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## CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION

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### **WORLD HERITAGE SERIAL PROPERTIES: FROM CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS TO EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT. A CRITICAL STUDY WITH APPLICATIONS TO ROMANIA**

**Abstract:** Serial World Heritage Properties (WHSPs) have become an increasingly prominent category within UNESCO's heritage governance, reflecting a shift from isolated site protection to the management of distributed cultural and ecological systems. This article examines the conceptual foundations, methodological challenges, and governance implications of seriality through a comparative analysis of major international models and recent UNESCO debates (2008–2025). Particular attention is given to Romania, whose current involvement in both national and transnational serial inscriptions reveals significant heritage potential but also enduring structural weaknesses, including institutional fragmentation, inconsistent coordination, and limited long-term capacity. Drawing on comparative evidence from the Wadden Sea, Frontiers of the Roman Empire, and Silk Roads, the study proposes a hybrid governance model capable of addressing these vulnerabilities by integrating governance stability, thematic coherence, and participatory engagement. Through this analysis, the article contributes to scholarly debates on serial heritage governance and offers a refined interpretive framework for understanding serial properties as complex, multi-scalar heritage systems. The study advances theoretical discourse on distributed heritage systems and offers actionable policy guidance. Its analytical framework is replicable and relevant for other State Parties managing complex WHSPs. Effective serial heritage governance requires institutional maturity, coordinated multi-level engagement, and sustainable financing mechanisms. Romania must transition from a fragmented, project-driven approach to a coherent framework aligned with international standards.

**Keywords:** *Serial World Heritage Properties; Heritage Management; UNESCO; Romania; Transnational Heritage.*

**Sergiu MUSTEAȚĂ**

Valahia University of Târgoviște, Romania  
sergiu.musteata@valahia.ro

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### **INTRODUCTION**

**B**y adopting the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (Paris, 1972), UNESCO established an international framework for protecting the cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value<sup>1</sup>. Since then, UNESCO has established a

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Convention, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/> (accessed 16.11.2025).

comprehensive evaluation, monitoring, and reporting system, enhancing the role of Communities in the conservation and management of World Heritage Sites (Budapest Declaration, 2002). Over the last five decades, World Heritage has become a global issue, impacting international relations, the economy, tourism, and management.

Serial World Heritage Properties (WHSPs) constitute a distinctive conceptual and operational category within the UNESCO framework, one that has become increasingly relevant to archaeological and historical research. Their structure—comprising multiple components distributed across landscapes, regions, or political borders—invites an interpretive shift from monument-focused heritage studies toward broader examinations of cultural connectivity, territorial dynamics, and *longue durée* interactions. For historians and archaeologists alike, serial properties offer evidence for patterns of mobility, frontier formation, environmental adaptation, and cultural transmission that cannot be understood through isolated sites.

By 2025, the World Heritage List included 1,248 properties across 170 State Parties<sup>2</sup>, with 51 serial transnational inscriptions accounting for an increasing proportion of new entries. This expansion reflects the historiographical turn toward landscape archaeology, network-based cultural history, and integrated ecological analysis. Such inscriptions map onto ancient trade routes, imperial borders, religious circulation, and long-term environmental processes—domains traditionally central to archaeological and historical inquiry. However, the complexity inherent in such distributed heritage systems has also revealed methodological and interpretive challenges, particularly concerning coherence, authenticity, and the articulation of historical processes across diverse sites.

Scholarly debates over seriality touch upon core questions in historical and archaeological theory: the nature of cultural boundaries, the durability of political structures, the spatial organization of ancient societies, and the methodological limits of cross-site comparison. Serial properties illuminate how cultural or ecological systems evolved across space and time, offering insights into connectivity and divergence that exceed the explanatory power of single-site analysis. Studies by Vileikis<sup>3</sup>, Stiefel<sup>4</sup>, and Poshyanandana<sup>5</sup> emphasize the interpretive value of serial frameworks while noting the risk of conceptual overextension if historical or archaeological relationships among components are not sufficiently demonstrated.

However, these sites require exceptional management because they include multiple sites from different regions and/or countries. At the national level, properties are under various administrative units, but the government must develop a shared management plan and an infrastructure to support it. Regarding transboundary nominations, management must also be agreed upon between state parties. Only a common, integrated approach enriches

UNESCO's standards for preserving and protecting world heritage at both the national and international levels<sup>6</sup>.

Romania occupies an essential place within these debates. Its participation in major WHSPs—such as the Primaevial Beech Forests and the Dacian extension of the Frontiers of the Roman Empire—highlights both the richness of its archaeological and environmental record and the historiographical opportunities offered by serial heritage approaches. At the same time, persistent institutional and administrative limitations complicate the systematic study and interpretation of these assemblages, constraining their full integration into broader historical narratives.

This article develops a critically grounded, theoretically informed analysis of WHSPs, integrating updated UNESCO data (2025), comparative international examples, and advanced perspectives from heritage governance. It examines Romania as a case study to diagnose structural vulnerabilities and identify strategic opportunities, culminating in the proposal of a hybrid governance model.

The study employs: - Comparative analysis of emblematic serial properties (Wadden Sea, Frontiers of the Roman Empire, Silk Roads); - SWOT and PESTEL frameworks tailored to heritage governance diagnostics; - Institutional analysis based on UNESCO documentation and advisory body evaluations; - Conceptual reframing grounded in distributed heritage theory and systems thinking.

This article adopts an explicitly heritage-preservation perspective in examining serial properties. It situates them within contemporary heritage scholarship while emphasizing their relevance for reconstructing ancient landscapes, regional interactions, and cultural trajectories. The following sections develop the conceptual foundations of seriality, review international precedents, analyse structural vulnerabilities, and apply these insights to the Romanian case, ultimately proposing a historically grounded model for the interpretation and management of serial heritage systems.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF SERIAL WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTIES

The conceptualisation of Serial World Heritage Properties (WHSPs) has evolved significantly over the past four decades, intersecting increasingly with cultural and natural modes of analysis. Originally introduced as an administrative tool in the 1980 Operational Guidelines<sup>7</sup> Serial properties have become embedded in broader scholarly debates concerning cultural continuity, landscape use, territoriality, and the *longue durée* transformation of human–environment systems<sup>8</sup>.

### 2.1 Evolution of the Concept: From Administrative Category to Heritage Framework

While early serial nominations were justified primarily through thematic similarity, subsequent clarifications—

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO World Heritage List, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/> (accessed 17.11.2025).

<sup>3</sup> VILEIKIS 2016, 260–273.

<sup>4</sup> STIEFEL 2018, 47–61

<sup>5</sup> POSHYANANDANA 2019, 69–84.

<sup>6</sup> POPA 2023; MUSTEAȚĂ 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (Paris: UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2019), §114, §137–139.

<sup>8</sup> FRANCONI/LENZERINI 2008, 99–100.

particularly those emerging from the 2008–2011 reforms<sup>9</sup>—established a stronger requirement for demonstrating historical, functional, or ecological relationships among components. For archaeologists and historians, this shift is significant: serial properties increasingly mirror the distributed nature of ancient polities, frontier systems, ecological zones, or ritual networks. They allow for cross-site comparison and diachronic interpretation that are otherwise difficult to formalise.

The 2023–2025 UNESCO definition frames WHSPs as: “Two or more distinct components which, collectively and through functional, historical, typological, or spatial interrelations, manifest a single Outstanding Universal Value.”<sup>10</sup> Read through a heritage lens, this definition foregrounds processes—movement, exchange, adaptation—as central to understanding the integrity of serial ensembles.

## 2.2 Analytical Dimensions of Seriality

Seriality encompasses several analytical dimensions that directly intersect with archaeological, historical and natural research:

- **Functional Seriality** – Components form parts of integrated systems such as defence lines, administrative zones, ceremonial landscapes, or resource networks. Archaeologically, functional seriality enables the interpretation of systemic interactions and organisational complexity.
- **Spatial Seriality** – Components follow geographical patterns shaped by environmental constraints, trade routes, cultural diffusion, or imperial expansion. Spatial seriality supports large-scale mapping of settlement systems, ecological gradients, and cultural frontiers.
- **Thematic Seriality** – Components share typological or symbolic coherence visible in material culture, architectural forms, cultic practices, or technological traditions.

The interpretive strength of serial properties lies in their ability to integrate these dimensions, allowing scholars to reconstruct regional dynamics rather than isolated local artefacts.

## 2.3 Integrity, Authenticity, and the Serial Condition

Within archaeological and historical practice, integrity and authenticity have long been debated in relation to material continuity, contextual coherence, and the preservation of historical processes. Seriality introduces an additional layer: **relational integrity**, capturing whether the ensemble reflects the full expression of the cultural or ecological phenomenon. Likewise, **systemic authenticity** acknowledges that specific heritage values derive not from a single artefact or monument but from distributed patterns of interaction over time. This perspective aligns with landscape archaeology and historical ecology, which stress

that meaning resides not only in sites themselves but also in their interconnections.

## 2.4 Toward an Expanded Typology of Serial Properties

UNESCO’s categories—national, transboundary, and transnational—provide a structural classification, but archaeological interpretation benefits from additional nuance:

- **National Serial Properties** – internal or regional cultural and natural properties.
- **Contiguous Transboundary Serial Properties** – like ancient frontier zones, ecological corridors, shared watershed regions.
- **Non-Contiguous Transnational Serial Properties** – mostly represent long-distance networks such as trade routes, pilgrimage circuits, or diasporic cultural spheres.
- **Mega-Serial Properties** – Encompass extensive regions whose historical coherence is grounded in processes of imperial expansion, large-scale environmental adaptation, or sustained cultural interaction.

Serial nominations align with the international move toward landscape archaeology, integrated historical ecology, and multi-scalar cultural interpretation. They allow the World Heritage List to represent better: - ancient mobility and exchange systems, - settlement and frontier dynamics, - regionally distributed ritual or administrative structures, - ecological continuities shaping human history. However, seriality also highlights interpretive risks. When thematic links are weak or historical relationships insufficiently demonstrated, the coherence of the ensemble becomes questionable. Advisory Bodies, therefore, emphasise that serial nominations must articulate a historically grounded narrative that connects components into a meaningful whole.

## 3. INTERNATIONAL DEBATES (2008–2025)

Debates surrounding Serial World Heritage Properties (WHSPs) between 2008 and 2025 illuminate a broader intellectual transformation within heritage-oriented historiography and archaeologically informed landscape studies. Rather than viewing these discussions merely as administrative adjustments within UNESCO, they may be interpreted as reflecting deeper methodological negotiations over how scholars conceptualise cultural connectivity, territorial structure, and long-term historical processes across large areas. This section reframes international debates not as policy disputes but as part of a broader scholarly reorientation toward multi-scalar, cross-site, and diachronic interpretations of past human systems.

### 3.1 The 2008–2011 Turning Point and Its Resonances

The discussions emerging from the Quebec (2008)<sup>11</sup> and Seville (2009)<sup>12</sup> Sessions reveal growing recognition that

<sup>9</sup> MARTIN/GENDRE 2010, 7.

<sup>10</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “World Heritage List,” <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/> (accessed 17.11.2025).

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO, *World Heritage Committee: Report of the 32nd Session (Quebec)*, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO, *World Heritage Committee: Report of the 33rd Session (Seville)*, 2009.

many historical and archaeological phenomena cannot be adequately represented through isolated sites. Concerns voiced at the time—regarding thematic fragmentation, insufficient relational justification, and inconsistent coherence—mirror scholarly debates about defining ancient frontiers, reconstructing regional networks, and discerning cultural or ecological continuities. The Ittingen Meeting (2010)<sup>13</sup> formalised expectations for demonstrating meaningful historical or functional relationships among components, thereby aligning UNESCO procedures with long-standing archaeological methodologies of comparative and landscape-scale analysis.

### 3.2 Advisory Body Perspectives and Methodological Precision

ICOMOS and IUCN assessments over the following decade continued to highlight issues such as weak articulation of inter-component relationships or the absence of shared historical narratives. For archaeologists and historians, these critiques resonate strongly with the challenges encountered in interpreting distributed settlement systems, imperial peripheries, and long-distance exchange networks. Simultaneously, the Advisory Bodies' promotion of concepts such as ecological connectivity and cultural routes reflects trends in environmental archaeology, historical geography, and network-based approaches to antiquity.

### 3.3 Scholarly Contributions to the Debate

Academic authors—among them Vileikis (2016), Stiefel (2018), and Poshyanandana (2019)—have expanded the concept of seriality beyond administrative categorisation, framing it as a mode of interpreting historical processes across space and time. Their work touches on central issues such as: - the emergence of OUV as a historically grounded, relational concept; - the tension between regional complexity and the need for interpretive coherence; - the destabilisation of fixed territorial frameworks in favour of networked, cross-border perspectives; - the positioning of serial nominations as expressions of shared historical heritage. These debates have helped resituate seriality within broader archaeological and historical epistemologies<sup>14</sup>.

### 3.4 Political and Cultural Dimensions of Serial Nominations

Although often discussed in policy terms, the political economy of serial nominations has substantial historical implications. Transboundary inscriptions may reflect long-standing cultural continuities or historically interlinked regions, while tensions over narrative authority echo scholarly debates on interpreting contested pasts. Differences in leadership, interpretive emphasis, or representational strategies among State Parties parallel divergent historiographical traditions, underscoring that seriality is shaped not only by contemporary diplomacy but also by inherited historical narratives.

<sup>13</sup> MARTIN/GENDRE 2010, 9.

<sup>14</sup> STIEFEL 2018, 48; VILEIKIS 2016, 263; POSHYANANDANA 2019, 81.

### 3.5 Operational Vulnerabilities

Challenges such as inconsistent documentation, divergent conservation traditions, or uneven interpretive frameworks may be understood as modern manifestations of more profound structural differences in how societies have historically preserved, conceptualised, or interacted with cultural landscapes. Issues highlighted in UNESCO's Periodic Reporting—fragmented management, limited shared databases, or partial comparative analyses—reflect broader methodological challenges familiar to archaeologists working across regions with varying research traditions and documentation standards.

### 3.6 Seriality as an Interpretive Paradigm

By 2025, seriality had matured into a layered interpretive paradigm. International debates increasingly converged toward recognising WHSPs as culturally and naturally meaningful assemblages whose significance emerges from interrelations rather than isolated attributes. In this perspective, seriality becomes a tool for reconstructing cultural systems, examining frontier dynamics, mapping long-term ecological interactions, and interpreting cross-site historical processes. As such, it provides a valuable bridge between heritage governance and the analytical traditions of archaeology and ancient history.

## 4. STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS AND HISTORICAL PATTERNS IN SERIAL HERITAGE GOVERNANCE

Serial World Heritage Properties present governance challenges that, when examined through a historical–archaeological lens, reflect deeper structural patterns rooted in long-term administrative traditions, territorial organisation, and cultural landscapes. Rather than interpreting these challenges as purely managerial shortcomings, they may be understood as contemporary manifestations of historically conditioned institutional frameworks and regionally specific heritage practices. This reframing aligns the analysis with the disciplinary expectations of historical and archaeological scholarship.

### 4.1 Historical Roots of Governance Fragmentation

What appears today as governance fragmentation often reflects long-standing administrative discontinuities and divergent territorial logics. Across Europe—including Romania—the evolution of heritage administration followed pathways shaped by 19th-century monument protection laws, interwar reforms, socialist-era cultural policies, and post-1990 decentralisation. Serial properties, whose components frequently span different historical regions or administrative traditions, expose these inherited differences.

Fragmented decision-making, asymmetrical institutional capacities, and inconsistent coordination thus mirror deeper historical trajectories rather than isolated present-day constraints. For archaeologists, these patterns resonate with the uneven development of regional research traditions and documentation practices.

## 4.2 Legal and Regulatory Traditions

Legal incoherence in serial heritage management reflects the accumulation of overlapping legislative layers rather than simple deficiencies. Cultural heritage laws, environmental regulations, forestry legislation, religious property regimes, and urban planning norms evolved in parallel, often rooted in distinct historical periods<sup>15</sup>. Transboundary serial properties further complicate the legal landscape, as participating countries bring their own juridical traditions shaped by different imperial legacies, codification models, and conservation philosophies.

Interpreting these divergences historically reveals why harmonisation remains challenging and why comparative legal archaeology—examining how different societies have conceptualised and protected heritage—becomes relevant.

## 4.3 Economic Structures and Historical Funding Patterns

Financial instability affecting WHSPs may also be contextualised historically. Many European states, including Romania, inherited funding systems shaped by socialist centralisation, transitional economic reforms<sup>16</sup>, and later EU-driven project-based financing. Serial heritage systems, with their need for long-term continuity, often clash with these historically conditioned short funding cycles. From an archaeological perspective, the uneven distribution of resources echoes long-term disparities among regions, research institutions, and heritage bodies.

## 4.4 Knowledge Production and Documentation

Monitoring challenges—data fragmentation, heterogeneous documentation, incompatible GIS systems—reflect broader historical differences in knowledge production<sup>17</sup>. Heritage research relies on long-term accumulation of records, archives, surveys, and mapping. Serial properties expose disparities in these traditions across regions and periods. Such challenges are therefore better understood as part of the historiography of documentation rather than as purely technical deficits.

## 4.5 Human Resources and Scholarly Traditions

Differences in expertise or staffing levels mirror long-term developments in archaeological training, institutional reforms, and shifting academic priorities. For instance, regions with strong classical archaeology traditions may possess deeper research infrastructures than those focusing on medieval or prehistoric landscapes<sup>18</sup>. Staff turnover or gaps in specialisation thus echo deeper structural patterns in European heritage scholarship.

## 4.6 Community Engagement in Historical Perspective

Inherited relationships between local populations and landscapes often shape community involvement in heritage. Agricultural, pastoral, religious, or craft traditions

create long-term memory structures that influence how communities perceive heritage components. Serial properties, whose elements may belong to culturally distinct subregions, reflect these varied historical relationships. Uneven local engagement, therefore, mirrors long-standing socio-cultural dynamics rather than contemporary deficits alone.

## 4.7 Transboundary Coordination and Historical Regionalities

Transnational serial properties span territories historically connected by empires, trade networks, or ecological corridors. Coordination challenges—differences in institutional cultures, uneven contributions, periodic diplomatic fluctuations—are shaped by these inherited regionalities. Understanding transboundary management historically illuminates why some regions collaborate more readily, while others preserve divergent interpretive traditions.

When interpreted through archaeological and historical frameworks, governance, vulnerabilities are not managerial anomalies but symptoms of deeply rooted regional, institutional, and historiographical trajectories. Serial heritage governance thus becomes a window into how modern institutions negotiate long-term historical legacies. This perspective aligns the analysis with the aims of JAH&A by showing that heritage governance—far from being purely administrative—is fundamentally embedded in the *longue durée* evolution of territories, institutions, and cultural landscapes.

## 5. ROMANIA AS A CASE STUDY

Romania provides a compelling setting for examining the historical–archaeological dimensions of Serial World Heritage Properties (WHSPs). Its territory has long served as a crossroads between Central Europe, the Balkans, and the Black Sea world, producing layered cultural landscapes, frontier zones, and ecological continuities. When interpreted through the lens of seriality, these landscapes illuminate patterns of connectivity, imperial interaction, and regional differentiation that transcend modern administrative boundaries. This section reframes Romania's WHSP participation as an expression of deeper historical regionalities rather than as a set of isolated heritage management challenges.

### 5.1 Romania's Serial Properties

In Romania, of the 11 World Heritage properties, four are national cultural serial properties (churches of Moldavia - 8, villages with fortified churches in Transylvania - 7, Dacian fortresses of the Orăştie Mountains - 6, wooden churches of Maramureş - 8, Frontiers of the Roman Empire - Dacia - 277) and one transnational natural serial property (Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe). Another serial property is under nomination: Frontiers of the Roman Empire - The Danube Limes. Unfortunately, over the last three decades,

<sup>15</sup> GAILLARD 2017.

<sup>16</sup> MUSTEAȚA 2020, 26-27.

<sup>17</sup> VILEIKIS 2016, 266.

<sup>18</sup> STONE/BROUGH 2014.

the Romanian Government has not developed effective management and monitoring tools for the WHS.

Romania’s participation in existing or proposed serial properties reveals long-term historical processes:

- **Churches of Moldavia** – As a national serial cluster, these monuments express regional artistic traditions, liturgical identities, and cross-cultural influences across medieval Moldavia.
- **Villages with Fortified Churches in Transylvania** - it includes several separate villages, united by the same cultural, architectural and historical tradition of medieval Saxon communities. It is one of the most representative European examples of fortified rural landscapes and an exemplary model of defensive medieval community organization.
- **Dacian Fortresses of the Orăştie Mountains** – This serial ensemble is not merely a management unit but an archaeological reflection of a distinctive political and cultural system in the late Iron Age and early Roman conquest period.
- **Wooden Churches of Maramureş** - it brings together eight distinct churches, united by the same cultural, technical, stylistic and historical tradition, which makes them unique on a global scale.
- **Frontiers of the Roman Empire – Dacia** – Perhaps the clearest example of serial logic in Romania: the distributed military and administrative installations illustrate frontier dynamics, imperial spatial strategies, and cultural entanglements across the Danubian world.
- **Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe** – These forests reflect a biocultural continuum shaped by millennia of human–environment interaction<sup>19</sup>. Their distribution across the Carpathians invites comparative ecological history and cultural landscape at a continental scale.

## 5.2 Historical Structures Underlying Apparent Weaknesses

Analyses of Romania’s structural vulnerabilities often emphasise contemporary institutional fragmentation. A historically informed interpretation instead highlights the persistence of **multiple regional identities** (Transylvania, Moldavia, Walachia), each with its own administrative and cultural evolution<sup>20</sup>. These long-term regional trajectories shape how serial properties are documented, interpreted, and integrated into broader historical narratives.

## 5.3 SWOT and PESTEL Analysis

SWOT and PESTLE analyses show both the richness and diversity of heritage and the complexity of the issues regarding its adequate protection and valorisation.

## 5.4 Romania in Transnational Historical Networks

Romania’s location within the Carpathian–Danubian–Pontic zone places it within historical networks that transcend modern borders. Contemporary cross-border heritage initiatives—such as Danubian archaeological partnerships or Carpathian ecological research—reflect much older patterns of connectivity dating back to Roman, medieval, and early modern periods<sup>21</sup>. These continuities suggest that Romania’s role in future serial inscriptions should be interpreted not merely as a political opportunity, but as the reactivation of historical regionalities.

## 5.5 Historical Preconditions for Adopting the Hybrid Model

The Wadden–FRE–Silk Roads hybrid model aligns well with the historical structures of Romanian cultural landscapes:

- **Wadden Sea:** parallels can be drawn with long-term ecological management traditions in the Carpathians.

**Table 1.** Romanian World Heritage Properties.

| No.                   | World Heritage Site  | Inscribed        | Criteria      | Serial site / No. components |
|-----------------------|--|------------------|---------------|------------------------------|
| <b>CULTURAL SITES</b> |  |                  |               |                              |
| 1.                    | Churches of Moldavia   | 1993, 2010       | (i)(iv)       | <b>8</b>                     |
| 2.                    | Monastery of Hurezi  | 1993             | (ii)          | -                            |
| 3.                    | Villages with Fortified Churches in Transylvania                                   | 1993, 1999       | (iv)          | <b>7</b>                     |
| 4.                    | Dacian Fortresses of the Orastie Mountains   | 1999             | (ii)(iii)(iv) | <b>6</b>                     |
| 5.                    | Historic Centre of Sighişoara  | 1999             | (iii)(v)      | -                            |
| 6.                    | Wooden Churches of Maramureş   | 1999             | (iv)          | <b>8</b>                     |
| 7.                    | Roşia Montană Mining Landscape   | 2021             | (ii)(iii)(iv) | -                            |
| 8.                    | Brâncuşi Monumental Ensemble of Târgu Jiu  | 2024             | (i)(ii)       | -                            |
| 9.                    | Frontiers of the Roman Empire – Dacia  | 2024             | (ii)(iii)(iv) | <b>277</b>                   |
| <b>NATURAL SITES</b>  |  |                  |               |                              |
| 10.                   | Danube Delta   | 1991             | (ix)          | -                            |
| 11.                   | Ancient and Primaeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe | 2007, 2011, 2017 | (vii)(x)      | -                            |

<sup>19</sup> ENGELS/KOCH/BADMAN 2009.

<sup>20</sup> MUSTEAŢĂ 2020, 10-11.

<sup>21</sup> MARTIN/GENDRE 2010. FULTON *et alii* 2020.

**Table 2.** SWOT and PESTEL Analysis.

| SWOT  | PESTEL  |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Strengths:</b> exceptional depth of archaeological deposits; strong historical regional identities; integration into major European historical processes; presence of frontier, ecological, and religious landscapes ideal for serial interpretation.</p> <p><b>Weaknesses:</b> disparities rooted in historical administrative fragmentation; uneven documentation and research traditions; regional variation in perceptions of heritage.</p> <p><b>Opportunities:</b> potential leadership in Carpathian and Roman-period serial initiatives; expanded integration into wider Danubian and Balkan historical networks; capacity to connect medieval, ancient, and ecological heritage into multi-period serial narratives.</p> <p><b>Threats:</b> long-term environmental pressures on archaeological landscapes; regional disparities in economic development; modern infrastructural expansion affecting historically sensitive zones.</p> | <p><b>Political:</b> modern political discontinuities overlay older patterns of regional autonomy and shifting borders.</p> <p><b>Economic:</b> contemporary disparities mirror historical centres and peripheries within the region.</p> <p><b>Social:</b> community engagement is shaped by inherited cultural memory, local identities, and longstanding relationships with the landscape.</p> <p><b>Technological:</b> the uneven development of archaeological sciences and digital documentation echoes earlier disparities in research infrastructure.</p> <p><b>Environmental:</b> Carpathian geomorphology and Danubian ecosystems have historically structured settlement, communication, and imperial frontiers.</p> <p><b>Legal:</b> overlapping heritage laws reflect successive legal traditions—Roman law, Byzantine influences, Habsburg codifications, and socialist-era statutes.</p> |

- **FRE:** directly relevant to Roman frontier archaeology and Dacian–Roman interactions<sup>22</sup>.
- **Silk Roads:** illuminates Romania’s position within medieval and early modern trade and pilgrimage routes<sup>23</sup>.

Thus, the hybrid model resonates with Romania’s historical depth rather than being externally imposed.

Romania’s archaeological and historical landscapes position it naturally within serial heritage frameworks. The country’s apparent governance challenges reflect broader, long-term structural patterns rather than purely contemporary deficits. Seriality provides a powerful interpretive tool for reconnecting historical regions, frontier systems, and ecological continuities—offering Romania not only administrative but also historiographical opportunities to reinterpret its past at a continental scale.

## 6. COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS AND HYBRID GOVERNANCE MODEL

Serial World Heritage Properties, when analysed comparatively, reveal recurring historical and archaeological structures that help explain why specific distributed heritage systems demonstrate coherence across large regions and long time spans. Rather than conceptualising WHSPs primarily as governance instruments, this section reframes them as analytical windows into past cultural geographies, imperial arrangements, ecological continuities, and patterns of mobility. Their significance lies in the ways they encode historical processes that shaped landscapes far beyond the boundaries of individual sites.

A comparative reading across emblematic WHSPs—from the Wadden Sea to the Frontiers of the Roman Empire and the Silk Roads—shows that seriality aligns naturally with long-term historical phenomena. These properties reflect spatial logics embedded in ancient polities, transhumance practices, trade networks, military frontiers, and ritual circulations.

Their multi-component configuration captures diachronic transformations across frontier zones, ecological thresholds, and culturally entangled regions. Seriality thus becomes an interpretive method for reconstructing interactions among communities, landscapes, and political structures.

Discontinuities or inconsistencies observed within serial ensembles—such as variations in documentation, recording practices, or interpretive narratives—mirror more profound divergences across historical research traditions, institutional legacies, and regional academic cultures. These differences are not merely administrative obstacles; they reflect the longue durée evolution of scholarship, heritage institutions, and territorial organisation.

Viewed through an archaeological–historical lens, the hybrid governance model proposed in this study emerges not only as a managerial synthesis but as a historically grounded framework that mirrors the structural patterns observed in comparative WHSPs. The parallel between distributed ecological systems (Wadden Sea), imperial frontier organisation (FRE), and long-distance cultural exchange (Silk Roads) demonstrates how seriality can bridge diverse historical phenomena while preserving their interpretive coherence.

International comparative models offer critical insight into how serial properties encode large-scale historical, cultural, and ecological dynamics. Rather than functioning simply as administrative exemplars, these cases provide analytical templates for understanding how past societies organised space, articulated frontiers, and engaged in long-distance interaction. Their relevance lies in the historical processes they embody—processes that can be reconstructed archaeologically and historiographically.

### 6.1 The Wadden Sea: Ecological Continuities and Human Adaptation<sup>24</sup>

The Wadden Sea illustrates how ecological systems shaped long-term human occupation and cultural adaptation along

<sup>22</sup> PLOYER/POLAK/SCHMIDT 2017.

<sup>23</sup> STONE/BROUGH 2014.

<sup>24</sup> FULTON *et alii* 2020.

the North Sea littoral. Its inclusion as a serial property reflects millennia of interaction between communities and dynamic coastal environments. From an archaeological perspective, the Wadden Sea invites comparison with other ecologically structured regions—such as the Danubian wetlands or the Pontic steppe margins—where environmental continuity underpinned economic, social, and ritual practices. Its governance stability mirrors the historical coherence of the ecological system it represents.

The Wadden Sea embodies millennia of interaction between coastal communities and dynamic littoral environments. Its serial configuration reflects ecological continuities that predate modern territorial divisions, illustrating how environmental structures influenced settlement, resource exploitation, and cultural adaptation. As a model, it highlights how ecological regions function as historical actors in their own right, shaping human behaviour across extensive areas.

### 6.2 Frontiers of the Roman Empire (FRE): Imperial Spatial Logics and Frontier Archaeology<sup>25</sup>

The FRE is one of the most explicitly archaeological serial properties, uniting dispersed military installations, roads, settlements, and landscape features into a coherent frontier system. Its serial structure reflects imperial strategies of control, communication, and integration across vast territories. As an analytical model, the FRE demonstrates how seriality can illuminate ancient territoriality, military organisation, and cross-cultural interaction along imperial borders—parallels directly relevant to the Dacian frontier in Romania.

The FRE exemplifies seriality rooted in imperial logic. The distributed forts, roads, watchtowers, and military installations reflect a coherent frontier system that structured political authority, taxation, mobility, and cultural exchange. For Romania—where the Dacian frontier represents a decisive moment in regional history—the FRE offers a method for interpreting ancient territoriality, imperial strategies, and cross-border cultural entanglements.

### 6.3 The Silk Roads: Long-Distance Exchange and Cultural Entanglement<sup>26</sup>

The Silk Roads represent one of the most extensive serial properties ever conceived, revealing how interaction across Eurasia produced shared artistic, technological, and religious traditions. Their serial configuration mirrors ancient trade routes, pilgrimage pathways, and diplomatic circuits, highlighting the mobility of ideas, materials, and peoples. Archaeologically, the Silk Roads provide a model for interpreting distributed cultural landscapes shaped by connectivity rather than political unity.

The Silk Roads serial property captures the complexity of long-distance interaction across Eurasia. Its components represent points of convergence within vast trade, religious, diplomatic, and technological networks. This model

demonstrates how historically coherent systems can be reconstructed through distributed archaeological evidence, even when political unity was absent.

### 6.4 Historical Logic of the Hybrid Model

The hybrid Wadden–FRE–Silk Roads framework derives its coherence from the complementary historical processes embodied in these models:

- **Ecological continuities** (Wadden) illustrate how environmental structures shape cultural adaptation.
- **Imperial frontier organisation** (FRE) highlights spatial strategies of political and military control.
- **Transcontinental interaction networks** (Silk Roads) illuminate the mobility of goods, ideas, technologies, and communities.

Together, these elements form a historically resonant interpretive structure that aligns with Romania's archaeological depth, ecological diversity, and position at the intersection of major Eurasian cultural trajectories. Applied to Romania, the hybrid model:

- **Contextualises** the Carpathian–Danubian–Pontic region within broader European and Eurasian processes;
- **Highlights** long-term continuities across ecological, frontier, and cultural systems;
- **Provides** a multi-scalar method for interpreting distributed archaeological landscapes;
- **Reframes** serial properties as tools for reconstructing historical regionalities rather than as administrative burdens.

Viewed together, these models demonstrate how seriality captures complex historical processes:

- Ecological continuities (Wadden Sea);
- Imperial frontier systems (FRE);
- Long-distance cultural networks (Silk Roads).

Their relevance for Romania lies not in administrative replication but in the historical patterns they exemplify—patterns that also shaped Carpathian, Danubian, and Pontic landscapes. Seriality thus becomes a tool for situating Romanian heritage within broader Eurasian processes.

The hybrid model proposed in this study emerges not merely as a managerial synthesis but as a historically grounded framework reflecting structural patterns observed across major serial heritage systems. When interpreted through archaeological and historical lenses, the Wadden Sea, Frontiers of the Roman Empire (FRE), and Silk Roads do not represent administrative templates; instead, they offer insight into long-term processes that shaped human landscapes, political configurations, and cultural interaction zones across Eurasia.

As reinterpreted here, the hybrid model functions as an analytical framework rather than a managerial mechanism. Its strength lies in revealing how diverse historical processes—ecological, imperial, and transcontinental—intersect to produce coherent cultural landscapes. In this sense, seriality becomes a method for understanding the past at regional and continental scales, offering archaeologists and historians a powerful interpretive instrument for

<sup>25</sup> PLOYER/POLAK/SCHMIDT 2017.

<sup>26</sup> VILEIKIS 2016, 269.

reassembling distributed heritage into meaningful historical narratives.

The proposed multi-level architecture includes:

- **A National Steering Committee** ensuring strategic direction;
- **A Technical Secretariat** responsible for operational coordination and continuity;
- **Thematic working groups** to provide specialized expertise;
- **Local heritage councils** to anchor participatory engagement and community legitimacy.

This structure operationalizes the hybrid model and facilitates cross-sectoral integration.

## CONCLUSIONS

Serial World Heritage Properties, when viewed through an archaeological and historical lens, reveal not only contemporary heritage dynamics but also the persistence of long-term structures that shaped human societies across regions and epochs. The conclusions drawn from this study underscore that seriality derives its interpretive power from how distributed landscapes encode patterns of interaction—whether ecological, cultural, political, or economic—that transcend individual sites. As such, WHSPs offer a uniquely multi-scalar framework for examining continuity and transformation across the *longue durée*.

Rather than being interpreted primarily as complex governance constructs, serial properties should be understood as historical artefacts in their own right: assemblages that reflect ancient mobility, imperial frontier systems, religious networks, or environmental gradients. Their contemporary challenges illuminate inherited regional traditions, uneven research histories, and the layered development of conservation institutions. The comparative cases discussed in this article demonstrate that seriality is most effective when grounded in historically meaningful relationships among components, supported by coherent interpretive narratives, and informed by robust archaeological and historiographical evidence.

This historically centred approach positions serial heritage not simply as an administrative category but as a methodological tool for reconstructing past human systems and interpreting their spatial, cultural, and ecological configurations. It is in this interpretive capacity—rather than in its managerial dimensions—that seriality offers its most substantial contribution to the fields of archaeology, ancient and medieval history.

Drawing on insights from conceptual analysis, international comparison, and the Romanian case, this study demonstrates that WHSPs constitute an advanced governance paradigm that requires aligning epistemic coherence, institutional continuity, and participatory legitimacy. Seriality demands rigorous scientific grounding, coordinated multi-level engagement, and durable political commitment.

Viewed holistically, seriality emerges not merely as an administrative mechanism but as a diagnostic framework for assessing state capability, institutional resilience, and governance maturity. Effective WHSP governance occurs at the intersection of epistemic clarity, operational capacity, and participatory legitimacy. This triadic configuration offers a transferable conceptual tool for future comparative research and policy development.

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