soft power’ (Holden, 2013). This notion is also connected with the popular concept of nation branding, developed within the last 10 years by Simon Anholt, who refers in his works to Nye (Anholt, 2005, p. 24). It is also no coincidence that the countries affluent in soft power resources are also perceived as having the strongest national brands. Those undoubtedly include the United States, but also the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Canada, China, and Japan. The rankings of nation brands are thus created in parallel to soft power rankings¹ which include specific indicators directly referring to UNESCO’s most powerful soft-power instrument: the *World Heritage List*.

The anniversary of the soft power concept occurs in parallel with the 10th anniversary of the coming into force of the 2003 *Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (hereinafter the 2003 *Convention*) that occurred in 2006. Since then, countries have been focused on inscribing as many elements of intangible cultural heritage (hereinafter ICH) from their territories as possible on the *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* (hereinafter the *Representative List*). These actions (creating national inventories, writing and submitting nominations – in most cases costly and time-consuming processes) are directly related to the shared conviction that the power of culture – the soft power of the states – is becoming increasingly important in contemporary international relations.

The purpose of this article is therefore to determine whether there is a factual relationship between the position of the state in the international arena of cultural heritage (UNESCO) – defined mainly by the number of inscriptions it has accrued on the *Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* – and the position they occupy in the soft power rankings. Additional questions that the author seeks to address concern the position of UNESCO in the heritage discourse that this organisation supervises, and the capabilities for influencing the images of states in the cultural heritage field outside of UNESCO. The ten-year period after the 2003 UNESCO *Convention* came into force (2006-2016) is thus analysed, taking into consideration the Member States of the European Union and countries occupying important places in the two most popular soft power rankings: *Soft Power 30* and the *Elcano Global Presence Index*.

Cultural heritage and ‘soft power’ – unexplored relations

One might find it surprising that the explanatory potential of the concept of soft power has not been utilised more broadly in the area of cultural heritage studies (or heritology,² this group also includes heritage management or heritage conservation), particularly when considering its popularity within the discipline of international relations. Not a single publication dedicated to studying the relationship between cultural heritage and states’ soft power can be found among the reputable publications devoted to cultural heritage – the emergence of which, among the majority of global publishers within the last 10 years is in turn evidence of the consolidation of this distinct field. Examples of such publications are *Routledge Key Issues in Cultural Heritage* and *Oxford University Press Cultural Heritage Law and Policy* amongst others.

Occasional references to this concept and its relationship with cultural heritage can be found in a handful of books.³ They also appear, though rarely, in academic journals (Jacobs, 2012). On the one hand, this absence may be associated with the lack of communication about new theoretical concepts between researchers of international relations and researchers of cultural heritage, which originate – if not directly from heritage studies *et consortes* – mainly from disciplines such as law, archaeology, museology, cultural anthropology and art history. On the other hand, it may be

so due to methodological difficulties connected to the research into the cultural diplomacy of states from the foreign policy perspective, and its significance for the status of the states within international relations. This could be particularly challenging for researchers from outside of what are broadly defined as political studies. Another reason for this may be the relatively small number of researchers within the area of political science interested in cultural heritage; it is much more popular to perform research in the areas of cultural policy, cultural diplomacy or public diplomacy *per se*, where the concept of soft power appears often and is commonly used.⁴

Regarding the strong awareness of the political dimension of cultural heritage and its relevance in shaping the identity of the modern nation-state among researchers associating themselves with the field of critical heritage studies, the lack of meaningful research in this area is even more striking.⁵ Ewa Klekot notices that:

... even writing about the political usage of heritage is impossible, because such formulation of the subject assumes that there could be non-political heritage. Nevertheless, the very genesis of the concept of 'cultural heritage' is associated with one of the political foundations of modernity. Heritage, often considered as part of the politics of memory, cannot be non-political, because its primary function is the legitimisation of the existing modern societies and communities whose members are united by a common notion of community (Klekot, 2014, pp. 46-47).

Cultural heritage is thus not only a matter of states' activity, but also the context in which states shape their policy (including foreign policy) and public diplomacy. Therefore, the concept of intangible cultural heritage, with its powerful ability to expose issues of identity, practices and inter-generationally reproduced processes, being today the second-strongest of the cultural (material, natural) heritage incarnations, has become another tool used by states in shaping public diplomacy and strengthening their soft power. This takes place within the framework of a widespread contemporary 'cult of heritage', called a 'new, international religion' by David Lowenthal (1998, p. 1).⁶ It serves to highlight the special, largely instrumental role that is attributed to heritage today (Harrison, 2012; Smith, 2006). This role is to a large extent a political one, where the decisions of individual countries

and the international community (e.g. through UNESCO) of what will bear the label of 'heritage' (whether of the 'world' or 'intangible' type) in fact legitimise and determine the acceptable forms of national, group or unit identities. They are determined using conventional criteria which postulate that those identities have to be *compatible with existing international human rights, and the requirements of sustainable development and mutual respect* (see the definition of Article 2 of the 2003 *Convention* below). Following Lowenthal, it can therefore be metaphorically assumed that the 'Vatican' for this new 'cult of heritage', is today located in the Paris headquarters of UNESCO, which in 2003 announced to the world the existence of a new 'dogma': the intangible cultural heritage (Schreiber, 2016, pp. 55-56).

Intangible cultural heritage – a new heritage discourse?

Intangible cultural heritage is defined for the purposes of the 2003 *Convention* as:

...the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that [are] ...compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development. (article 2 of the Convention).

The definition of 'intangible cultural heritage' has created an unprecedented new paradigm of understanding cultural heritage. It regards heritage as the sphere of 'constantly recreated' practices, thus implying that they may also be subject to change.⁷ Furthermore, it renegotiates the present concept of heritage that according to the 'authenticity principle' had been previously required to be 'preserved in an unchanged form', and in turn leads to the adoption of a new dogma: of heritage that is alive and dynamically changing, and what is more, even to the consideration that today, anything can be perceived as heritage (Howard, 2003).

As a result of the definition of ICH, a new way of understanding heritage has replaced the previous, 'archival' narrative of cultural monuments in favour of current, anthropological narratives of cultural practices,

and furthermore has de-legitimised the exclusiveness of expert discourse in this area in favour of a discourse that includes the heritage bearers themselves: individuals, groups, and communities⁸ (Waterton and Smith, 2005, p. 11). It is these entities that have appeared for the first time in the 2003 *Convention* as the basic 'mediators' of cultural heritage, whose opinion on any of the stages of heritage proceedings (whether domestic or international) cannot be ignored. This new 'intangible heritage discourse' has also revealed with full force the western-centric way of former thinking about heritage (material, authentic, historic and universal), and has subsequently tried to balance it by introducing new rules and principles (intangibility, representativeness, 'present-ness' and locality). According to those western-centric discursive practices, 10 years ago Laurajane Smith (2006) introduced the term Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD). The newly observed Intangible Heritage Discourse (IHD) – suggested by the author (see also Sargent, 2016, who suggests the term 'Intangible Cultural Heritage Authorised Discourse – ICHAD) has at the same time kept the necessary legitimisation criteria from the previous discourse, which are crucial from the United Nation's point of view, namely: the compliance with human rights, and the compliance with the principle of sustainable development.⁹ Laurajane Smith and Emma Waterton even claim because of this that, *there is no such thing as a heritage*, but rather a number of competing discourses which convey significant political and cultural consequences (Waterton and Smith, 2005, p. 11). Sargent analyses this newly emerged discourse with scepticism, pointing out the fact that it *highlights the politics that surround heritage selection, a process riven by politics and devoid of merit*, which also did not meet the expectations that it would stand in contrast to the AHD, especially in relation to the aim of counterbalancing the elitist, imperial, European origins of cultural heritage (Sargent, 2016, pp. 49-50).

In this somehow biased rivalry between discourses (AHD and IHD) and countries, UNESCO seems to play the role of an arbiter which has imposed the rules of the game of cultural legitimacy: it recognises, authorises and justifies the functioning of certain cultural manifestations as 'heritage' (Smith, 2006, p. 111). This organisation, due to its role in the fields of culture and cultural heritage, has considerable soft power resources itself and is aware of them, and uses their potential in positioning itself in the environment of international organisations as the

intellectual agency of the United Nations, whose message has never been more important (UNESCO, 2016d). The advent of the new instrument of international law - the 2003 *Convention* - and the subsequent introduction of its new concept of intangible cultural heritage thus resulted in an increase of UNESCO's soft power, as an organisation that guards the growing number of heritage legitimisation processes (Schreiber, 2016).

Furthermore, the concept of soft power has become a leading idea in defining the role and tasks of UNESCO in the wide-ranging consultation process on the new United Nations' development goals after 2015 (*Post-2015 Development Agenda*), adopted in September 2015 as the *Sustainable Development Goals* (Agenda, 2030). In the introduction to the document prepared in April 2014 by UNESCO,¹⁰ titled briefly and timely *Soft Power Agenda*, UNESCO General Director Irina Bokova said that this organisation is a key *soft power actor*.¹¹

Intangible cultural heritage – an effective tool for countries to strive for 'soft power'?

It should be noted that it is not only the quite revolutionary way of understanding the cultural heritage itself, but also the specific instruments created within the 2003 *Convention* that make this new concept attractive. The undisputed success of the most recognisable international 'promotion machine' for the purposes of sustaining the 'cult of cultural heritage' – the *List of World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, established by the UNESCO 1972 *Convention*¹² and now containing more than 1,000 entries – brought about the decision to repeat that solution in the UNESCO 2003 *Convention*, which established the *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*.¹³ This list currently includes 365 inscriptions (as of December 2016).¹⁴ The rapid pace of ratification of this international treaty and the large number of nominations pending entry on the *Representative List*, shows that states recognise the constantly growing role of cultural heritage in building their image in international relations. The most eminent UNESCO 1972 *Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, after over 40 years of its existence, has been ratified by almost all the countries of the world (192). After just 10 years, in 2013, the *Convention* had been ratified by 150 countries. By December 2016 the number of States Parties had reached 171. Considering

the pace of ratification, one can thus expect that the number of ratifications will have reached 190 by its 15th anniversary in 2018. This demonstrates not only its universal acceptance and the lack of major controversy regarding its meaning, but also the fact that all states which have ratified it have recognised it was in their interest to do so (Schreiber, 2014).

This basic, tangible interest in the intangible 'game' of soft power is evident: it is to inscribe an entry on to the *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*. The process of creating such a list does not only consist of excluding certain elements of heritage from the list, but also includes attributing meaning to certain elements of ICH according to specific criteria adopted by UNESCO. Although the main idea behind naming the ICH list as 'representative' has been to avoid a hierarchical and value-judgmental approach to ICH (of which the *World Heritage List* was accused because of its claim to collect only cultural and natural properties of *outstanding universal value* – cf. Article 1 of the 1972 *Convention*), the final result is very similar. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett claims: *world heritage is first and foremost a list. Everything on the list, whatever its previous context might have been, is now placed in a relationship with other masterpieces* [from the list]. *The list becomes a context for all the items on it* (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004, p. 57). One can thus infer that at present, intangible cultural heritage consists firstly and foremost of items on the *Representative List*. For countries that have been constantly analysing their place in hundreds of rankings in the world and have become 'obsessed with rankings', (even leading to a creation of the ranking of rankings by *The Economist* in 2014), the ICH *Representative List* becomes – contrary to its original premise – another such ranking, within which they aspire to rank high in both quantitative and qualitative terms.¹⁵ Having no ICH elements on any list from their country seems to be visible evidence of being weak in the global race for prestige, image, and soft power. It can therefore be inferred that the greater the number of items on all types of international 'heritage lists' the greater the cultural soft power of a country. This is because it requires professional and efficient personnel in the administration who deal with heritage protection and safeguarding, as well the availability of appropriate financial resources allocated to cultural policy, including the promotion of that heritage abroad, and effective diplomacy at the international level that includes skilful crafting of coalitions aimed at gaining

a place on the selected list. Inscription on the list therefore becomes only a culmination of a complex process within the sphere of cultural diplomacy that nowadays seems to be – from a political point of view – a necessity, since these are simply the rules of the soft power game (Schreiber, 2016). But does the strength of culture/heritage actually reflect and directly influence the soft power of a state, or can it be compensated by other, non-cultural elements? In other words, how does the culture indicator influence the result achieved by a state in the given soft power ranking and what is the meaning of UNESCO instruments in measuring countries' power in the culture indicator?

As the basis for the analysis of these questions, two soft power rankings were chosen: *Soft Power 30* by Portland Communications and the *Elcano Global Presence Index* by Elcano Royal Institute.

Jonathan McClory, partner at Portland Communications and an author of *Soft Power 30*, opens his report from 2016, *The New Persuaders. An International Ranking of Soft Power* with the words: *The ability to engage with and attract global audiences has never been so critical to prosperity, security, and international influence* (McClory, 2016, p. 11). He presents the ranking of 30 countries divided according to 6 different indicators (labelled as 'objective data' and accompanied by newly added 'subjective data': cuisine, tech products, friendliness, culture, luxury goods, foreign policy, liveability). The method that he has been developing since 2010 in the British Institute for Government (later transferred to his private company, Portland Communications), complements Nye's concept of soft power with new indicators.¹⁶ The impact on the soft power of countries, according to the latest edition, is determined by 'objective data' such as culture, government, engagement (here, public diplomacy), the level of digitalisation, enterprise (which is understood by the author in terms of competitiveness and innovative character which make up the conditions for business, so despite the fact that traditional economic issues are classified as 'hard power', they also appear in the index), and education (until 2015 hidden under the indicator 'culture').

The indicator of 'culture' (objective data) consists respectively of the following elements: the number of tourists that visit the country (data taken from the World Tourism Organisation), the amount of money left by tourists in the country (on average), the number of films

that appear at major film festivals, the number of music albums classified as 'top five' outside their country of origin, the export of creative goods, the number of gold medals won at the Olympic Games, the number of foreign correspondents (journalists) in the country, the outreach of a country's language, the number of annual visitors to museums on the list of the 100 most important museums in the world, the place of a country's football team in the FIFA rankings and the number of sites on the UNESCO *World Heritage List*. In 2016 an additional element appeared: the quality of the national airline. If there is no national carrier, a country's largest airline was used (McClory, 2016, p. 32). The lack of taking the UNESCO *Representative List* into account in the culture indicator could thus mean that it is still not consolidated enough in the common consciousness to be included in the index (therefore it may still be too weak as a tool for building soft power). What might also influence the fact of this absence of the *Representative List* is that the author of the ranking is British, and the whole team consists mainly of British and American nationals (neither Britain nor the United States has yet ratified the UNESCO 2003 *Convention*).

Apart from this, the ranking itself is not surprising. The first ten places are occupied by, in descending order: United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, France, Australia, Japan, Switzerland, Sweden and the Netherlands.

The second report: the *Elcano Global Presence Index*, developed since 2011, covers the global presence of a selection of 90 countries in the 2016 edition. The selection includes the first 85 world economies according to World Bank data (nations with the highest GDP in US dollars in 2014) as well as countries with smaller economies but which are members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and/or the European Union (Elcano, 2016, p. 44). The variables are structured in three categories: military presence, economic presence and soft presence, where the variable 'culture' appears as one among nine 'soft presence' indicators. The others are: migration, tourism, sports, information technology, science, education, development cooperation. The culture variable is assessed by the indicator 'exports of audio-visual services' (cinematographic productions, radio

EU Member States	Year of entry into EU	Year of ratification of UNESCO 2003 Convention	Number of inscriptions on the Representative List of ICH of Humanity	Soft power 30 ranking in 2016	Elcano Global Presence Index in 2016
Belgium**	1958	2006	11	18	17
France	1958	2006	14	5	6
Germany	1958	2013	1	3	3
Italy	1958	2007	7	11	11
Luxemburg	1958	2006	1	-	33
The Netherlands	1958	2012	-	10	8
Denmark	1973	2009	-	13	32
Ireland	1973	2015	-	20	27
United Kingdom	1973	-	-	2	4
Greece**	1981	2007	4	25	37
Portugal	1986	2008	4	21	48
Spain	1986	2006	13	12	12
Austria	1995	2009	3	17	28
Finland	1995	2013	-	14	50
Sweden	1995	2011	-	9	22
Czech Republic	2004	2009	5	29	42

Cyprus	2004	2006	3	-	84
Estonia	2004	2006	4	-	80
Hungary*	2004	2006	3	26	47
Latvia	2004	2005	1	-	83
Lithuania*	2004	2005	3	-	70
Malta	2004	2017	-	-	85
Poland	2004	2011	-	23	29
Slovakia	2004	2006	4	-	61
Slovenia	2004	2008	1	-	72
Bulgaria*	2007	2006	4	-	64
Romania	2007	2006	6	-	53
Croatia	2013	2005	13	-	65

Outside the European Union, occupying the first 10 places in at least one of the given soft power rankings

Australia	-	-	-	6	13
Canada	-	-	-	4	9
China	-	2004	30	28	2
Japan		2004	21	7	7
Russia	-	-	2	27	5
Saudi Arabia		2008	5	-	10
Switzerland		2008	1	8	18
United States of America	-	-	-	1	1

* Member States of the Intergovernmental Committee of the 2003 *Convention*, term of office 2014-2018.

** Member States of the Intergovernmental Committee of the 2003 *Convention*, term of office 2012-2016.

Table 1

Intangible Cultural Heritage and the 'Soft Power' of Countries, ed. Hanna Schreiber.

Based on the websites: www.unesco.org, www.softpower30.portland-communications.com, www.explora.globalpresence.realinstitutoelcano.org [Accessed December 2016]

and television programmes and musical recordings), which are accounted for by the data from the World Trade Organisation (*International Trade Statistics*), or data obtained from Eurostat – when it comes to the assessment of the global presence of the European Union as a whole (the *Elcano European Presence Index* also takes into account national sources). Interestingly, UNESCO as an organisation providing data for measuring the global presence appears in the field of education, but not culture (Elcano, 2016, p. 45).

The following chart considers these rankings in connection with the date of entry into the European Union

(where applicable), the date of ratifying the UNESCO 2003 *Convention*, and the number of ICH elements on the *Representative List*. Non-EU countries, which appear in the first 10 positions in at least one of two chosen rankings, e.g. the United States, Canada, China, Russia, Australia, Japan, Switzerland and Saudi Arabia have also been included.

Almost all of these countries have ratified the UNESCO 2003 *Convention*. The only exception in the European Union remains the United Kingdom,¹⁷ however the UK's soft power is based on many other cultural elements, therefore this absence does not significantly deplete English soft power and it has a leading position in the rankings of

(actual) soft power (McClory, 2016). Nevertheless, taking Brexit into account, there is likely to be a negative impact on global perceptions of Britain in the future soft power rankings. Outside the EU, the remaining non-State Parties to the 2003 *Convention* are: Australia, Canada, Russia and the United States. Among the EU countries, only the Netherlands, Germany, Finland and Ireland ratified the 2003 *Convention* later than Poland (2011), in 2012, 2013, 2013 and 2015 respectively. However, all of them rank higher than Poland, e.g. in the ranking of Portland Communications *Soft Power 30*: Germany – 3rd, the Netherlands – 10th, Finland – 14th, Ireland – 20th, while Poland remains 23rd (McClory, 2016). Interestingly, Croatia could be considered the fastest-developing country in the area of intangible cultural heritage within the EU (it joined the EU in 2013). It already has 13 inscriptions on the *Representative List*, which puts it in first place in terms of the number of entries from south-east Europe, and together with France (14 entries) and Spain (13 entries) they leave the other EU countries behind. However, Croatia is rarely taken into account in the soft power rankings – even though its brand has been focusing on the cultural and natural heritage and its image as a tourist paradise with a relatively high number of UNESCO sites compared to the region as a whole.¹⁸

The role ascribed to cultural heritage for the international position of states, especially for small or medium countries, (Włodkowska-Bagan, 2015, pp. 295-309) does not always result in timely and effective actions at government level. Poland is the best example, since it was the 135th country to ratify the *Convention*, and the 20th among the members of the European Union. Its culture turned out to be the main factor for understating Poland's position. Regarding the 'culture' indicator, Poland ranks 23rd out of 30 countries in *Soft Power 30* and occupies the 29th position in the *Elcano Global Presence Index*. It has the best score in the 'education' indicator, however – it ranks 15th on *Soft Power 30*. As a result of this, it has been given the 23rd place overall. Surprisingly, whereas its culture indicator in 2015 was described as a weakness that had to be improved, in 2016 it appears on the 'strength' side with the comment: *Since joining the EU, more and more tourists across Europe and the rest of the world are getting a taste of all the cultural assets Poland has on offer. With a rich history, impressive architecture, and a wide range of outdoor activities made possible through the surrounding sea, mountains and forests, Poland welcomed 16 million*

tourists last year. (McClory, 2016)

China, in turn, had already ratified the 2003 *Convention* in 2004 as the 6th country in the world (after Algeria, Mauritius, Japan, Gabon and Panama). The *Representative List* thus currently contains 365 entries (as of December 2016), 31 of which come from China, placing it at the forefront in terms of the number of inscribed elements of intangible cultural heritage. In addition, China has up to 48 inscriptions on the UNESCO *World Heritage List* (UNESCO, 2015). Undoubtedly then, it is the leader in terms of promoting its cultural heritage in the international forum, which allows it to rise significantly up the soft power ranking; this is quite unbalanced in the case of China, particularly because of weak indicators for the development of democratic institutions (29th place), digitalisation (28th place) or education (28th place) which all negatively affect Chinese soft power (McClory, 2016). Increasing the strength of Chinese culture has most likely allowed China a place in the ranking, although it is almost at the bottom of the list – 28th place. It is thus effectively the 'culture' indicator that has given China the high 9th place in the culture field and kept China in the top 30 countries.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that among 30 countries in the worldwide soft power ranking, the majority of them (16) are EU Member States, which in turn affects the soft power of the EU itself. The *European Agenda for Culture*¹⁹ and many other official documents adopted by the EU20 have been open about the EU's soft power and the importance of culture for its support:

The European Union is not just an economic process or a trading power; The EU is already widely – and accurately – perceived as an unprecedented, successfully implemented project of social and cultural development. The European Union is and must further strive to remain an example of soft power founded on norms and values such as human dignity, solidarity, tolerance, freedom of expression, respect for diversity and intercultural dialogue; values which – if they are retained and promoted – can provide inspiration for the world in the future (The Council of the European Union, 2013, p. 3).

The *Elcano Global Presence Index* measures the specific position of the EU in the globalised world: the objective is to measure the presence of member states inside the European Union's borders. It therefore includes

the number of news items on each member state generated by European news agencies (Reuters, AFP, EFE, DPA, ANSA), though it excludes the country's own agency in order to avoid over-representation (Elcano, 2016, p. 40).

Conclusions

The concepts of ICH and soft power are linked by 'intangibility', 'soft nature', and the degree to which they are subject to change, and as a result, there are obvious difficulties in researching them.

Nevertheless, if in this way all entities can possess a certain amount of soft power, what is the difference between a country's soft power, such as the United Kingdom's, and the soft power of international organisations such as UNESCO? Their soft power has distinct components which makes them impossible to compare. For the EU, its soft power is not a simple sum of the soft power of the states that form it, but an entirely new quality that is measured in the regional context by the *Elcano European Presence Index* (Elcano, 2016, pp. 11 and 19). The sole fact that it is an international organisation is definitely not enough to compare it, for example, to the soft power of UNESCO. Therefore the question that remains is whether the concept of soft power is useful at all to compare and rank the impact (global presence) of international organisations. Maybe in their case it is only an interesting rhetorical figure of speech? In 2015, the Director General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, at a conference celebrating the 70th anniversary of the organisation, stressed that *especially today, in times of conflict, violence and divisions, culture, education and science make for the soft power that can win against hatred and destruction* (Bokova, 2015). It appears, therefore, that not only UNESCO has its soft power resources, but also culture, science and education themselves possess it. The challenging task is therefore to reliably examine and determine the essence of this concept, which still remains quite unclear, and the methodology of soft power rankings may also raise serious doubts (see Wojciuk, Michatek, Stormowska, 2015, pp. 5-6). These limitations, and the subjective character of these rankings, are pointed out by the authors of the rankings themselves: *One of the biggest challenges to measuring soft power accurately is its inherently subjective nature. Rather than attempt to design against subjectivity, the Soft Power 30 index embraces it* (McClory, 2016, p. 29); the concept is also criticised for this by many other researchers.²¹

This analysis has so far not revealed the existence of a clear correlation between intangible cultural heritage legitimised by UNESCO and the soft power of countries. The leaders of the rankings, the United States and the United Kingdom, are not parties to the 2003 *Convention* and have therefore no inscriptions on the *Representative List*. These two countries also remained outside UNESCO for a long time. The United States, even though they were founding members of UNESCO, left the organisation in 1984 due to growing political conflicts, and returned in 2003, only to reduce their subsidies again in 2011 after the decision to withdraw substantial funds (22% of UNESCO's regular budget, approx. \$80 million per year) covering the costs of UNESCO activities, triggered by the acceptance of Palestine's application to be recognised by UNESCO. Similarly, the United Kingdom left the organisation in 1985 and returned in 1997. One can also question whether the number of properties on the *World Heritage List* affects a country's soft power at all. The United States has 23 inscriptions, and the United Kingdom 29 (UNESCO, 2016a, 2016b). Therefore, both are a long way from China which has 46 inscriptions on the *World Heritage List*, and has been part of the organisation since its establishment in 1945. However, China is ranked below both countries in the soft power rankings (though the Elcano ranking is an exception).

All this means that states with strong soft power can afford to pay much less attention to the importance of heritage discourses (authorised and intangible), in which UNESCO plays the role of an arbiter that legitimises cultural heritage. The United States welcomed over 74 million international tourists last year, attracted by America's cultural output that is seemingly omnipresent around the globe (McClory, 2016), without the help of UNESCO. The United Kingdom's soft power is boosted by cultural institutions like the British Council and the British Museum (McClory, 2016), both of them having existed for far longer than UNESCO.

Cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is thus an important component of soft power for all countries, small and medium ones as well as 'global players'. However, only in the case of these powerful actors can their potential be developed outside organisations such as UNESCO. In a situation where the soft power of a country is not great, ignoring this organisation can have a negative long-term impact on its image, especially among

countries of low and medium rank. In their case, the shortage of cultural soft power may translate into the deficit of hard power. And instead of 'smart power', small countries that ignore the potential of soft power will remain small powers (Schreiber, 2016, p. 78). Thus, though the relationship between intangible cultural heritage and soft power generally remains to some extent a field of subjective judgements, an awareness of this relation alone may be enough to turn Intangible Cultural Heritage into powerful 'hard currency' (McClory, 2016, p. 20) in global politics. 🇺🇸

ENDNOTES:

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- 1 Best known are Simon Anholt’s *Nation Brand Index* (NBI) and Future Brands’ *Country Brand Index* (CBI). However, Beata Ociepka points out that *what the NBI measures largely corresponds with what the essence of soft power is. According to NBI, it is possible to, among others, select the countries that are perceived as “quality brands” because of the quality of their products, but also because of the culture, and attractive national heritage. Among six channels of brand communication selected by Anholt (branded export, foreign and domestic policy, investment and migration, culture and heritage, people, tourism) three of them could be found as partially outside of the concept of country’s soft power, namely export (Nye classifies the economy as hard power), partly investment and migration and tourism, as a branch of the country’s economy. See Ociepka (2013).*
- 2 This term was proposed by the Croatian museologist, Tomislav Šola (1982), as an alternative to the traditionally understood museology/museography as a discipline in which the object of study is, above all, tangible objects (monuments). It indicates the need for a new paradigm of thinking about heritage as a collective experience; a process in which tangible and intangible aspects are inseparably connected. The definition of intangible cultural heritage is also heading in this direction, combining the two elements – cf. Article 2 of 2003 *Convention*. See also Matić (2011).
- 3 E.g. in Akagawa (2015) or in a publication by Luke and Kersel (2013), which explores how this relationship indicates the political entanglement of American archaeologists’ work after the invasion of Iraq and analyses soft power as part of cultural diplomacy.
- 4 A good example of the lack of separate treatment of cultural heritage within Polish public diplomacy using the concept of soft power is Ociepka (2013). The concept of ‘heritage’ appears in it only twice in the context of national heritage as an element for communicating the country’s ‘brand’.
- 5 For a reconstruction of this mechanism, see Klekot (2014).
- 6 Lowenthal refers to the Alois Riegl’s speech from 1903, in which he described the social significance of practices related to monuments as ‘the cult of monuments’ (Riegl 2002).
- 7 An important interpretation guideline formulated in line with UNESCO statements can also be found on the website of the National Heritage Board of Poland and in the instructions for completing forms for a possible inscription on the National ICH List: *Intangible cultural heritage is both traditional, contemporary and vibrant – it represents not only inherited traditions of the past, but also contemporary, creatively converted practices in which we participate as representatives of various social and cultural groups. Phenomena of intangible cultural heritage are evolving in response to a changing environment, forming a link between our present, the past of our ancestors and the future of our children. As long as the core meaning that codifies our value system remains intact in these vibrant, changing manifestations of intangible heritage, our identity will survive. Intangible cultural heritage is not always original and unique. Every aspect of this heritage is important and valuable to those who practise it and to whom it provides a sense of belonging to their community. For this reason, every phenomenon deserves to survive, http://niematerialne.nid.pl/Dziedzictwo_niematerialne/, 12.02.2016.*
- 8 See article 15 of UNESCO 2003 *Convention*.
- 9 Additionally reinforced by the new ‘6th Chapter of the Operational Directives’ for the 2003 *Convention*, entirely dedicated to the implementation of the concept of sustainable development adopted in 2015 at the United Nations Agenda 2030 (Sustainable Development Goals).
- 10 *UNESCO’s Participation in the Preparations for a Post-2015 Development Agenda Overview of Goals and Targets Proposed*, document no. 194 EX/14.INF.2.

- 11 See UNESCO, 2016a.
- 12 *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*.
- 13 Alongside it, based on the model of the 1972 *Convention*, arose the *List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding* (Article 17 of the 2003 *Convention*) and a list of programmes, projects and activities aimed at protecting ICH, named the *Register of Good Safeguarding Practices* (Article 18 of the 2003 *Convention*). They are, however, much less popular among countries. The *Register of Good Safeguarding Practices* has only 17 entries, and the *Urgent Safeguarding List* has 47 elements.
- 14 <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/lists>.
- 15 For more information about controversies associated with creating the *Representative List*, see Hafsteinn (2009).
- 16 With his blessing, as evidenced by Nye's introduction to the 2015 report of this ranking (McClory, 2015, pp. 6-7).
- 17 For an analysis of why Great Britain did not ratify this *Convention*, see Smith and Waterton (2009).
- 18 For further analysis, see Skoko and Kovačić (2009).
- 19 *European Agenda for Culture in a Globalizing World*, COM (2007, p. 242).
- 20 See, *inter alia*, The Council of the European Union (2013).
- 21 See, *inter alia*, Kounalakis and Simonyi (2011), Blanchard and Lu (2012).

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