



# The role of Visitor Centres in UNESCO Designated Sites

30 September - 2 October 2018, Palermo, Italy

Report of the first Regional Workshop for Europe



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Regional Bureau  
for Science and Culture  
in Europe

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# Acknowledgements

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# Executive Summary

## What is this Report about?

The present report provides key insights into the Visitor Centres' core functions and potentialities resulting from conceptual discussions, best practices and lessons learned that were shared during the first regional workshop for Europe on "The Role of Visitor Centres in UNESCO Designated Sites", organized by UNESCO through its Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe (based in Venice, Italy).

With the participation of representatives of Visitor Centres from 19 UNESCO designated sites from all over Europe, the workshop aimed at:

- Exchanging knowledge and good practices concerning current activities and achieved results;
- Discussing and defining possible means, challenges, and opportunities to enhance the Centres' functions.

The report includes a set of recommendations to assist existing and future Centres to enhance their role in the management and presentation of UNESCO designated sites and related values.

The workshop was generously hosted by the City of Palermo from 30 September to 2 October, with the support of Fondazione Sicilia and Fondazione per l'Arte e la Cultura Lauro Chiazzese. The initiative was made

possible by the annual contribution of Italy to the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe.

As part of the interdisciplinary activities of the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, the workshop targeted sites related to both Science and Culture designations, with special focus on World Heritage properties, Biosphere Reserves, and Global Geoparks. This comprehensive approach allowed for the exploration of specificities as well as common challenges and possible innovative solutions related to the mentioned designations, in their common quest to contribute to UNESCO's mission to foster peace and sustainable development.

NB: the definition "Visitor Centre", used during the workshop and throughout this report, refers to any kind of organized service with front-desk activities, the main purpose of which is to facilitate the presentation and appreciation of UNESCO designated sites. This concept includes a broad range of different structures, sometimes using names other than "Visitor Centre", depending on the specificities of the respective contexts. Hence, the term "Visitor Centre" shall be intended as indicative of structures having homologous functions, regardless of their actual denominations.

## Who is this Report for?

The report is mostly aimed at professionals in Visitor Centres servicing UNESCO designated sites, as well as at their parent institutions and partners. Furthermore, this report may provide useful guidance to local authorities and/or other actors planning to establish new Visitor Centres in their UNESCO designated sites.

## How is the Report structured, and what are its conclusions?

The report consists of three chapters that present the workshop's concept, findings and recommendations as discussed by participants during the workshop. All in all, the workshop confirmed the strategic role that such Centres can play in improving site management across the board, highlighting their core functions as well as priorities for their further development.

The first chapter summarizes the **workshop's preparation and focus**, introducing the work methodology and the three main focus areas characterizing the Centres' current and potential functions: i) tourism sustainability and visitors' management; ii) interpretation of heritage and education; iii) community engagement and community-oriented services.

The second chapter presents the workshop's findings with regard to the current **functions and potentialities** of Visitor Centres in UNESCO designated sites, as well as to the necessary conditions for the Centres to fulfil their role in the three mentioned focus areas. The discussions during the workshop defined a set of generic functions that are common to most Centres and which were divided into three main categories: information, education, and accessibility. Within this framework, the Centres' responsibility as information sources for their different target groups was defined to ideally go beyond the borders of the respective designated sites, by touching upon multiple levels of information which include not only the site's values but also its historical, social, environmental, and economic contexts. The Centres' educational purpose was seen as key to combining site presentation with the transmission of values related to the different designations and UNESCO in general, including on global issues such as sustainable development. The importance of accessibility was underlined notably for

audiences with different physical and intellectual needs, as part of an ongoing effort to enrich the quality of visitor experiences and address the site's conservation requirements.

In addition to these core tasks, the workshop found that Centres have a great and partly yet unexplored potential to further expand their functions, especially with regard to interfacing, integrating, and inspiring. In particular, "interfacing" was defined as the opportunity for Centres to facilitate the relationship between local and external actors, and between them and the sites, by negotiating needs, interests, and expectations. In order to do so, Centres need to develop the necessary skills to listen, analyze and implement the demands of different stakeholders. "Integrating" was defined in the double sense of the Visitor Centres' capacity to serve as platforms for: i) supporting participative and inclusive processes for site management; ii) better connecting site management with broader planning programmes at territorial level, with special focus on sustainable development. The full inclusion of the Centre in the site management system and planning process is a necessary condition to ensure this. Finally, participants highlighted the possibility for the Centres to have a transformative impact on critical thinking and behaviour (i.e. be "inspiring"), with regard to both internal (community) and external (visitors) audiences, in line with the site's, the designations', and UNESCO's values.

The final chapter presents the workshop's **recommendations** with regard to future actions that existing or new Centres should consider in order to better perform their multiple functions. The recommendations are grouped into four main sets (Management, Activities, Partnerships, and Contexts), with the following highlights:

- Visitor Centres should be fully integrated into the respective site management systems and their activities should be conceived as integral to the sites' strategic vision.
- Visitor Centres should be connected with broader local systems for sustainable development and territorial development, which in turn could reinforce their capacity to mobilize resources.
- Visitor Centres ought to promote community involvement through participatory and inclusive approaches, to reinforce local awareness and ownership of the site's values and promote a mutually enriching interplay with visitors.
- When establishing a Visitor Centre, decisions on its name, location, facilities and activities will determine the Centre's future development. Such decisions should be taken based on a clear strategic vision about the centre's mandate and objectives.
- Visitor Centres need appropriate monitoring systems to inform management and future planning. This is especially important when considering strengthening current activities, introducing new functions or extending the scope of action, in order to adapt to new challenges and opportunities while not losing sight of one's core mission.
- Visitor Centres ought to plan for continuous capacity building to develop the skills and knowledge of their staff, including volunteers whenever appropriate.
- Visitor Centres should be able to address different target groups (visitors and local communities; adults and children; superficial and in-depth engagement levels; etc.), as part of a coherent communication strategy.
- Budget diversification and self-financing (including through commercial activities compatible with the site's values) contribute to the Centre's sustainability and operational capacities.
- Partnerships are key to developing and sustaining Visitor Centres, and to enhancing their effectiveness (e.g. with schools; universities; civil society organizations, especially through volunteering; territorial development agencies; tour operators; museums; other designated sites; etc.).

# Introduction

As part of its mission to build peace, eradicate poverty and foster sustainable development through education, science, and culture, UNESCO has developed a system of different but complementary “designations” that recognize the role and value of specific cultural and natural assets in contributing to this mission. These designations include the World Heritage List, the Biosphere Reserves, the UNESCO Global Geoparks, as well as others that are not covered by the scope of the present activity.

In the culture sector, UNESCO’s conventions foster sustainable development and promote human rights by protecting and fostering culture in its different expressions. The 1972 World Heritage Convention and its 193 State Parties (as per March 2019), is one of the most successful UNESCO Conventions and a flagship focus area of the Organization. In this binding document, the State Parties recognize their primary duty of ensuring the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value<sup>1</sup>. In order to do so, State Parties to the Convention shall endeavor, inter alia: to adopt the necessary policies to give heritage a function in the life of communities, to integrate such heritage into broader planning programs; and to set up services for the protection, conservation, and presentation of such heritage, with appropriate means and staff<sup>2</sup>.

The Science sector shares the Organization’s objective of building peace through various programmes and approaches, such as the Man and the Biosphere programme (MAB) which was established more than 40 years ago to better understand, measure and improve the relationship between humanity and the surrounding natural environment. Within the MAB programme, Biosphere Reserves are established upon initiative of national governments as ‘Science for Sustainability support sites’ – special places for testing interdisciplinary approaches to understanding and

managing changes and interactions between social and ecological systems, including conflict prevention and management of biodiversity<sup>3</sup>. In addition, the MAB programme promotes knowledge exchange and transfer to confront problems with effective solutions and fosters environmental education for sustainable development.

A more recent, but rapidly growing initiative in the science sector is the Geoparks programme. The UNESCO Global Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development, involving local communities. In addition to meeting the required criteria for inclusive and participative management structure, the designated Global Geoparks are encouraged to be part of the Global Geopark Network, an initiative built upon international cooperation between the involved actors and aligned to geo heritage purposes and objectives.<sup>4</sup>

Despite their different legal, institutional and operational frameworks, UNESCO designated sites are all called to act as laboratories of initiatives that enhance the management and safeguarding of cultural and natural resources, while having a direct transformative impact on and of communities and visitors. The sites contribute to UNESCO’s mission of peace and sustainable development in alignment with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

To support the achievement of common objectives, the sharing of knowledge and the definition of innovative solutions, the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science

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<sup>1</sup> *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), art. 4.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid, art. 5.*

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<sup>3</sup> *UNESCO, “Biosphere Reserves – Learning Sites for Sustainable Development”. Retrieved April 2, 2019: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/ecological-sciences/biosphere-reserves/>.*

<sup>4</sup> *UNESCO, “What Is a UNESCO Global Geopark? | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,” Retrieved March 14, 2019: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/earth-sciences/unesco-global-geoparks/frequently-asked-questions/what-is-a-unesco-global-geopark/>.*

and Culture in Europe has developed an inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary set of activities bringing together different kinds of UNESCO designated sites from all over the region. This innovative approach assumed as central assets the experiences developed at local level by different designated sites, investigating how they contribute to sustainable local development within their different contexts, functions, and roles, and providing them with opportunities to develop capacities and reinforce networking and cooperation. Within this framework, and building on the increasing demand to investigate the role of Visitor Centres in UNESCO designated sites, the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe launched a pilot activity to start mapping relevant activities in the region, and to identify priorities for future action. In particular, Visitor Centres (VCs) were identified as vital actors, common to many UNESCO designated sites, in the achievement of the designations' mission, with special focus on the interpretation of heritage education for sustainable development, visitors management, and community engagement. Accordingly, the Bureau organized the first regional workshop for Europe on "The role of Visitor Centres in UNESCO Designated Sites", which took place in Palermo, Italy, on 30 September – 2 October 2018, with the participation of managers and other representatives of Visitor Centres from 19 different UNESCO designated sites in Europe (including World Heritage properties, Biosphere Reserves, and Global Geoparks). The participants were identified through a regional consultation process with relevant national partners.

The workshop was intended to enrich the interdisciplinary understanding, knowledge, and capacities of participating Centres, with the specific objectives to:

The workshop was held from 30 September to 2 October 2018 at Villa Zito, in the city of Palermo. Participants in the workshop included 19 representatives of Visitor Centres from UNESCO Designated Sites in Europe, as well as UNESCO staff and other international resource persons.

- **Exchange knowledge and good practices concerning current activities and results achieved;**
- **Discuss and define possible means, challenges and opportunities to enhance the Centres' functions, increasing their contribution to the effective management of UNESCO designated sites.**

In addition, Visitor Centres improved their understanding of their role and impact and were empowered to take action and develop their capacities.

This publication is intended to communicate the outcomes of the workshop to interested audiences, with a view at raising awareness on the actual and potential role of Visitor Centres, contributing to the international debate, and laying the ground for future activities at regional and global level.

The workshop was generously hosted by the City of Palermo, with the support of Fondazione Sicilia and Fondazione per l'Arte e la Cultura Lauro Chiazzese, and it was made possible by the annual contribution of Italy to the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe.

**NB**

For communication purposes and due to its widespread use, the term "Visitor Centres" was used during the workshop to indicate its main subject. However, it should be noted that different denominations (e.g. "interpretation centre", "house", "World Heritage site centre", etc.) are used in sites/countries to indicate homologous structures, playing similar roles and offering similar services, but with significant differences due to the specific local contexts. Therefore, the use of "Visitor Centre" in this document shall be intended as merely indicative, and it does not imply the expression of any advice or opinion on the part of UNESCO.

# 1 WORKSHOP'S PREPARATION AND MAIN FOCUS





The structure of the workshop was envisioned to reflect the diversity of the contexts and perspectives of participating Centres, as well as the main facets of the subject under discussion. Following the selection of participants, UNESCO collected and analysed basic information on the concerned Centres, to understand the state of the art and design the workshop's programme accordingly.

Based on this preliminary survey, three focus areas were identified for discussion during the workshop, to investigate the role of the Centres with regard to:

- 1 Tourism sustainability and visitors' management**
- 2 Interpretation of heritage and educational services**
- 3 Community engagement and community-oriented services**

Participants received preparatory materials prior to the meeting, including: an overall concept note with programme, three introductory notes on the mentioned themes, a background document presenting basic information on the concerned Visitor Centres, and a note to introduce the work methodology for the meeting.

The lively group discussions during the workshop, enriched by the diversity of the participants' operational contexts and experiences, resulted in the definition of the core functions of the Centres, their untapped potentialities, and a first set of recommendations on how to enhance the role of existing Centres or guide the establishment of new ones. These outcomes are presented in the following sections.

## 1.1. Defining the main focus areas for Visitor Centres

Based on the desk research conducted before the workshop, three main focus areas were identified that characterize the functions – actual or potential – of Visitor Centres with regard to the overall management of UNESCO designated sites. This section includes the introductory notes that were shared with participants, and that served as the basis for work during the group discussions.

“ *Managing tourism in a sustainable manner, requires both a long-term perspective and careful consideration of the many ways in which tourism activities and interactions with communities and the environment interrelate.* ”

### 1.1.1. Tourism sustainability and visitors' management

World Heritage (WH) properties may support a variety of functions, including tourism, that are ecologically and culturally sustainable and which may contribute to the quality of life of concerned communities. In fact, WH sites are important travel destinations that, if managed properly, have great potential impact for local development and long-term sustainability. Managing visitor movement and influencing visitor behaviour are considered as critical aspects of developing sustainable tourism: they are crucial to protecting the values and attributes of the sites and contribute to a high quality visitor experience. The UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme was launched on this basis and to facilitate the management and development of sustainable tourism at WH properties.

As stated in the MAB Strategy 2015-2025, biosphere reserves are expected to “act as models to explore, establish and demonstrate approaches that foster the resilience of communities and opportunities for youth, through livelihood diversification, green businesses and social enterprise, including responsible tourism and quality economies”, with the strategic objective to contribute to building sustainable, healthy and equitable societies, economies and thriving human settlements in harmony with the biosphere.<sup>5</sup>

The promotion of sustainable local economic development through sustainable (geo)tourism is also one of the key pillars of the UNESCO Global Geopark Network, contributing to SDG 8.9 of the 2030 Agenda, which aims at devising and implementing policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products. From the outset, Geoparks adopted a “bottom-up” or community-led approach to conservation, research, education, and the development of responsible tourism.

Within this framework, Visitor Centres can play an important role in the management of UNESCO sites (World Heritage properties, Biosphere Reserves and UNESCO Geoparks) promoting sustainability, supporting visitor management, influencing behaviours during visits, and collecting data on visitors' numbers and activities along with information on their needs and motivations. Managing tourism in a sustainable manner, requires both a long-term perspective and careful consideration of the many ways in which tourism activities and interactions with communities and the environment interrelate.

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, “MAB Strategy 2015-2025” (UNESCO, 2015), 9: [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/SC/pdf/MAB\\_Strategy\\_2015-2025\\_final\\_text.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/SC/pdf/MAB_Strategy_2015-2025_final_text.pdf).

Visitor Centres have multiple functions depending on their development and management. They can be used to promote the destination, provide information and interpretation of the area's attractions, control and filter visitor flows and, in some cases, be a substitution for on-site visits. Additionally, Visitor Centres may serve other purposes including acting as community centres, displaying the pride and political achievements of the area and serving as the administrative and research hub for local tourism management.

The Centres are seen as active promoters of the attraction or destination. In their basic form, Visitor Centres provide information on what to do and experience in a destination and seek to stimulate tourism demand. In some cases, commercial activities can also be associated with this function including information on restaurants, accommodation and community events and festivals. By concentrating on the quality of the experience for the visitor, Visitor Centres can provide rich content that reflects the values of the attraction, whether they are World Heritage sites, Biosphere Reserves or UNESCO Global Geoparks. The goal is to inform visitors about the features of the destination, encourage them to spend more time, and promote responsible behaviour.

Visitor Centres are hubs within a destination that can be utilized to manage the flow of visitors to help alleviate congestion problems experienced by many sites. Acting as gateways and central information and interpretation points, VCs can determine the times of the day to visit certain attractions and/or suggest alternative locations for less crowded experiences. The use of the Visitor Centres in conjunction with other activities, such as guided tours or films can concentrate visitors' numbers outside fragile sites or viewing areas. Visitor Centre's staff are key resources to providing information and concierge services as well as impacting visitor behaviour to ensure a quality experience both for the visitor and for interactions with residents.

In addition, VCs can provide a space to generate revenue through the sale of tickets, merchandise, local handicrafts, paid comfort facilities and parking. These can be important resources to finance conservation.

To facilitate discussion in the workshop on this theme, the following questions were raised:

- ? There are examples of how VCs can be used to manage the flow of visitors in a destination. Some require mandatory visitations, others provide additional attractions and experiences to lure visitors away from congested areas. Timed entry and technology are also being used to limit visitor numbers. How do you use your Visitor Centre to manage visitors' flows?
- ? To what extent is your Visitor Centre capturing and analyzing important visitor information and statistics to ensure long term sustainability? How is this information being used in terms of visitor management? Is this information shared with national authorities? Is this information made publicly available?
- ? Visitor behaviour is a key factor in terms of achieving sustainable tourism. How are you engaging with visitors to influence their experience on the site and encourage positive behaviour?
- ? A key feature of Visitor Centres is their role in promoting collaboration with local businesses, the public sector, and other potential partners to introduce new initiatives to improve the locality and quality of life. How is your Visitor Centre engaging with the local community to encourage a more responsible approach to tourism and in particular the need for safeguarding and protecting of the sites? What are some of the challenges you are experiencing?
- ? Long-term sustainability of World Heritage sites, Biosphere Reserves and Geoparks requires resources for conservation. How is your Centre developing innovative approaches to generate revenue for the conservation of the site?

“ *Interpretation is commonly implemented as the full range of potential activities intended to raise public awareness and enhance understanding of the complexities of sites.* ”

### 1.1.2. Interpretation of heritage and educational services

Presentation of heritage, communication and education are part of the basic responsibilities for all participant UNESCO designations in this workshop.

In the World Heritage Convention, the duties of the State Parties include the presentation of the cultural and natural heritage situated in their territories. As stated in the Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the Convention, intangible dimensions of heritage such as perceptions and associations play a role in property management, while management systems should deliver a constructive role for cultural heritage in enhancing human development and fostering positive learning environments. In turn, presentation of heritage can help in developing a thorough, shared understanding of the property by all stakeholders, which is a necessary element for effective management.

Biosphere Reserves are ‘Science for Sustainability support sites’ – special places for testing interdisciplinary approaches to understanding and managing changes and interactions between social and ecological systems, aiming at developing a sustainable balance between conservation and development goals. As part of their three interconnected functions (conservation, development and logistic support), Biosphere Reserves should act as sites of excellence for knowledge generation, including through demonstration projects, education, training, and capacity enhancement.

Visibility is also a key objective for Global Geoparks, in their quest to promote sustainable local economic development through geotourism and to raise awareness and understanding of key issues facing society, such as the sustainable use of natural resources,

the effects of climate change, and the reduction of natural disaster-related risks. Accordingly, Global Geoparks should produce various information materials and develop activities for dissemination, including a specific corporate identity, with the aim to explore, develop and celebrate the links between geological heritage and all other aspects of the area’s natural and cultural heritage.

Interpretation is commonly implemented as the full range of potential activities intended to raise public awareness and enhance understanding of the complexities of sites. Presentation, more specifically, denotes the carefully planned communication of content through the arrangement of interpretive information and infrastructure aimed at different objectives, which are summarised as follows<sup>6</sup>:

1. Facilitate understanding and appreciation of local cultural and natural values;
2. Foster public awareness and engagement in heritage and nature conservation;
3. Communicate site values to a range of audiences;
4. Safeguard the tangible and intangible values of sites in their natural and cultural settings and social contexts, protecting them from intrusive interpretive infrastructure, visitor pressure, inaccurate or inappropriate interpretation;
5. Contribute to sustainable development by better integrating the sites in their broader cultural, social, environmental, and economic environment;
6. Encourage inclusiveness in the definition and communication of local cultural and natural values, by facilitating the involvement of stakeholders and associated communities in the development and implementation of interpretive programmes.

These objectives and obligations are to be pursued within a rapidly changing framework, influenced by factors such as the massive increase of tourism, the evolution of communication media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), as well as the economic, social, demographic and environmental transformations related to climate change, migrations, evolution of productive systems, conflicts, and other global challenges. Their achievement requires insights based on communication and international cooperation, as well as efforts at the practical level for implementation.

Against this background, the workshop offered the opportunity to exchange experiences, questions and visions on how Visitor Centres can improve the interpretation, presentation and communication of heritage vis-à-vis external and internal stakeholders, including through educational activities. To this end, the following, non-exhaustive list of issues was proposed for discussion:

- Each designation scheme has its own rules and approach to the way in which the significance of a site is recognised. The form of the recognition, particularly if it is based on a normative instrument (e.g. World Heritage), affects the ways in which the site is defined and interpreted (e.g. the site's Outstanding Universal Value). Linking the hallmark of the "initial recognition" to the broader site context is one of the key challenges in the presentation of heritage, which brings with it the need to recognize and express wider associative values;
- Different people or groups can have different perceptions of values, sometimes even conflicting. This implies the need for participatory, inclusive approaches, aimed at collecting and elaborating multiple viewpoints, and developing plural and open narratives;
- In addition, different target groups normally have different expectations, interests, needs, and capacities. In this sense, proper and effective presentation and communication require specific contents, processes and tools based on a good understanding of the various audiences, spanning local population, national and international visitors, and others;
- Interpretation and outreach should be regarded as part of the management system of a heritage site. Their objectives and expected results are to be interpreted according to their role in the management system and the overall vision guiding the site management;
- Human resources, facilities, equipment, techniques and tools are necessary investments to carry out presentation and communication at the practical level. They should be planned strategically and well managed to ensure effectiveness and efficiency to achieve the objectives;
- A wide range of potential techniques and tools are available for interpretation and communication. Decisions on the use of technologies and on content development should be taken bearing in mind the wider management vision, interpretation's objectives, target audiences, and available resources for both, the initial development and the future maintenance and update;
- Interpretation and presentation of UNESCO designated sites, besides focusing on the local context, should refer to and be aligned with UNESCO's mission to contribute towards building peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue by using education, the sciences, culture, communication and information.

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<sup>6</sup> *ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Interpretation and Presentation, "The ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites," 16th General Assembly of ICOMOS (2008): [http://icp.icomos.org/downloads/ICOMOS\\_Interpretation\\_Charter\\_ENG\\_04\\_10\\_08.pdf](http://icp.icomos.org/downloads/ICOMOS_Interpretation_Charter_ENG_04_10_08.pdf).*

“ *Community engagement has been recognized in the 2030 Agenda key to achieving sustainable development, and UNESCO is actively promoting it throughout the Organization’s focus areas.* ”

### 1.1.3. Community engagement and community-oriented services

Community engagement has been recognized in the 2030 Agenda as key to achieving sustainable development, and UNESCO is actively promoting it throughout the Organization’s focus areas. This is especially relevant in the case of UNESCO designated sites, where community engagement and community oriented services should be an integral part of the overall site management efforts and underlying objectives.

With regards to World Heritage, the primary purpose of the designation is the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value. This has, however, taken on a broader significance over the years, as the concept of sustainable development has evolved. In fact, the Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention state that legislations, policies and strategies affecting World Heritage properties should promote and encourage the active participation of the communities and stakeholders concerned with the property, as necessary conditions to its sustainable protection and management. Along the same lines, management plans of nominated properties should be defined preferably through participatory means, to ensure the involvement and coordination of different partners and stakeholders. This is especially important in approaching sustainable uses of the properties, which are intended to contribute to the quality of life of the concerned communities.

Since their inception, Biosphere Reserves and Global Geoparks have focused on the interactions between humans and their environment, and on the importance of managing these sites to promote sustainable development. The MAB programme and its Biosphere Reserves are in a sense precursors of the concept of sustainable development, as they sought in the early 1970s to promote scientific and environmental research in designated areas of high ecological value, while also focusing on the social and economic aspects of the development of the sites.

One of the key aspects of Biosphere Reserves and Geoparks is participatory management. In Biosphere Reserves, participatory management is in fact a criterion for the establishment of a site, and indeed one of the indicators of the success of a site. The vision for the MAB programme expressed in its 2015-2025 strategy is “a world where people are conscious of their common future and interaction with our planet, and act collectively and responsibly to build thriving societies in harmony within the biosphere.”<sup>7</sup> Subsumed within this vision are sites in which all members of society in a designated territory (government, academics, NGOs, private sector, local populations, indigenous groups, etc.) participate not only in particular activities within the site, but also in its management. The triple zonification of biosphere reserves permits for the involvement of different groups in different zones and promotes a variety of interactions to fulfill its goals. Awareness raising and communication have been given increased importance in biosphere reserves, and are in fact one of the five strategic areas in the Lima Action Plan (2016) for the coming ten years.

UNESCO Global Geoparks developed in the past twenty years represent a new, cutting edge, and dynamic network and are defined as a mechanism of international cooperation through areas of geological heritage of international value. By using a bottom-up approach to conserving that heritage, they support each other to engage with local communities to promote awareness of heritage and adopt a sustainable approach to the development of the area. One of the main aspects of Geoparks is giving local people a sense of pride in their region, and therefore involving local populations in all aspects of Geopark development. UNESCO Global Geoparks are established through a bottom-up process involving all relevant local and regional stakeholders and authorities in the area (e.g. land owners, community groups, tourism providers, indigenous communities, and local organizations). One of the criteria for the establishment of a Geopark is the active involvement of local communities and indigenous peoples.

Therefore, community engagement and community oriented services have always been (BRs and Geoparks) or have increasingly become (WH sites) fundamental aspects of all three of UNESCO's designations. Visitor Centres have been developed in great part for this purpose: to communicate effectively on the sites to the local communities, as well as to visitors. Due to the differing nature of the three designations, they may have different roles to play, but also act similarly in response to similar challenges, needs and opportunities. For instance, in all three types of sites, Visitor Centres play an educational role for people to not only understand the nature of the sites, but also what they represent for local communities.

Within this framework, the workshop gave the opportunity to Visitor Centres' managers to exchange ideas on how their sites can help promote community engagement and community services, elaborating on the following questions:

Within this framework, the workshop gave the opportunity to Visitor Centres' managers to exchange ideas on how their sites can help promote community engagement and community services, elaborating on the following questions:

- ? What is your particular Visitor Centre's success story in relation to the involvement of local communities and the promotion of community oriented services in the site?
- ? What are the biggest challenges that you have encountered in achieving and sustaining community engagement?
- ? Have local communities been involved in the design of the Visitor Centre, and do they make up a large part of its staff?
- ? Are communities involved in the management and governance of your UNESCO designated site? Does your Visitor Centre promote such involvement and how?
- ? Have you developed tools for assessing community engagement in your Visitor Centre?
- ? Have you been able to harness youth to promote innovation for community engagement in your Visitor Centre? How have you done so?
- ? Do local communities take advantage of the Visitor Centre or is it mostly used by national and international visitors?
- ? How have you been able to use technology to further the involvement of communities in your Visitor Centre?
- ? Has your Visitor Centre been able to develop interactive methods to highlight the role of local communities in the site?
- ? Why do you think it is important for Visitor Centres to include a community-based perspective to the site, and how can this be achieved?
- ? What can be improved within Visitor Centres to ensure that local communities are involved and have an impact in their development?

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<sup>7</sup> UNESCO, "MAB Strategy 2015-2025," 7.

# 2 DEFINING FUNCTIONS AND POTENTIALITIES OF VISITOR CENTRES IN UNESCO DESIGNATED SITES



## Name a Centre

Choosing the name for a Centre can reflect the initial vision for its establishment, but it can also influence its evolution. While the concept of “Visitor Centre” entails an explicit focus on visitors vis-à-vis other target groups, other options – such as interpretation centre, information centre, or centre for the (name of the designated site) – can indicate different priorities, or take a more encompassing stance.

This chapter provides an overview of the main workshop’s conclusions with regard to the current functions of the participating Visitor Centres, and to the advice produced by participants for the enhancement of existing or future Centres, bearing in mind the three main focus areas.

### 2.1. Different contexts, different solutions

The first, clear evidence produced by the workshop is about the great diversity of existing Centres. Thanks to the criteria adopted for the selection of participants, that considered geographical distribution, balanced representation of different kinds of designations, and inclusion of cultural and natural sites, the information gathered in the preparatory phase showed a variety of practices that is due to a combination of factors, including: the diversity of the concerned sites; the disparity in available resources and in the institutional and operational contexts; different visions, with consequent strategic decisions taken during the set up of the Centres.

As a result, participating Centres differed greatly in terms of size, premises, core activities, management and governance, budget and funding sources. While, on the one hand, adaptation is key to responding to the site’s needs, the combined effect of the initial vision for the VC and the constraints determined by local circumstances can leave a durable hallmark that influences greatly the way a Centre develops.

Accordingly, the no one-size-fits-all rule should apply hand in hand with a very careful, well pondered, and possibly inclusive and participatory planning, already in the conceptualization of the Centre, as subsequent adjustments can prove difficult and expensive.

© Vadehavscentret





## Location

### Centralized

Concentration of all functions in one single building located in a strategic position

The Olympus National Park Information Centre (Greece) is located within the premises of the Park Management Agency, at the main access to the park. Its facilities include exhibition spaces, a library, and an auditorium

### Decentralized

Use of more than one building, to provide different services or to have better coverage of the area

The Dinosaur Geopark in Hateg (Romania) has a network of small "Geopark houses" scattered around the Geopark, focusing on different but complementary subjects, which also incentivate to visit the entire area

Human resources vary, depending on the Centres' needs, functions and budget

### Small staff

The Centre for Interpretation of Asturian Pre-Romanesque Art (Spain) has one single permanent staff

### Large staff

The Pont du Gard site (France) has about 100 staff members, including those employed in the local museum, parks, and other facilities



## Staff

Different kinds of building respond to different site's features, functions, target groups, as well as maintenance costs and available resources.



## Building

### Big and new

The Vadehavscentret (Wadden Sea), in Denmark, is located in a building that was extensively renovated and enlarged to host the centre, with a new site-specific architecture

### Small

The Visitor centre of the Arab-Norman Palermo (Italy) is located in small premises along one of the main streets in the historical city centre

### Converted

The Visitors Centre Welterbe Regensburg is located in a historical building originally used as the Salt Warehouse, especially recovered to host the Centre

Some Centres serve one single designations, while others cover multi-designated areas

### Multiple

Las Amoladeras Visitor Centre serves to Cabo de Gata-Níjar protected site (Spain), designated as Biosphere Reserve, Global Geopark, Natura 2000 Network, Specially Protected Area of Mediterranean Importance, and Nature Park

### Single

The Durham's World Heritage Site Visitor Centre is a free facility providing information on the site values, the meaning of World Heritage, and other info useful to the visit



## Designations

Different management structures respond to different normative, governance, and operational frameworks

**One single (public) authority**

The Hg Smelting plant in Idrija (Slovenia) is managed by the public institute Idrija Mercury Heritage Management Centre, established by the State Governemnt

**Mixed**

The Magma Geopark Visitor Centre is run by the Geopark managing authority (a private body, mainly owned by 7 public authorities together with privates), in cooperation with the local Tourist information service



**Management**



**Funding**

**Self-financing**

Crespi d'Adda Visitor Centre finances derive mainly from its activities (guided tours, educational workshops, events), complemented by sponsors. The centre's establishment was made possible by a loan from a local bank foundation.

**Public funding**

The Marble Arch Caves Visitor Centre is funded by different local authorities in UK and Ireland, plus grants from national and EU programmes

**Mixed funding**

The Troodos geopark Visitor Centre benefits from several financing sources, including: government funding; the Troodos Development Company; local communities; ticket sales; Geological Survey Department; participation in EU project

Different Centres can have different priorities in terms of mandate and services

- Tourist information at the Vilnius Tourist Information Centre
- Interpretation and accessiblity at the Castles of King Edward in Gwynedd
- Education at the Vadehavscentret, receiving 400 school groups per year
- Regulate and facilitate Accessibility (physical and intellectual) in complex locations, such as at the Silex's interpretive centre, and the Marble Arch Caves Visitor Centre
- Diversified functions at the Naturum Vattenriket with its more than 500 yearly activities offered to the public



**Functions**



**Visitor Centre?**

While the term "Visitor Centre" remains the most used, many Centres opted for different names to communicate their function

- Geopark Houses at Hateg Dynosaurs Geopark
- Vilnius Tourist Information Centre
- Olympus National Park Information Centre
- Nature Interpretation Centre "Las Amoladeras"
- Centre for Reception and Interpretation of the Asturian pre-Romanesque Art
- Natuurum Vattenriket

## 2.2. Core functions

Based on the information provided by the participating Centres before and during the workshop, the workshop allowed for identifying a set of generic functions that are common to most Centres, and that could be considered as forming their core business (except possible specific priorities related to the sites' context).

### 2.2.1. Information

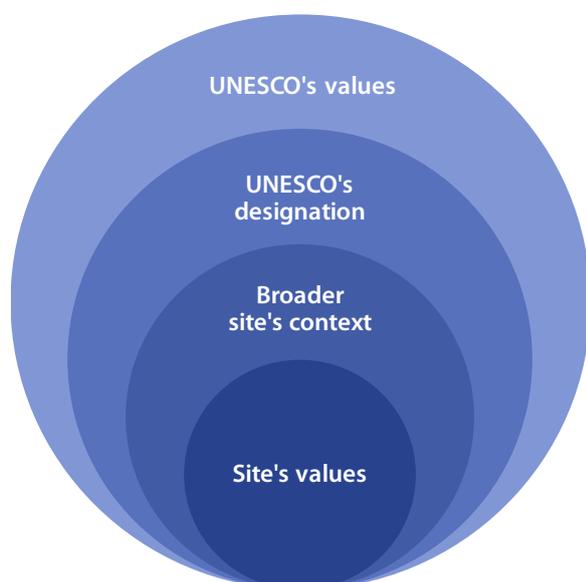
The first, most obvious and intuitive role of a Centre is to provide information to its different target groups, with regard to any possible issue of relevance to the site. Information provided by the Centres mostly concerns the values of the site (starting with those that determined its designation), to facilitate its understanding and appreciation; secondly, it is aimed at facilitating the sites' visit (schedules, itineraries, services, codes of conduct, etc.). This function includes the production and dissemination of specific information materials, that should be conceived to serve the Centre's specific communication purposes.

Ideally, this function should transcend the borders of the designated site, providing information on a series

of multiple levels corresponding to different levels of engagement. The first stage is the transmission of knowledge on the site's core values, bridging information with heritage interpretation. This should include the reasons why the site obtained the designation, any additional information on the local cultural or natural values, as well as information on the designated site's activities (including, when relevant, with regard to international cooperation) and – when relevant, its tourism, recreational and educational offers. The following stage ought to provide a view of the site within its cultural, natural and social surroundings, highlighting the connection between the designated site and its broader territory (local and/or national). The third stage comprises the objectives and principles of the related UNESCO designation's programme or Convention, having the sites acting as ambassadors of the broader designations' systems. The last circle shall aim at linking the understanding of the site, its local context and its international relevance, raising awareness on UNESCO's basic values, and its mission to build peace and foster sustainable development.

Last but not least, the informative function is inextricably related to their communication processes and capabilities. Communication is one of the major tasks for a Centre, requiring the development of specific capacities, tools, contents, and networks. Within this framework, emerging challenges include: the necessity to consider different needs and expectations of multiple target audiences; the identification and use of technologies that are affordable, effective, sustainable, and appropriate for the related purpose; and the increasing communication demand generated by social media.

### Information: multiple levels



## 2.2.2. Education

Today's climatic, social and economic complexities are constantly challenging human resilience to maintain global peace and sustain inclusive development. In 2015, a landmark commitment was made with the aim of tackling the main challenges and threats to humanity's future, with the approval of the Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. As the responsibility to achieve these goals relies on all sectors of society, Visitor Centres in UNESCO designated sites have an important role to play, complementary to UNESCO's one, acting as educational agents for different audiences to raise awareness and inspire responsible behaviour.

Such actions should encompass visitors and local communities alike, ideally by means of tools and contents tailored on the specificities of different audiences, in line with the principles of Education for Sustainable Development. This also entails the necessity to invest in the life-long learning education of the Centres' human resources, and in ensuring responsible behaviours in the overall Centres' activities, with a view at making of each Centre a role model for sustainable practices.

In order to achieve this goal, experience shows that cooperation with formal education actors is of strategic importance. Schools are one of the main target groups for all Centres, which regularly host study visits and offer specific activities for school-age children. Universities and research centres are also important partners (in some cases, having managerial responsibilities in the Centre's governance), through forms of cooperation that may include internships, advice, and applied scientific research.

Cooperation with non-formal education actors also offers great potentialities, yet not fully explored, especially with regard to lifelong learning or, when appropriate, technical and vocational training.

Irrespective of the kind of partnership, cooperation with educational actors should be as structured and regular as possible, prioritizing shared planning and joint content production with respect to spot activities, in order to maximize effectiveness and sustainability.

### Education: partnering for sustainable development

Visitor Centres capacity to influence the behaviour of visitors, both during the visit (codes of conduct) and in their general attitudes with regard to sustainable development, should be a priority in their educational function.

To efficiently respond to their educational function, Visitor Centres should build strong partnerships with schools and universities to collaborate in the planning of educational activities, as well as in the elaboration of contents.

Finally, many Centres highlighted the importance of voluntarism as a way to mobilize local communities and engage them in a process of increasing understanding, appreciation, and active care of their heritage and the surrounding environment. More generally, voluntarism proved in many cases to be a key resource for the Centres' effectiveness and sustainability, relevant to all core functions.

### 2.2.3. Accessibility

Besides being the main interface of a site with external actors, Visitor Centres in some cases act as entry points to the sites: they are the gate through which visitors access the site, offering a strategic opportunity to guide and influence the entire visit experience. In these cases, Centres are fundamental to filtering access through opening hours and maintaining the established carrying capacity.

As part of their core mandate, Visitor Centres can have the function to facilitate access to the site, especially in cases where access is restricted for conservation or security reasons, or hindered by physical barriers. This may apply to both real (with special focus on people with reduced mobility) and virtual access (considering the potential of new technologies for virtual or augmented reality).

With regard to local communities, some Centres have developed experiences to encourage local stakeholders to experience the site, through measures that include priority access (no or reduced entry fee, when entry tickets are entailed), communication campaigns, recreational facilities, and cultural activities open to the public.

The presence in the Centre's premises of a good cafe, restaurant, or similar public space – whenever feasible – often proved to be a good practice to encourage access and to diversify the Centre's funding sources.

More generally, accessibility functions should be intended in the broader sense to facilitate information access to numerous audiences, with diverse intellectual needs, aiming at stimulating curiosity and contributing to a positive experience. In this sense, Visitor Centres remain key actors to secure, monitor, and adapt physical but also conceptual accessibility to the site's values.

## Facilitating and promoting access

Centres can play a key role in facilitating real and virtual access to the sites. This may include measures to support mobility, overcome physical barriers, enjoy virtual reconstructions, as well as to promote access through a complementary recreational, gastronomic, or cultural offer.

Similarly to the information and educational functions, measures to support accessibility should include local communities as key stakeholders, with a view to reinforce local ownership and promote new functions for heritage in the life of communities.

## 2.3. Exploring potentialities

The Visitor Centres' core functions set the framework for their role as supporting actors in the management of designated sites, and as fundamental contributors to enhance appreciation of the site's values. On that basis, the workshop analyzed challenges and opportunities to further expand the Centres' role, drawing on the experience of some participants and elaborating on conceptual developments. The outcomes of the discussion can be comprised into three main groups of action: interfacing, integrating and inspiring.

### 2.3.1. Interfacing

The Centres' multiple scope of action permits them to act as meeting points between locals and visitors, not only referring to the physical use of the site but also through knowledge and understanding. Namely, the Centres have the capacity to act as negotiators of the needs, interests, and expectations from the external (visitors) and internal (locals) actors.

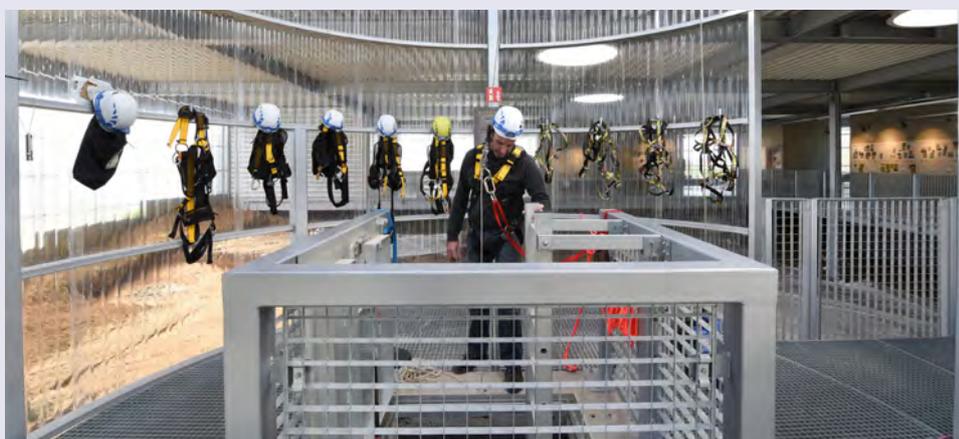
Interpretation, educational and visitors' management strategies are effective approaches to connecting these main audiences and to strengthening mutual appreciation and empathy. To this end, some of the Centres' basic functions seem especially relevant and should be further enhanced, including:

- Improving information and education, to encourage visitors to behave in a way that is respectful of local values and practices;
- Facilitating visitors' understanding of and interaction with the site's broader social, economic, and environmental context;
- Regulating access and visitors' flows, to manage them compatibly with the site's vulnerabilities, and in accordance with the needs and priorities of different local stakeholders;
- Offering cultural programmes and activities that can increase the interaction between different stakeholder groups, including among local groups;
- Developing a coherent communication strategy, able to recombine different tools and contents within a consistent vision on the site's identity.

To do so, it is crucial that the Centres develop capacities to listen, understand, and consider the demands of all stakeholder groups, and especially of the local partners, through an open, inclusive, participatory planning approach.

### Connecting two visions through volunteer work in Silex's Visitor Centre

The Silex's Visitor Centre gives the opportunity for visitors to be guided by locals and volunteers participating in the activities of the centre, including people in social re-insertion and retired persons. Another relevant project is the "Jeunes Actifs dans le Volontariat et les Voyages Alternatifs" (JAVVA)<sup>8</sup>, which is oriented to raise awareness of UNESCO's values among the local population through the involvement of volunteers in the research actions on the site, such as archaeological excavations, the study of the artefacts and the development of conferences and workshops for the local population. The projects are developed in partnership with the site management board, research centres, the City of Mons and local associations.



The Neolithic Flint Mines at Spiennes (Belgium)

© City of Mons

<sup>8</sup> World Heritage Volunteers Silex and the City, 2016 – accessed 11/11/2018

### 2.3.2. Integrating

Inclusive, participatory and integrated approaches to management and conservation are imperative to building and maintaining efficient safeguarding systems for UNESCO designated sites. Visitor Centres have the potential to contribute substantially to this challenging objective, as platforms for participative and consultative procedures for site governance, and as supporters of local development and community initiatives.

From the management perspective, the Centres can play a key role, through their core functions, in linking the site values to the associative values of its broader territory, including the social, economic, and environmental contexts. This potentiality encapsulates the opportunity for their greater involvement in relevant socio-economic dynamics, starting with the following, non-exhaustive list of focus areas:

- Centres can provide a strategic contribution to the collection and elaboration of data on tourism and site visiting in general, with regard to visitors' statistics, expectations, motivations, experience, etc. This kind of information is crucial to the improvement of tourism management, and can bring substantial territorial benefits beyond the site's core area;
- Still in the field of tourism, Centres proved able to effectively address the issue of excessive seasonality, by planning their offer and activities to attract more visitors during lower seasons;
- Centres act as a strategic partners for the local tourism sector, by developing closer cooperation with planning authorities, tour operators, trade associations, and other community groups;
- The same holds true for the promotion of local produce, arts and crafts, and cultural activities, prioritizing sustainable and ethical practices. This can span the dissemination of informative materials, until the direct commercialization of products through the Centres' restaurants and gift shops. In this sense, Centres also have the opportunity to raise awareness about other related focus areas, such as intangible cultural heritage, or issues related to sustainability and the Agenda 2030;

- Centres can create a human-centered practice to develop their storytelling about the site, by using collective memories, stories and other local testimonies, as innovative and inclusive approaches to heritage interpretation with a spill-over effect on local ownership and engagement;
- Overall, Centres can be important actors in community life, by promoting or adhering to campaigns, initiatives, or programmes in line with UNESCO values.

As a necessary condition to exploring these opportunities, Visitor Centres must be fully integrated into the respective site management system, and be involved regularly in the related planning processes. This is greatly facilitated in cases where the Centre is managed directly by the site managing authority, or under its immediate supervision, although alternative governance frameworks can also prove effective, provided they ensure the necessary level of engagement of the Centre in the definition of the site management strategies and plans.

#### Creating bridges between biospheres and gastronomy in the Dolomites

Infopoint APT Terme di Comano Dolomiti di Brenta



The initiative "UPVIVIUM gastronomic biosphere at km0"<sup>9</sup> consists in a gastronomic competition among several Biosphere Reserves in Italy. The Visitor Centre in Terme di Comano coordinates the local communication and awareness raising activities. The initiative promotes UNESCO MABs' values through gastronomy, as an important component of the local identity and economy. The involvement of different Italian Biosphere Reserves allows for the discovery of participating territories and the creation of specific tourism products that promote local gastronomy and produce, while tackling tourism seasonality by incentivising visits in low season.



© Infopoint APT Terme

<sup>9</sup> UPVIVIUM – accessed 12/11/2018 - [www.upvivium.it](http://www.upvivium.it)

### 2.3.3. Inspiring

The Preamble to the Constitution of UNESCO declares that, since wars begin in the minds of humans, it is in the minds of humans that the defences of peace must be constructed. This statement best illustrates the importance of ideas, principles, and values in determining courses of action and their potential effects. Along this line, Visitor Centres can be a formidable actor in connecting site knowledge and site experience with meaningful ideas.

Through heritage interpretation, awareness raising and education for sustainable development, as well as by posing themselves as role models for responsible practices, Visitor Centres have an enormous potential to inspire positive changes. In particular, the workshop emphasized the importance of reinforcing actions aimed at inspiring visitors and influencing their

behaviour on two levels: in the first place, sensitizing them to respect the site and its people; secondly, upholding the shared values of sustainability, global citizenship, respect for diversity, gender equality, and the universal human rights.

Such ambition applies to visitors and local communities alike. With regard to the latter group, Visitor Centres' position as an intermediary could inspire the mutual engagement of local opinion leaders, community groups and decision makers to develop a sustainable vision of the site. Combining general advocacy with specific initiatives (public events and meetings; campaigns; etc.), their action can stimulate responsible behaviour with regard to individuals, schools, and families, and it can sustain collective mobilization through volunteering and learning opportunities.

#### Inspiring audiences to engage in the conservation of the Kristianstads Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve

The Naturum Vattenrike Visitor Centre (Sweden) has a well-structured portfolio of activities to respond to the main needs of its natural and sensitive environment. Its more than 500 activities in 2018, which range from water-colour classes to hand-netting, have inspired people to experience nature and to engage in its conservation. Some of the positive results of this approach are reflected in the gradual recovering of fauna and the harmonious interaction between visitors and farmers without compromising the natural values of the site. Thanks to a new-found respect for natural values, the wetlands are no longer seen as a problem, but as a valuable resource for Kristianstad.<sup>10</sup>



Naturum  
Vattenriket  
(Sweden)

©  
Naturum  
Vattenrike /  
Jörgen  
Mattisson

<sup>10</sup> Kristianstads Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve, 2018, Activities 2018, Retrieved from [https://vattenriket.kristianstad.se/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2019\\_VB\\_ENG.pdf](https://vattenriket.kristianstad.se/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2019_VB_ENG.pdf) 13/04/2019

# 3 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS



## Participants recommended UNESCO:

- To continue supporting similar initiatives to exchange experiences among Centres, develop their capacities, and provide guidance for the establishment of new ones.
- To facilitate the Centres' role in sustaining UNESCO's and its designations' core values, by providing them with contents and tools to convey appropriate messages.

Hg Smelting Plant © CUDHg / Stane Jeršič



The workshop provided key insights to the Centres' core functions and potentialities, as well as to conditions, best practices and lessons learned to enhance existing Centres or establish new ones. These are grouped into four main sets of recommendations, related to:

- **Management**
- **Activities**
- **Partnerships**
- **Contexts**



# Management

- **Have a vision (and plan accordingly).** The main precondition for a Centre's effectiveness is to develop a strategic vision with regard to its function, objectives, and expected results vis-à-vis the site and its broader context. Decisions concerning location (spatial and symbolic), facilities (type of building/premises) and activities should be determined by such vision, and not be merely driven by opportunities and contingencies.
- **Integrate and be integrated.** Centres should be considered as an integral element of the site's overall management system, functional to the management's short and long term objectives. In turn, Centres can help to improve the integration between site management and broader planning programmes, providing services that benefit the entire territorial system beyond sites' boundaries.
- **Work to include.** Centres can also play a key role in reinforcing participatory approaches to site management, as an interface between the management authority and the local stakeholders. Similarly, the Centres' managing bodies should consider the needs, priorities and expectations of local stakeholders in developing their programmes.
- **Be sustainable.** Budget diversification can increase the capacity of adaptation to emerging challenges and opportunities, while reinforcing the Centres' autonomy. A Centre's capacity to mobilize resources also depends on its level of integration within broader systems for local sustainable development.
- **Be able to evolve.** As Centres operate in a fast-changing context, they should consider foresight, monitoring and capacity-building as essential actions to secure adaptive and sustainable planning. This includes the need to allocate the necessary financial and human resources for related activities.

*Full integration of the Centre in the overall site management results in more effective and responsive services, while reinforcing financial sustainability.*



© Nicolas Chavance

## Pont du Gard Site

The Centre is operated by the management authority of the Pont du Gard World Heritage property, which includes public authorities, scientific partners and local representatives, allowing for flexible and inclusive approaches. In addition, thanks to its multiple functions and diversified activities, the centre has a vast local impact and is able to directly generate 80% of the funds for its annual budget (through ticket sales, events, merchandising, etc.)

*Informed decision making, along with a proper monitoring system, are fundamental to the effective and efficient use of resources.*



© Marble Arch Caves Visitor Centre

## Marble Arch Caves Visitor Centre

In order to efficiently adapt to changing times and address emerging challenges, the Centre established a strong monitoring system for data gathering and analysis, especially concerning visitors and environmental issues. Drawing on such evidence, the Centre developed a plan to enhance physical and intellectual inclusiveness for its diverse users.



## Activities

- **Keep your focus.** The initial activities of a Centre are to be defined bearing in mind the Centre's strategic vision, in order for them to always be in line with it. Similarly, when considering to expand their scope of action, Centres should not lose sight of their core mandate and identity, as well as of conditions for sustainability.
- **Keep your balance.** Centres are required to cater for a great variety of target groups: visitors and local communities; different age groups; different interests and capacity of engagement; etc. Accordingly, their overall action should include activities aimed at a generic audience and as well as other activities tailored for specific stakeholders, in a way which is sustainable, comprehensive, but also aligned with the centre's mandate and priorities.
- **Keep your roots.** Centres can play a key role as meeting points for communities and visitors, to improve reciprocal knowledge, respect, and positive interactions. In order to do so, Centres need to develop a privileged relationship with local communities, through activities especially aimed at them such as events and educational programmes, conditions for facilitated access (including discounts or fee exemptions when applicable), recreational facilities, etc.
- **Value Information.** Centres can be formidable in gathering and analyzing users' data, providing precious information to improve the Centre's performance and the overall management of the site. Activities to collect and process information should be developed whenever possible, on issues such as visitor numbers, profile and satisfaction levels, community needs and expectations, and other relevant variables to the sites' specificities.
- **Be technology aware.** New information and communication technologies can be very effective in improving the Centres' operations and overall performance. However, the use of technology should be responsive to actual needs, rather than being driven by mere technical feasibility. In addition, use of technology should consider future costs for maintenance, updating, and upgrading. Not all that is possible is also necessary.
- **Invest in capacities.** Developing staff knowledge and skills should be considered within the Centres' priorities, as a continuous activity assigned with adequate resources. This applies first of all to the knowledge of the site's core values, as well as to cross-cutting competences including: heritage interpretation; education for sustainable development; community engagement; communication (storytelling, social media), etc. Training and capacity-building should be extended to volunteers, whenever they are involved in the Centres' activities.

*Facilities, activities and staff competences should be consistent with the Centre's core mandate and strategic vision.*



© Crespi d'Adda Visitor Centre

### Crespi d'Adda Visitor Centre

The Centre's facilities, activities and human resources are oriented to serve families and students as main target groups. Its three-story building, with an extension of approx. 1,000m<sup>2</sup>, was developed to include conferences rooms, multi-media facilities, and classrooms dedicated to educational activities. The Centre has 15 staff members dedicated to didactic activities.

*Education is key to engage with local community, building partnership with schools, universities, and other relevant actors.*



© Centre for Reception and Interpretation of the pre-Romanesque art

### Centre for Interpretation of the Asturian Pre-Romanesque Art

The Centre works in partnerships with educational and academic institutions to reinforce its role as a knowledge source on local Pre-Romanesque Art for different audiences, with a special focus on schools, contributing to local identity and heritage ownership.



## Partnerships

- Centres' managing authorities should attach strategic importance to developing **partnerships with external actors**, as partnerships are key to sustaining the Centres' functions and fully tapping into their potentialities. This applies to public, private and community actors, as in the following categories.
- Partnerships with **civil society** actors, such as associations or NGOs, can help to reinforce community engagement, which in turn has a positive impact on heritage safeguarding, awareness, life-long learning, social cohesion, etc. In this regard, **volunteering** proves to be a fundamental resource for many Centres, both in order to reinforce the Centres' capacities and to actively involve local groups and individuals. Volunteering can also provide opportunities for fruitful interaction between visitors and local communities.
- Partnerships with **schools**, universities, and other educational actors are crucial to fully exploiting the Centres' potentialities with regard to heritage interpretation and education for sustainable

*Openness and the capacity to develop partnerships are key to reinforcing, diversifying, and increasing the effectiveness of activities, addressing multiple stakeholders.*



© Popa\_A

### Hateg "Dinosaurs" Global Geopark

Instead of one centralized visitor centre, the Geopark developed a network of "Geopark Houses" located in small-size, formerly abandoned buildings over the entire park territory. The Houses are a key instrument for the implementation of the Geopark's numerous partnerships, with special focus on the involvement of local volunteers as guides or tutors ("Geopark Ambassadors"), the promotion of local produce called geoproducts, and the dissemination of information on other UNESCO designated sites in the region.

development. In this regard, the establishment of long-term partnership agreements should be considered whenever possible, as it allows for better planning and strategic action with respect to spot activities. Such partnerships can also include the joint conceptualization of activities and related contents.

- Partnerships with the **private sector** can greatly contribute to the Centres' financial capability and increase the Centres' contribution to the local economy (e.g. through cafeterias and gift shops; guided tours; the promotion and commercialization of local food produce and arts and crafts; etc.), provided that the concerned commercial activities are compatible with the sites' values and sustainable uses.
- Partnerships with other local **public authorities** or actors (e.g. operating in the field of culture, environment, tourism and economic development, agriculture, etc.) are conducive to better aligning the Centre's activities with local needs and expectations, and to improving the integration of the overall site management with broader planning programmes at territorial level.

*Planning for the Centres' facilities and activities should be as inclusive, consultative and participatory as possible.*



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### Castles and Town Walls of King Edward in Gwynedd

All the four Castles (Caernarfon, Conwy, Harlech and Beaumaris) comprised by this serial WH property have visitor facilities to ease physical access and the interpretation of related heritage. The facilities were planned in cooperation between different authorities, in order to combine safety measures with heritage interpretation and conservation requirements, while considering communities' and visitors' needs. Such an approach increased visitors' numbers and satisfaction levels, enhancing the sensitization about the site's Outstanding Universal Value.

- Partnerships may include, whenever applicable, the reinforcement of coordination with **other UNESCO designated sites** over the same local territory, including the development of joint activities. This is especially relevant with regard to serial designated properties with more than one site on the same area, and to multi-designated areas (i.e. areas hosting more than one UNESCO designated property).
- Finally, cooperation with similar actors at **national and international level** has a great and largely unexplored potential, on issues spanning joint promotion, exchange of knowledge and experiences, and other possible peer-network activities.

## Contexts

- The name of the Centre.** Assigning a name to a Centre can greatly influence the way that Centre develops and is perceived by external actors. For instance, the definition “Visitor Centre” may entail a priority assigned to external visitors versus local communities. Accordingly, the decision on the name should be taken as much as possible in accordance with the Centre’s mandate and strategic vision.
- Connect local values.** While the Centres’ function and activities are naturally developed around the specific values determining the affiliation of the sites to the respective UNESCO designations, Centres should be able to elaborate contents and services that link the site’s values with other associative values (tangible and intangible) related to the broader local economic, environmental, and socio/cultural contexts.
- Think “glocal”.** As interfaces between designated sites and external stakeholders, Centres are also invested with the responsibility of representing the spirit of the related UNESCO designations, and of UNESCO in general. Accordingly, besides presenting the respective sites’ values, the Centres should work to convey messages on global values aligned with UNESCO’s mission related to building peace, fostering sustainable development, and protecting the world’s cultural and natural diversity.

*Centres can make meaningful contributions towards the presentation of the site’s tangible and intangible values in relation to their local, national, and international contexts.*



© J. Shoebridge

### **Durham World Heritage Site Visitor Centre**

The Centre provides an overview of the World Heritage property, its international significance, as well as of the local points of interest. It is also an introduction to the other World Heritage properties in the UK. Intangible heritage is introduced through multimedia tools, providing a connection between the tangible and intangible heritage values. The Centre also functions as a local exhibition space to artists, an educational space for heritage academics, and a point of aggregation for volunteers.



© City of Regensburg

### **Visitors Centre Welterbe Regensburg**

The Centre’s exhibition space includes a permanent and interactive interpretation of the World Heritage property within the historical, social and scientific view of the city, with its tangible and intangible heritage, including its role in the Danube regional framework. The Centre also connects the local site with the national and international World Heritage context, using an interactive globe with available information in different languages.

In so doing, they should also act as models of sustainability in practice, operating consistently with those values as an example to visitors and communities alike.



# ANNEXES

- 1 | Programme
- 2 | List of participants
- 3 | Info sheets of participating Visitor Centres

# Annex 1

## Programme

Day 1 | 30 September 2018

17:30 Registration

18:00 Opening Speeches

- **Leoluca Orlando**, Mayor of Palermo
- **Giovanni Puglisi**, President, Fondazione Lauro Chiazzese
- **Raffaele Bonsignore**, President, Fondazione Sicilia
- **Jonathan Baker**, Head of Science Unit, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe

18:30 Introduction to the workshop

- **Matteo Rosati**, Programme Specialist, Culture Unit, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe
- **Filippo Lenzerini**, chief facilitator

19:00 Introduction of participants

19:30 The experience of visitor centres in WH sites in Germany

- **Kerstin Manz**, German Commission for UNESCO

20:00 Welcome cocktail and buffet

## Day 2 | 01 October 2018

09:00 **Thematic Session 1** – Tourism sustainability and visitors management  
Chair: **Peter Debrine**, Senior Project Officer, Sustainable Tourism and Outreach Unit, UNESCO World Heritage Centre

09:15 Presentations by participants

- **Manuela Valentino**, Silex's (Belgium)
- **Alexandru Andrasanu**, Hateg Geopark Houses (Romania)
- **Rachel Peltier Muscatelli / Sonia Sabatier**, Pont du Gard (France)
- **Alessandra Odorizzi**, Infopoint APT Terme di Comano Dolomiti di Brenta (Italy)
- **Vilma Daubariene**, Vilnius Tourist Information Centre (Lithuania)
- **Javier Navarrete**, Las Amoladeras, Cabo de Gata Níjar (Spain)
- **Karin Magntorn**, Naturum Vattenriket (Sweden)

11:30 Group discussion

13:00 Lunch

14:00 **Thematic Session 2** – Interpretation of heritage and educational services  
Chair: **Matteo Rosati**, Programme Specialist, Culture Unit, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe

14:15 Presentations by participants

- **Aurelio Angelini**, Visitor Centre of the Arab-Norman Palermo (Italy)
- **Elena Tsangaridi**, Troodos Geopark Visitor Centre (Cyprus)
- **Kathryn Roberts**, Caernarfon, Conwy, Harlech and Beaumaris Castles (UK)
- **Aniello Aloia**, Centre of Geo-Biodiversity Museum, Cilento National Park (Italy)
- **Susanne Hauer**, Visitors Centre Welterbe Regensburg (Germany)
- **Tatjana Dizdarevič**, Hg Smelting Plant (Slovenia)
- **Martina O'Neill**, Marble Arch Caves Visitor Centre (UK)

16:30 Group discussion

18:00 End of works

## Day 3 | 02 October 2018

09:00 **Thematic Session 3** – Community engagement and community-oriented services

Chair: **Jonathan Baker**, Advisor for Sciences, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe

09:15 Presentations by participants

- **Klaus Melbye**, Vadehavscentret (Denmark)
- **Savvas Vasileiadis**, Olympus National Park Information Centre (Greece)
- **Giorgio Ravasio**, Crespi d'Adda Visitor Centre (Italy)
- **Sara Gentilini**, Magma Global Geopark Centre (Norway)
- **Clara García**, Centre for Reception and Interpretation of the pre-Romanesque art (Spain)
- **Jo Shoebridge**, Durham World Heritage Site Visitor Centre (UK)

11:15 Group discussion

12:30 Lunch

13:30 Guided tour to some monuments of "**The Arab-Norman Palermo and the Cathedral Churches of Cefalù and Monreale**" World Heritage Site and its Visitor Centre

16:00 Final Plenary session - presentation and approval of the instant report

19:00 End of works

## Annex 2

# List of participants

**Table 2.1** List of participants to the workshop (1)

No.	Name	Role/function	Sector	Institution
1	Jonathan Baker	Advisor for Sciences	Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, Science unit	UNESCO
2	Peter Debrine	Programme Specialist	World Heritage Center, Sustainable Tourism and Outreach Unit	
3	Matteo Rosati	Programme Specialist	Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, Culture Unit	
4	Costanza Fidelbo	Programme assistant	Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, Culture Unit	
5	Simone Beck	president	Luxembourg National Commission for UNESCO	
6	Kerstin Manz	head	Division for World Heritage	German National Commission for UNESCO
7	Filippo Lenzerini	Workshop facilitator		
8	Anna Agostini	Workshop facilitator		

**Table 2.2** List of participants to the workshop (2)

No.	Participant	Role/Organization* *if different from the Centre	Visitor Centre
1	Aurelio Angelini	Director of the WH site managing authority	Visitor Centre of the Arab-Norman Palermo (Italy)
2	Rachele Ramo	Promotion, communication and monitoring officer	
3	Deborah Pivha	Tourism management officer	
4	Manuela Valentino	Curator of Worlds Heritage Site / City of Mons	Silex's – Neolithic Flint Mines of Spiennes (Belgium)
5	Elena Tsangaridi	Communication & EU Project officer/ Troodos Development Company	Troodos Geopark Visitor Centre (Cyprus)
6	Klaus Melbye	Director, manager, ranger	Vadehavscentret – the entrance to the World Heritage Wadden Sea (Denmark)
7	Susanne Andersen	Second-in -command	
8	Sonia Sabatier	Heritageproject manager	Pont du Gard Site (France)
9	Rachel Peltier Muscatelli	Head of Research and projects department	
10	Susanne Hauer	Junior World HeritageCoordinator / City of regensburg	Visitors Centre Welterbe Regensburg (Germany)
11	Savvas Vasileiadis	Guide	Olympus National Park information Centre (Greece)
12	Aniello Aloia	Head of office for relations with UNESCO	Geo-Biodiversity Museum, National Park Cilento, Vallo di Diano and Alburni (Italy)
13	Giorgio Ravasio	President / Associazione Crespi d'Adda	Crespi d'Adda Visitor Centre (Italy)
14	Walter Carrera	Marketing & communication officer	
15	Lucia Colombo	Visitor Centre coordinator	
16	Alessandra Odorizzi	Director / APT Terme di Comano Dolomiti di Brenta	Infopoint APT Terme di Comano Dolomiti di Brenta(Italy)
17	Vilma Daubariene	Chief Project manager / GO Vilnius	Vilnius Tourist Information Centre (Lithuania)
18	Sara Gentilini	Project Manager	Magma Global Geopark Centre (Norway)
19	Alexandru Andrasanu	Director of the Hateg Country Global Geopark	Hateg Global Geopark Houses (Romania)
20	Tatjana Dizdarevic	Director of the Centre and Site manager	Hg Smelting Plant, Idrija (Slovenia)
21	Javier Navarrete Mazariegos	Head of Service for Public Use in Protected Areas / Regional Ministry of Environment and Land Use Planning (Andalusia)	Las Amoladeras, Cabo de Gata – Nijar (Spain)
22	Clara Garcia Lopez	Officer in charge of the visitor centre	Centre for Reception and interpretation of the pre-Romanesque art (Spain)
23	Karin Marntorn	Director	Naturum Vattenriket, Kristianstad (Sweden)
24	Kathryn Roberts	Principal Inspector of Ancient Monuments / Welsh Government (Cadw)	Caernarfon, Conwy, Harlech and Beaumaris Castles (UK)
25	Jo Shoebridge	Deputy Visitor Services Coordinator	Durham World Heritage Site Visitor Centre (UK)
26	Martina O'Neill	Geopark Development Officer	Marble Arch Caves Visitor Centre (UK)

## Annex 3

# Info sheets of participating Visitor Centres

## Summary

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## Overview on participating Visitor Centres

No.	Visitor Centre	Country
1	Visitor Centre of the Arab-Norman Palermo	Italy
2	Silex's	Belgium
3	Troodos Geopark Visitor Centre	Cyprus
4	Vadehavscentret	Denmark
5	Pont du Gard	France
6	Visitors Centre Welterbe Regensburg	Germany
7	Olympus National Park Information Centre	Greece
8	Crespi d'Adda Visitor Centre	Italy
9	Infopoint APT Terme di Comano Dolomiti di Brenta	Italy
10	Vilnius Tourist Information Centre	Lithuania
11	Magma Global Geopark	Norway
12	Hateg Country Geopark Centres	Romania
13	Hg Smelting Plant	Slovenia
14	Nature Interpretation Centre "Las Amoladeras"	Spain
15	Centre for Reception and Interpretation of the pre-Romanesque art	Spain
16	Naturum Vattenriket	Sweden
17	Caernarfon, Conwy, Harlech and Beaumaris Castles	United Kingdom
18	Durham Visitor Centre	United Kingdom
19	Marble Arch Caves Visitor Centre	United Kingdom

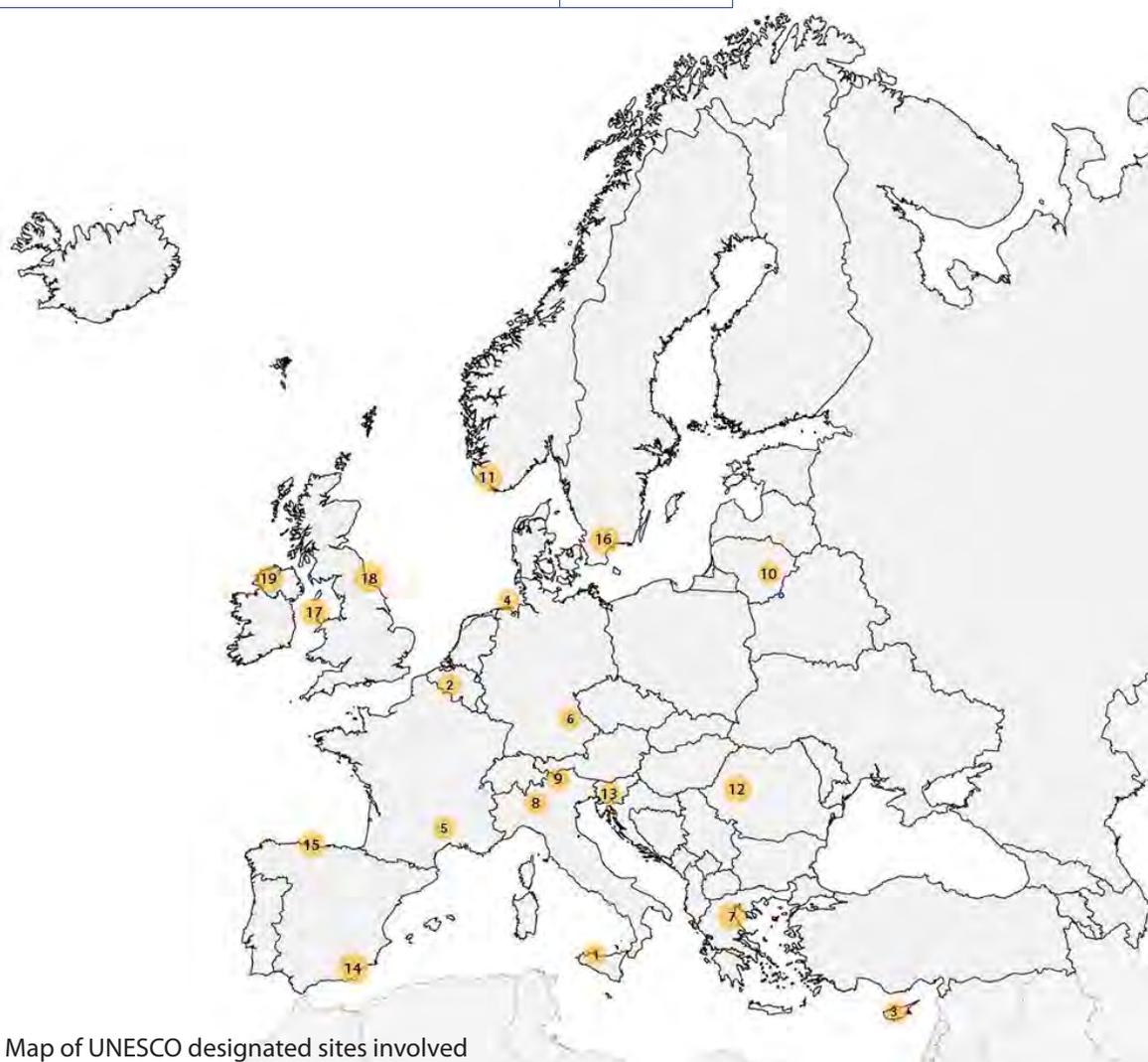
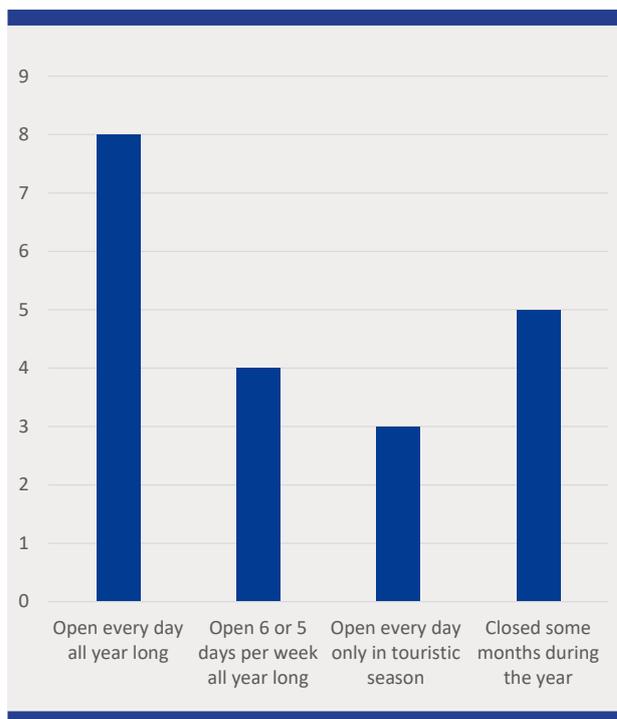


Figure 3.1 Map of UNESCO designated sites involved

## Summary tables of participating Visitor Centres

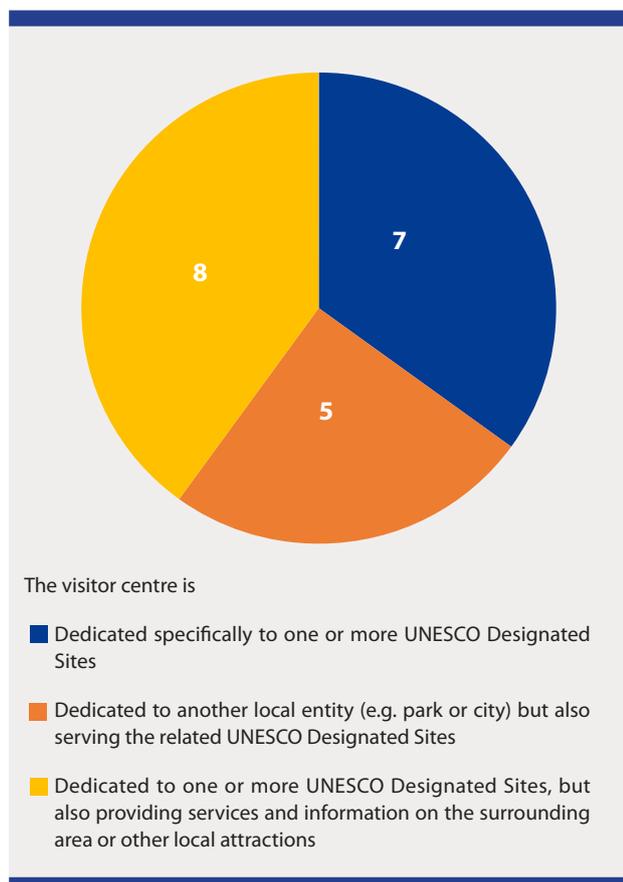
### Working period of the visitor centre during the year

Most visitor centres participating in the workshop are open all year long, usually having one or two closing days per week. Only 5 centres are closed for some months during the year.



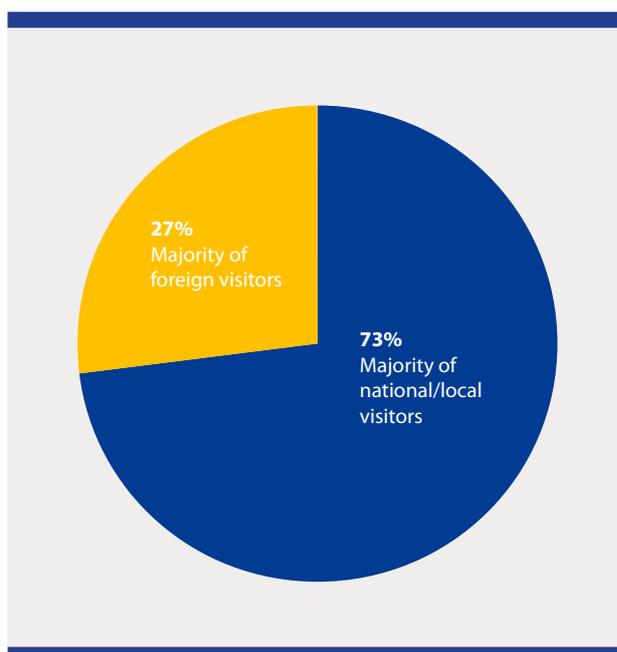
### Relation of visitor centres to UNESCO designated sites

Some of the Visitor Centres participating in the workshop are dedicated specifically to one UNESCO designated site, while others serve a broader local area which also include one (or more) designated sites.



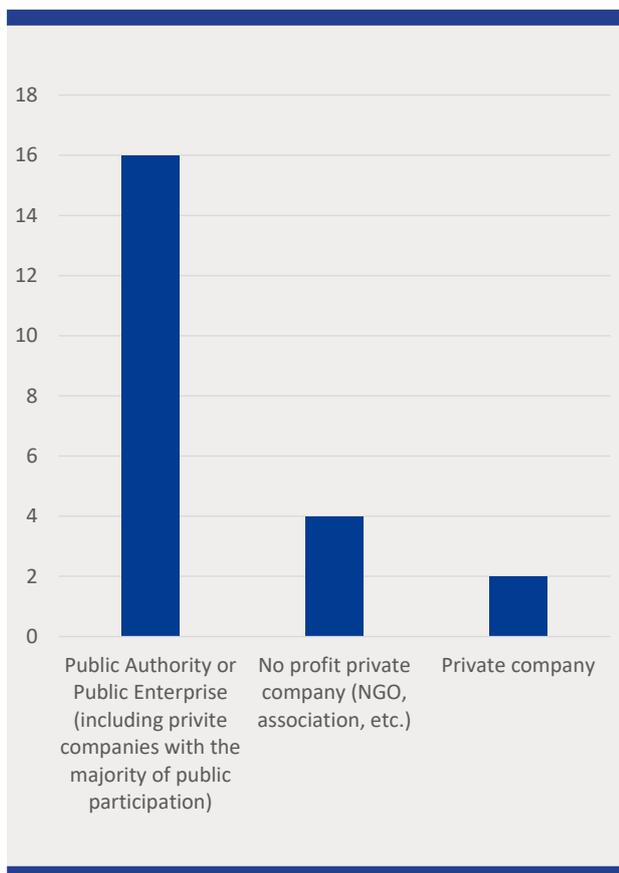
### Origin of visitors

**NB:** not all the centres involved in the meeting have detailed statistics on visitors.



### Management structure in the centres

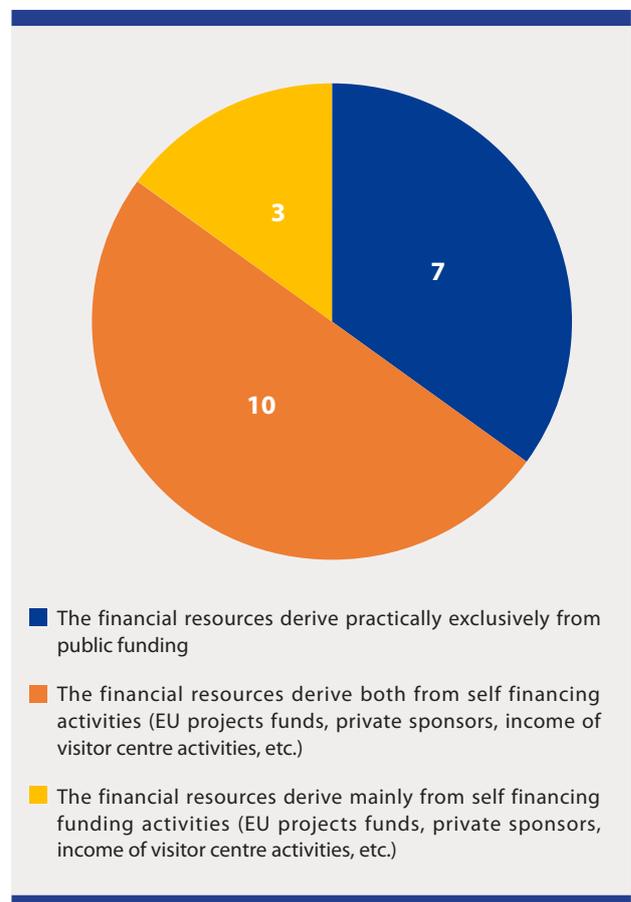
The majority of the participating centres are directly managed by a public authority (including one university) or by an enterprise owned or controlled by local government agencies. 2 centres are managed by a private company and 4 are managed by non-profit NGOs or associations.



### Financial Resources

Among Centres participant in workshop:

- 7 are funded exclusively (or almost) from public sources, either as part of the budgets related to the management of the concerned UNESCO designated sites, or with funds especially allocated to them
- 10 centres combine public funding with earnings from self-financing activities (selling entrance tickets and other services, sales in visitor centre's shops and restaurants, external sources such as EU funds, etc.). 3 visitor centres are funded mainly from self-financing activities.



## 01 | Visitor Centre of the Arab-Norman Palermo



© CRICD

### About the site

The Arab-Norman Palermo and the Cathedral Churches of Cefalù and Monreale were inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2015. The property is located on the northern coast of Sicily. It includes a series of nine civil and religious structures dating from the era of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily (1130-1194): the Royal Palace and the Palace of Zisa, the Churches of San Cataldo, Santa Maria dell'Amiraglio and San Giovanni degli Eremiti, the Cathedral of Palermo, the Admiral's bridge and the Cathedrals of Cefalù and Monreale. Collectively, they are an example of a social-cultural syncretism between Western, Islamic and Byzantine cultures in Sicily which gave rise to new concepts of space, structure and decoration. They also bear testimony to the coexistence of people of different origins and religions (Muslim, Byzantine, Latin, Jewish, Lombard and French).

**Ongoing or planned activities to enhance the Centre:** The Centre is planning to enlarge the premises and expand its role to become a multifunction Welcome-Research-Knowledge Centre for the World Heritage site. The project involves the use of new technologies, such as multimedia rooms; the opportunity for visitors to create their itineraries and access them in their portable devices; as well as the installation of new exhibitions and the extension of cultural spaces in the added premises.

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 2015

**Country:** Italy

**Key facilities:** The Centre serves as the information point of the World Heritage site in Palermo, offering free services including tourist information and materials on the local WH site and other main cultural features, front office for ticketing and guided tours, a nursery, a virtual info-point connected to other websites on local cultural attractions, and information on local transports.

**Number of visitors:** More than 8,600 visitors in 2017.

**Management and staff:** The Centre is managed by the Steering Committee of the World Heritage site (composed of local government agencies, private partners and community representatives), in alignment with the site's annual plan. The management is supported by the Sicily World Heritage Foundation and the City of Palermo.

**Financing sources:** The Centre is entirely funded by the overall budget allocated for the management of the WH property, provided by the Steering Committee and managed by the Sicily World Heritage Foundation. The Centre has one full-time employee, plus 3 touristic operators seconded by the City of Palermo.

**Main lessons learned:** As a reference point for locals and tourists, the Centre improved the access to the various components of the serial World Heritage site through one single ticket to access to the listed monuments. It also contributes towards the improvement of knowledge of the site values and connection between the different components of the serial site.

### Impact and main results:

- Reference point to learn about the city of Palermo and its World Heritage site
- Involvement of young generations through school visits and internship programmes.

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Further information is available at: <http://arabnormannaunesco.it/en/>

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 2015

**Country:** Belgium

**Key facilities:** Located in a green area at the heart of the archaeological site, Silex's enable visitors to understand and appreciate the site's values. The Centre is the result of the joint efforts of archaeologists, curators, architects and museum designers to protect, benefit and offer better access to the site, including special services for people with reduced mobility and the visually impaired. Its services include the permanent museum exhibition; the descent into the Neolithic flint mines; and walking and cycling routes in the area.

**Number of visitors:** More than 4,800 visitors per year (open 8 months out of 12). Due to conservation issues, the daily visitors' numbers are limited.

**Management and staff:** The Center is owned and managed by the City of Mons. The management and the staff onsite are supervised by the curator of the City of Mons, in cooperation with the City's communication and tourism offices. The regional authority (Wallonie) is responsible for the archeological excavations with the assistance of the Association S.R.P.H. The staff on site also include one engineer, on receptionist, 2 security guards, one janitor, plus a dozen free-lance guides.

**Financing sources:** The centre's budget is funded by the City of Mons, Ministry of Wallonia-Brussels Federation, EU funds, the region of Wallonie and the revenue generated by the rent of spaces.

#### Main lessons learned:

- Importance to anticipate the needs and risks related to the conservation of this very sensitive site
- The establishment of a right balance between conservation and the cultural/tourism enhancement of the site requires correct methodologies and appropriate knowledge
- Human relations between various stakeholders are at the heart of management

Further information is available at: <http://www.silex.mons.be/>



© City of Mons

### About the site

Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2000, the Neolithic flint mines in Spiennes are one of the oldest and largest centres for flint extraction in Europe. Dotted with thousands of mine shafts, the site extends over 250 acres four miles from the city of Mons. Digging mine shafts are as 16 metres in depth, in which the Neolithic human invented techniques to extract large slabs of flint that in some cases weighed hundreds of kilos. Techniques for cutting the flint were developed and they are now recognized as early evidence of human ingenuity. In 2015 the SILEX'S interpretive centre at the Neolithic flint mines of Spiennes opened its doors. The VC allows visitors to understand all facets of this internationally renowned archaeological site, giving them the possibility to join educational tours at the surface, visit the semi-permanent exhibition, and descend into a real Neolithic flint mine.

#### Impact and main results:

- Contribution to the conservation of the mines and of the local fauna and flora
- Facilitate the access to the mines without compromising the site's conservation
- Raise awareness of the site's significance and its conservation
- Facilitate inclusive site management.

**Ongoing or planned activities aimed to enhance the Centre:** Strengthen the presence of archaeologists onsite; develop more activities related to nature and wellness; enhance partnerships in place to fulfill its scientific function.



© Troodos Development Company/Nektarios Kammass

### About the site

The Troodos Geopark (1,147 km<sup>2</sup>) was designated UNESCO Global Geopark in 2005. VC is located inside the site in the old Asbestos mine, an area of historical value. The facilities include a botanical garden with information of local flora, endemic species and the history of local mining. The VC is situated in the restored elementary school of the abandoned mine. The VC includes a geological garden featuring all the rock types encountered in the area representing the Troodos ophiolite sequence. The exhibitions include local rocks and minerals, the geology of the area representing sites of geological importance and interest (faults, mines, geo-trails, etc.), information panels and multimedia materials related to the geology of the Troodos mountain range.

### Ongoing or planned activities aimed to enhance the Centre:

- Extend the offer of tours and interactive activities
- Build European partnerships through UNESCO Geoparks Network
- Elaborate materials and organize special events to promote the site and the visitor Centre.

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 2015

**Country:** Cyprus

**Key facilities:** The Centre is located in a historical building, hosting exhibition rooms with multimedia materials on local geological heritage and related history, a conference room, and a shop for the retail of local “geoproducts”. Next to the building are a geological garden displaying different rock types of the area, and an outdoor classroom serving students and visitors.

**Number of visitors:** 5,000-6,000 visitors per year, in average (50% domestic; 40% from schools).

**Management and staff:** The restoration of the building and the Geological Museum were funded by the cross-border EU Project GEOTOPIA (Greece – Cyprus, 2011-2013). The Troodos Development Company, a non-profit organization, manages and promotes the Geopark and its visitor Centre. The only permanent staff, a geologist, coordinates the tours and information to visitors.

**Financing sources:** Revenue generated by the entrance tickets, government contributions, and EU funding (different projects).

**Main lessons learned:** The main challenge is the lack of tourism diversification in Cyprus, known as a sun and beach destination, making the visibility of the site difficult. To respond to this, specific actions were identified, such as the elaboration of an effective management plan, strengthened partnerships with the tourism sector and academic institutions, and the application to EU programmes to complete the required funding for the Centre’s activities.

**Impact and main results:** The establishment of the Centre raised awareness of the site’s significance for local and foreign visitors, while also serving as an information source for the mining history of Cyprus, the geology of the Troodos area, and the influence of copper mining on the history of the island.

Further information is available at: <http://www.troodos-geo.org>

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 1996 (renovated in 2017)

**Country:** Denmark

**Key facilities:** The Centre was largely expanded and renovated in 2017, based on a site-specific architectural design. It covers an area of 3000 m<sup>2</sup>, including a large exhibition space, meeting rooms and classrooms, a tundra garden, a cafeteria, a shop, and a building for storing outdoor activities' gear.

**Number of visitors:** 116,000 visitors in 2017, including 1,030 groups and 400 school classes.

**Management and staff:** The Wadden Sea Centre is a semi-private, self-governing institution governed by representatives from the municipality (which owns the building), universities, local business companies and support groups. The staff is composed of 16 people, out of which 5 are rangers educated as biologists, and 5 are in charge of ticketing and the cafeteria.

**Financing sources:** The Centre is supported by the Esbjerg municipality, the Ministry of education, and the Outdoor Council. In addition, it has its own earnings from tickets, the cafeteria and other activities.

**Main lessons learned:** The centre is committed to presenting the Wadden Sea with high professionalism and enthusiasm. Guests are to be treated as competent persons, eager to learn about the site. The site visit is also an opportunity to convey messages on global environmental issues that transcend the local values. Finally, the beauty and functionality of the renovated building is key to the centre's success.

### Impact and main results:

The new Wadden Sea Centre has brought pride to the local population; locals and visitors praise its architecture and services.

In just one year since of activities, the centre's guests spent €7million in the region, with broad positive impact on the local economy, and the centre's staff grew from 5 to 16 employees. Annual events increased from 430 to 1,030, and school visits also increased substantially.



© Vadehavscentret

### About the site

The Wadden Sea World Heritage site is a transboundary property located in Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark, inscribed in 2009. The property was later extended in 2014 into Danish territory. The Wadden Sea is also the biggest national park in Denmark with about 80% as boundaries of the World Heritage site. The entire transboundary property covers an area from Ho Bugt in Denmark to Den Helder in the Netherlands (1,143,403 ha).

The Wadden Sea is the world's biggest cohesive tidal water system with large tide flats, barrier islands and shallow areas. The large tidal flats that run dry twice a day are an enormous larder for 15 millions of migratory birds, that feast and rest every spring and autumn. It is a great source of food for different species as, every square foot accommodates up to 100,000 crustaceans, worms, snails and mussels.

The new centre improved the overall understanding of the area, raised professionalism, stimulated growth in the experience economy, created jobs and increases sustainability in tourism development.

**Ongoing or planned activities aimed to enhance the Centre:** the centre is considering several activities for its further development, based on the operational agreement with the Esbjerg municipality and drawing on the Danish environmental fund.

Further information is available at: <https://www.waddensea-worldheritage.org/>



© François Allaire

### About the site

Pont du Gard, the highest Roman aqueduct bridge in the world, was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1985. The natural and archaeological surroundings are classified under the Environment Act as an outstanding site. Its Mediterranean and riverside landscape contributes to the magic of the structure. During the period of 1996-2000 a major development operation gave birth to the new Pont du Gard site. Designed to combine nature and culture. The three principles that have guided the development are: 1. protection of the historical and ecological heritage; 2. quality of reception, and 3. local economic development. Maintained, cleaned, protected and secured, the site offers spaces for reception and discovery to familiarize with the Roman civilization, the techniques of construction, the agriculture and the Mediterranean landscapes.

**Ongoing or planned activities to enhance the Centre:** Improve the existing facilities on the right and left banks of the Gardon; create new facilities that enhance the connection between the different spaces of the banks; rehabilitate museum spaces.

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 2000

**Country:** France

**Key facilities:** Two reception buildings including: permanent exhibition (2500 m<sup>2</sup>); children and temporary exhibition spaces (600 m<sup>2</sup> each). Natural park and trail of ca. 15 ha.

**Number of visitors:** 1 million visitors per year.

**Management and staff:** The Pont du Gard site is managed by the Public Establishment for Cultural Cooperation (EPCC), which manages 165 hectares under agreement with the Gard Department. EPCC is composed of public authorities (at central, regional and local levels) and staff representatives, providing scientific and professional advice to decision makers. This managerial structure facilitates partnerships and operates as an autonomous body. EPCC has 110 employees and 60 seasonal workers.

**Financing sources:** Operations budget is approximately 11 million euros, out of which 80% is self-financed (revenues from ticket sales and other on-site commercial activities) and the rest comes from the Gard Department and the Occitan Regional Council.

**Main lessons learned:** The progressive changes in the use of the site and its development proved that the understanding and articulation of spaces are not optimal. There is an imbalance in supply on the right and left banks and a need to enhance existing facilities.

#### Impact and main results:

- Restoration and interpretation of various areas
- Rehabilitation of the landscape
- Improved management of traffic flows
- Development of educational spaces
- Creation of more than 100 full-time year-round and 60 seasonal jobs to welcome 1 million visitors, maintain the site, guide groups and perform the educational activities, with great impact on local economy.

Further information is available at: <http://pontdugard.fr/>

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 2011

**Country:** Germany

**Key facilities:** The Centre is located in the Old Town, within the former Salt Warehouse. The permanent exhibition, covering 2 floors, makes use of multimedia installations and displays to present 4 focus areas: World Heritage from a local to an international perspective; the Old Town with Stadtamhof as a WH site; the history of Regensburg as a medieval trading city on the Danube; and the social history of Regensburg. The Centre also hosts temporary exhibitions and group activities.

**Number of visitors:** 312,000 visitors per year.

**Management and staff:** The Tourist Board of the City of Regensburg runs the Centre's information desk. All content and communication tools are under the responsibility of the City World Heritage Management Office.

**Financing sources:** The City of Regensburg owns the building. The World Heritage Management Office of the City of Regensburg provides the budget for the staff and permanent exhibition.

#### Main lessons learned:

- Use analogue features whenever
- Keep digital applications simple
- Tell stories, instead of just providing information
- Encourage involvement
- Sustainability is key: think about cleaning, heating and functionalism when planning for such a centre.

**Impact and main results:** the Centre helps citizens of all ages to connect and identify with their cultural heritage. Citizens show the centre to their guests/relatives, and drop in on a regular basis to see what's new.

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Further information is available at: <https://www.regensburg.de/>



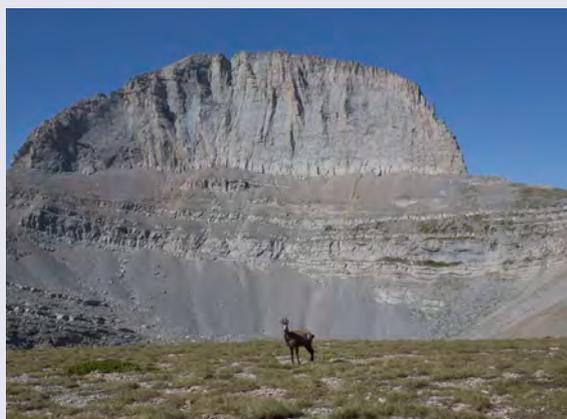
© City of Regensburg

### About the site

The Old Town Regensburg with Stadtamhof inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2006 is recognized as "the only authentically preserved large medieval city in Germany". Located on the Danube River in Bavaria, this medieval town contains numerous buildings of exceptional quality. Historic structures include ancient Roman, Romanesque and Gothic buildings. Regensburg's 11th to 13th century architecture – including market, city hall and cathedral – still defines the character of the town with the tall buildings, dark and narrow lanes, and fortifications. Other buildings include medieval patrician houses and towers, numerous churches and monastic ensembles as well as the 12th century Old Bridge. The town is also remarkable for the vestiges of its rich history as one of the centres of the Holy Roman Empire that turned to Protestantism. The "Old Town of Regensburg with Stadtamhof" embraces almost 1,000 historic structures within its core area standing as testimony to its development over many centuries. The town has been carefully restored over the past few decades and continues to be a lively business and cultural centre.

#### Ongoing or planned activities to enhance the Centre:

- Update permanent exhibition
- Develop additional contents and narratives (e.g. on Jewish heritage)
- Use different interpretative approaches for adults and children
- Increase local engagement
- Replace the damaged wooden floor.



Mount Olympus © sav. vas.

### About the site

Due to its outstanding natural and cultural importance, Olympus was designated as a Biosphere Reserve in 1981 with its inclusion in the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Program (MAB). Mount Olympus is the highest mountain in Greece (2.918 m) and the second highest in the Balkans. It stands on the border of Macedonia and Thessaly, between the counties of Pieria and Larissa. The Biosphere Reserve includes the summit and limestone foothills of the mountain. The landscape is comprised mainly of forests, specifically black pine (*Pinus nigra*), Bosnian pine (*Pinus heldreichii*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) at medium and higher elevations and oak woodlands (*Quercus* spp.), in the lowlands maquis and Mediterranean sclerophyll shrublands. Montane grasslands, alpine meadows, rocks and screes can be found at higher elevations and are representative habitats of the alpine zone. In addition to its natural significance, Mount Olympus is an emblematic symbol of Greek mythology and history.

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 2016

**Country:** Greece

**Key facilities:** The Centre has a permanent multimedia exhibition in the park, an auditorium with a capacity of more than 100 seats, a conference room, and a library.

**Number of visitors:** 11,292 visitors in 2017.

**Management and staff:** The Centre is managed by the Olympus National Park Management Agency, operating under the supervision of the Hellenic Ministry of Environment and Energy. It employs two guides and eight guards.

**Financing sources:** The Centre is funded by the Greek government. (€364,000 in 2018).

**Main lessons learned:** the visitors appreciate the exhibition, and this has an impact on their sensitivity and behaviours on environmental issues. Presentation of the site's significance and natural values is to be combined with information to assist during visits.

**Impact and main results:** The influence of the Centre's exhibition on visitors' appreciation for the site is reflected in their support of the protected area. The Centre also encourages visitors to come again.

**Ongoing or planned activities to enhance the Centre:**

- Organize more events for the local community
- Promote and commercialize local products
- Encourage the participation of volunteers

Further information is available at: <https://olympusfd.gr/>

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 2017

**Country:** Italy

**Key facilities:** The 1000m<sup>2</sup> space, on two floors, includes a multimedia room, a video room, a meeting room and classrooms dedicated to educational activities on the ground floor; while the information desk and the bookshop are on the first floor.

**Number of visitors:** Ca. 100,000 visitors per year.

**Management and staff:** The Centre is managed by the local non-profit association Associazione Crespi d'Adda, which is also the managing authority of the World Heritage site, in agreement with the Municipality of Capriate San Gervasio. In addition to the management and operational personnel, the Centre has communication and editorial staff, as well as 15 guides and 15 educators to implement its didactic activities.

**Financing sources:** The Centre was established thanks to a grant by a bank foundation (Fondazione Cariplo). Currently, the Centre self-finances its staff and activities thanks to the income generated from ticketing, tours, events, and the support of sponsors. The income is reinvested in research and promotional purposes.

**Main lessons learned:** The Centre is aware of the required balance between its key functions and the responsibility to guide and support sustainable and professional tourism practices. In addition, the rise of foreign visitors requires the elaboration of materials in different languages.

**Impact and main results:** Thanks to the constant communication efforts in collaboration with local media, the Centre increased the awareness of local communities and stakeholders about the site's significance. Communication activities are complemented with events dedicated to the local community. The Centre also contributed to the substantial increase in the amount of visitors.

**Ongoing or planned activities to enhance the Centre:** To consolidate the Centre as a dynamic space for the local community by offering an extensive cultural programme with events spanning literature, science, cinema, and theatre. The main objective is to further engage the community in the activities of the Centre, increasing local awareness and ownership of the site.



© Crespi d'Adda Visitor Centre

### About the site

The workers' village of Crespi d'Adda is situated in the Italian region of Lombardy between the Adda and Brembo rivers and the foothills of the Alps. The village was founded by Cristoforo Benigno Crespi to house the workers of his textile factory. His son, Silvio Benigno Crespi brought the village to its final form. He developed the town to provide comfortable housing and services to maintain a stable workforce and prevent industrial strife. The town remained under the ownership of a single company until the 1970s after which many buildings, particularly houses, were sold to private individuals. Crespi d'Adda was inscribed on the World Heritage List in December 1995. Crespi d'Adda represents an important example of a Company Town from the 19th century, or villages developed near factories in Europe and North America, as part of the Industrial Revolution.

Further information is available at: <http://www.crepidadda.it/visitor-center/>



© Parisi Fabio

### About the site

Designated UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 2015, the Ledro Alps and Judicaria Biosphere Reserve is located between Lake Garda and the Brenta Dolomites. The Biosphere Reserve covers an area of 47.000 ha inhabited by 1600 flora species, 33 rare and 149 protected species. Although the Reserve is just 30 km long, the difference in elevation within its boundaries exceeds 3,000 metres including diverse environments, such as Dolomite peaks, the banks of the Sarca and Chiese rivers, the agricultural terraces of Tennesse and the narrow Alpine valleys of Val di Ledro, the lush natural amphitheatre of Giudicarie Esteriori and high-elevation pastures of Malga Alpo in the Chiese valley. The cultural component of the site is represented by significant historical and archaeological findings that demonstrate continuous human presence in the area. The Terme di Comano-Dolomiti di Brenta touristic area includes different UNESCO designated sites, namely the Dolomites World Heritage site, several sites of the transboundary World Heritage property "Prehistoric Pile Dwelling around the Alps", and the Adamello Brenta Global Geopark.

**Ongoing or planned activities to enhance the Centre:** Among the future and ongoing projects, there are plans to increase the educational activities to raise awareness among locals and visitors of the significance of the Biosphere Reserve; increase the efforts to provide adequate infrastructure and services to people with limited mobility; and to improve the communication and information materials. All the mentioned projects are or will be carried out in addition to the establishment of the new dedicated Centre in Fivè.

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 1989

**Country:** Italy

**Key facilities:** The Centre offers different kinds of information on the cultural and natural attractions of the local multi-designated area (including a Biosphere Reserve, a Geopark, and part of a natural World Heritage site), through multiple information points. A new Visitor Centre is planned in the archeological area of Fivè, in the Biosphere Reserve Ledro Alps and Judicaria, which will be especially dedicated to local UNESCO designations.

**Number of visitors:** Around 12,000 per year.

**Management and staff:** The information points are managed by the local tourism authorities. The overall management structure is composed of the Destination Management Organization (DMO) of Terme di Comano Dolomiti di Brenta. Specific projects are developed in cooperation with external partners and the sites' representatives.

**Financing sources:** Public funding through the overall budget received by the DMO.

**Main lessons learned:** For effective management, it is necessary to have an integral vision of the overall local promotion and economic activities, such as tourism. It is also important to understand the visitors' needs and maintain the necessary quality standards for visitor experiences.

### Impact and main results:

- Facilitated access to different areas of the local territory
- Improved tourism offer through the elaboration of new sustainable tourism products that facilitate the contact between visitors and locals, while supporting the promotion of local produce (e.g. cycling routes; and "Upvivism", a gastronomic competition in partnership with other Italian Biosphere Reserves, based on the use of local produce).

*Further information is available at: <http://www.mabalpiledrensjudicaria.tn.it>*

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 1996

**Country:** Lithuania

**Key facilities:** The Information Centre has two main locations in Vilnius' historic centre and one at the airport. The Centre is mainly oriented to the tourism sector, operating as an information source on the main points of interest, events, tourism facilities and guiding services. It also provides guided tours, a city discount card, gift shops, and other services..

**Number of visitors:** More than 110,000 visitors in 2017 (85% foreigners).

**Management and staff:** Vilnius Tourist Information Centre is a part of the Tourism Division of GO Vilnius. GO Vilnius is a public institution owned by the Vilnius City Municipal Government. The three centres have 12 employees in total (one director, and 11 information specialists)

**Financing sources:** The Centre's budget is defined on a yearly basis by the City government, as part of the overall budget of the Tourism Division (ca. €2.3million per year). Additional funds may come from project activities (mostly EU).

**Main lessons learned:** The experience of the Centre shows that information and promotion are key aspects of cultural tourism development, including through local and national events (for example, the celebrations of 100 years of Restored Lithuania). The information must be up-to-date and supported by new technologies.

**Impact and main results:** Based on the monitoring of results and increase of visitors' numbers, the positive influence of the Centre's functions is noticeable in the satisfaction levels of local and foreign visitors. These outcomes contribute to the objective of creating an open space to strengthen the sense of local community while building the image of an attractive city with a rich cultural heritage.



© Go Vilnius

### About the site

Vilnius as the political and cultural centre of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the 13th to the 18th century is an outstanding example of a city where Eastern and Western European cultures meet. Vilnius' historic centre evolved over five centuries and it is one of the largest preserved historic centres in Europe, covering an area of 360 hectares. With its 112 quarters, the Old Town presents an authentic medieval network of streets, urban structures and impressive historical buildings in Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and Classical styles. Its current silhouette complements its historic multicultural urban context. For centuries, Vilnius has been home to Lithuanian, Jewish, Polish, Russian, German, Belarusian, Karaite and Tatar communities. The Vilnius Historic Centre was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1994.

**Ongoing or planned activities to enhance the Centre:** Different activities are being considered to further extend the Centres' role and capacities to welcome visitors to the city while transmitting the site's values. Among these activities, the Visitor Centres intend to enhance their efforts through capacity-building, use of new technologies, build partnerships with cultural organizations, and improvement of the current facilities and operations.

Further information is available at: <http://www.vilnius-tourism.lt/en/vtic/contacts/vilnius-tourist-information-centres/>



© Pål Thjømøe

### About the site

The Magma Geopark refers to the formed rocks from magma more than 900 million years ago. On a global scale, it is a rare type of rock. The Magma Geopark is designated as UNESCO Global Geopark since 2015 and forms part of its Network. The park covers 2,300 square kilometres within five municipalities, two counties and 46 geosites. The Geopark focuses on five key areas: adventure through its itineraries, creativity and innovation supported by the Virtual Reality facilities, culture highlighting the locally produced handicrafts and gastronomy, sustainability reflected in the leisure activities, and enlightenment by using its educational initiatives related to geological hazards, climate change and other relevant subjects.

**Ongoing or planned activities to enhance the Centre:** With the RURITAGE project, the Centre will become a hub for exchanging knowledge and practices on heritage-based rural development among project partners and stakeholders, by setting up a Rural Heritage Hub that will run until 2022. The project's activities and outcomes will set the basis for further enhancing the visitor centre, in view of the building of new, bigger premises.

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 2017

**Country:** Norway

**Key facilities:** The Centre consists of a small exhibition dedicated to the geological history of Magma Geopark, and two virtual reality stations for heritage interpretation. In addition to finding information materials and advice, visitors can purchase guided tours or rent bikes to explore the park. There is a plan for building a bigger centre, as part of the new Geopark's headquarters in Jossingfjord.

**Number of visitors:** Due to its recent opening (November 2017), no consolidated statistics are available.

**Management and staff:** The Centre is managed by the Geopark managing authority, which is a private entity owned by public authorities (two counties and five municipalities), in cooperation with the local Tourist information office. The Centre's staff includes one permanent employee and 10 guides.

**Financing sources:** Due to its recent opening and operation, the financial plan is under development. Funds to enhance the centre and develop local activities will also come from participation in the RURITAGE project, funded by Horizon2020 (EU).

**Main lessons learned:** Based on current and previous experiences, the Centre's structure and services are still under revision. In particular, the exhibition and the marketing strategy will be developed as part of the approved 4-year project RURITAGE.

**Impact and main results:** The Centre contributed to the development of tourism itineraries and educational initiatives with local schools and regional authorities. The Centre was also instrumental in creating the conditions to participate in the mentioned RURITAGE project.

*Further information is available at: <https://magma-geopark.no/en/>*

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 2016

**Country:** Romania

**Key facilities:** Instead of one single centre, the park has a network of so-called “Houses” located in different places around its surface, in formerly abandoned buildings or new ones made of natural materials. Each house has a specific theme (Geopark House, Volcanoes House, House of Art and Science, Dwarf Dinosaurs House, Traditions House, and Rocks House). They offer information services and materials; collections of fossils; minerals and rural objects; small boutiques; and access to visitor trails.

**Number of visitors:** 10,000 – 12,000 per year, on average.

**Management and staff:** Two houses are managed by Geopark employees, two by partner associations, and the others by associations with local administrations. Geopark volunteers also play an important role in guiding visiting tours and educational activities. A monitoring system collects visitors’ feedback and statistics. The overall managing authority is the Hateg Country Global Geopark, created as a grass-roots project by a consortium of universities, local and national administrations coordinated by the University of Bucharest.

**Financing sources:** The houses are funded by the University of Bucharest, together with partner associations and local authorities.

#### Main lessons learned:

- The network system proved to be sustainable, appreciated by visitors and locals, low-cost, and effective in providing information and promoting the visit of the entire park territory
- Specialized guides are necessary to effectively transmit the site’s values; in order to do so, guides are to be trained
- Importance to maintain visitors’ satisfaction levels.

#### Impact and main results:

- Awareness raised of the site’s values and the Geoparks/UNESCO’s mandate
- Contribute to local tourism development and economy



© Andrasanu\_A

### About the site

The Hateg Country Global Geopark is located in the central part of Romania, in Southern Transylvania. It covers 11 municipalities and 80 civil parishes with a population of 38,500 people. The area is famous for its dwarf dinosaurs and for its natural, historical and cultural sites. Its elements include the ruins of the ancient Roman capital of the Dacia province at Sarmizegetusa - Ulpia Traiana, medieval churches and fortresses, as well as the remains of more recent castles. The Geopark provides the setting for the development of a less conventional tourist destination, with focus on the promotion of geo and bio-diversity and cultural heritage. Thematic tourist routes, visiting and interpretation centres and trails give visitors the opportunity to discover and learn about the evolution of the land of Hateg from ancient times until today. The Geopark was designated as UNESCO Global Geopark in 2015.

- Promote local products and support entrepreneurship
- Reference point for educational institutions
- Reinforced community engagement and ownership of the site.

#### Ongoing or planned activities to enhance the

**Centre:** Considering the need to extend the narrative to include other relevant subjects, future projects include to enlarge the network, provide suitable capacity building to the guides, increase educational offer, improve the interpretation materials using new technologies, and enhance local partnerships with other regional destinations (starting with other local UNESCO designated sites).

*Further information is available at: <http://en.hateggeoparc.ro/>*



Panorama Idrija © CUDHg / Jani Peternej

### About the site

The site is a transboundary World Heritage property including the mining sites of Almadén (Spain), where mercury has been extracted since antiquity, and Idrija (Slovenia), where mercury was first found in 1490AD. The site in Idrija notably features mercury stores and infrastructure, as well as miners' living quarters, and a miners' theatre. The sites bear testimony to the intercontinental trade in mercury which generated important exchanges between Europe and America over the centuries. Together they represent the two largest mercury mines in the world, operational until recent times. The protection measures for the sites are satisfactory; in both cases they have led to municipal general plans of land use and the control of construction projects which could affect the sites. These urban and rural planning measures also apply to the buffer zones. The site was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2012.

### Impact and main results:

- Enrich the tourism offer in Idrija
- Development of interpretation materials for different audiences
- Awareness raised in the local community of the heritage related to mercury
- Contribution to job creation, especially among youth, by indirect support to local economy

### Ongoing or planned activities to enhance the

**Centre:** The Centre will increase fundraising efforts to complete the project "Restoration and Recovery of the Hg Smelting Plant area of the Idrija Mercury Mine - Phase 2". Other priorities include community engagement and sensitization (cooperation with former miners, etc.), and the enhancement of education, public communication, and dissemination activities.

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 2017

**Country:** Slovenia

**Key facilities:** The Hg Smelting Plant area covers the cableway end-station and the building that hosted most of the industrial activities, as the final part of the 500-year old mercury mining in the area. Facilities and machines are partly conserved, as part of a restoration project of the industrial heritage to host an interactive and educational exhibition, visitors services, multi-functional facilities, as well as itineraries for visiting the underground site.

**Number of visitors:** 4,816 in 2017 (68% domestic, 46% children), since its opening in February.

**Management and staff:** The Centre is managed by the Department for management and coordination of the World Heritage site, as part of the public institute Idrija Mercury Heritage Management Centre (IMHMC), established by the Government of Slovenia to manage the cultural and natural values related to the Idrija mercury deposit. The Department has two staff members. IMHMC also has 9 employees (paid by the Ministry of economic development) for the maintenance of the above-ground facilities and environmental monitoring; and 3 employees (by the Ministry of culture) for the conservation and presentation of the WH site.

**Financing sources:** The budget is composed of the contribution by the Ministry of Culture (1/3) and the entrance fee income.

### Main lessons learned:

- Importance to integrate the visitor centre within a comprehensive and sustainable site management system, to safeguard the heritage and the values of Idrija, also developing cooperation with other relevant actors
- Necessity of suitable human resource to continue research and heritage presentation activities on the natural and historical values of the mine, to bring the heritage closer to the public

Further information is available at: <http://www.cudhg-idrija.si/en/hg-smelting-plant/>

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 1995

**Country:** Spain

**Key facilities:** The Centre is located at the entrance of the protected area of Cabo de Gata-Níjar and serves various designations (UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and Global Geopark, Natura 2000 Network, Specially Protected Area of Mediterranean Importance and Nature Park). The exhibition space, which is divided into seven self-contained thematic sections, supported by multimedia tools, facilitates the interpretation of the natural and cultural values of the Park.

**Number of visitors:** about 9,000 in 2017 (43% from Andalusia, 38% from the rest of Spain).

**Management and staff:** The Centre is run by a local cooperative called NATURES, S.C.A., which holds an administrative concession from the Regional Ministry for Environment. All activities and events are overseen by the management authority of the protected area. The onsite staff is composed of one receptionist and nine specialized guides.

**Financing sources:** The operational budget (ca. €50,000) is composed of private and public contributions and complemented by revenues generated by the Centre's activities.

**Main lessons learned:** An integral approach to the different designations of Cabo de Gata-Níjar has proved to be the best method for effective management. However, regardless of the optimal location of the Centre as the entrance to the protected area, further signalization should be developed and put in place.

#### Impact and main results:

- The Centre integrated very well with conservation activities in the protected area, contributing to promoting sustainable practices and behaviours
- The Centre contributes to de-seasonalization of tourism flows, by offering activities and alternative leisure options during lower seasons



© Las Amoladeras

### About the site

Cabo de Gata-Níjar Nature Park was recognized as a UNESCO Global Geopark and Biosphere Reserve on account of the contrasts it contains between marine, coastal and terrestrial environments, the numerous endemic species and its unique characteristics as one of Europe's most arid ecosystems. Its unusual ecology and landscape are mainly due to the absence of cold weather and its geological diversity. The 50 kms of the coastline are composed by cliffs, villages and hamlets, beaches, creeks and coves, volcanic mountains, fossil marine reefs and terraces, dunes, meadows, ancient fortresses, watchtowers and lighthouses, etc. The site is home to about 1,000 endemic species adapted to the hostile local climatic conditions. Its natural features are ideal for different outdoor activities.

#### Ongoing or planned activities to enhance the

**Centre:** Among the future projects, the Centre aims to broaden its activities with a botanical trail highlighting endemic flora and fauna, and the installation of a planetarium in the Centre's surrounding. In addition, partnership with the regional Ministry of Tourism will be strengthened in order to enrich the visitors services offered at the Centre.

Further information is available at: <http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/medioambiente/servtc5/ventana/mostrarficha.do?re=s&idEquipamiento=19875&lg=EN>



© Asturian Pre-romanesque Interpretation Centre

### About the site

The Monuments of Oviedo and the Kingdom of Asturias is a serial World Heritage property inscribed on the List in 1985. The site includes the most representative samples of the Pre-Romanesque architectural style in the Christian kingdom of Asturias at the times of the Emirate of Córdoba, and played a significant role in the development of religious architecture of the Iberian Peninsula. The most important monuments and buildings are: Santa Maria de Naranco (848), a former royal residence built on two levels. San Miguel de Lillo (848). San Julian de los Prados (820-825) has the most important collection of paintings from that time. The Holy Chamber (866-910) is a rectangular two storey structure. Santa Cristina de Lena: unique example because of its interior distribution and layout. The Foncalada: unique example of hydraulic engineering of the high middle Ages in working order. These buildings belong to the Catholic Church except Foncalada that belongs to Oviedo Town Hall.

### Ongoing or planned activities to enhance the Centre:

- Improve the quality of reception and services to the visitor
- Gather visitors' data and statistical analysis
- Enhance communication initiatives and cooperation with different stakeholders
- Be part of the Pre-Romanesque Interpretation Centres network
- Participate in EU funded programs
- Reinforce the organization of activities oriented for the local community.

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 2012

**Country:** Spain

**Key facilities:** The Centre offers a complete view of the Asturian pre-Romanesque art, putting it into a historical context. Located in a former school, it has interactive, multimedia tools developed in partnership with the Archeological Museum of Asturias, including virtual visits and QR codes. The interpretation materials provide inclusive access in different languages, including braille and sign language. The materials are also suitable to different audiences, with special focus on children. The Centre also hosts workshops, lectures, exhibitions, and other events.

**Number of visitors:** 29,600 per year, on average.

**Management and staff:** The interpretation centre is managed by a public enterprise created by the Government of Asturias, which is also responsible for different recreational and cultural regional activities. One onsite staff member operates the daily activities in the Centre.

**Financing sources:** The Centre is funded by the government of Asturias (€78,000 per year). The entrance and services are free of charge.

**Main lessons learned:** The Centre proved to be very effective, much to the appreciation of the local community, in presenting the local cultural heritage and its universal significance, with special focus on schools.

### Impact and main results:

- Creation of an information point to learn about local Pre-Romanesque art
- Reference point to local schools to teach the students about their local heritage
- Perceived as a meeting point for families
- Contribute to community's sensitization and ownership of local heritage.

*Further information is available at: <http://www.prerromanicoaasturiano.es/es/23/el-centro/33/el-centro.html>*

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 2010

**Country:** Sweden

**Key facilities:** The Naturum Vattenriket is located in the middle of the reserve, at a short distance from the city centre. The centre explains how the Biosphere works and encourages visitors explore the area. It has displays, meeting rooms, a restaurant, and outdoor facilities including 21 birdwatching towers, trails, and an outdoor museum. It hosts ca. 80 school visits per year, and its annual programme offers an average of 500 activities, from big concerts to excursions and exhibitions. Naturum's motto is that enabling people to experience nature inspires them to respect it.

**Number of visitors:** About 120,000 visitors per year (1/3 locals, the rest from other parts of Sweden and abroad).

**Management and staff:** The Centre's staff is under the responsibility of the Kristianstad Municipality management office. Besides regular staff, the Centre has a fulltime person working as a "nature school teacher" running classes with field activities 3 times a week.

**Financing sources:** the Municipality provides 600,000€ per year for the centre's activities and staff. Additional funds derive from revenues generated by the Centre's activities (restaurant, lectures, concerts, etc.)

**Main lessons learned:** Naturum was approved by the Swedish EPA as a certified visitor centre. It also received positive feedback from the Swedish Centre for Nature Interpretation (SCNI) and the Swedish Museum of Natural History in the last review in 2017. The positive feedback on the Centre's functions and projects demonstrate the effectiveness of its approach and activities.

**Impact and main results:** Naturum is a driver for tourism development in the municipality, as evidenced in a recent study related to the influence and contribution of the centre in the local tourism development, according to which visitors in the area (mostly attracted by the Biosphere reserve) spent about €2,4million in 2011, increased to €2,7million in 2013 and €3million in 2016. This creates jobs and tax revenues that would not have been generated without the reserve and its visitor centre.



© Naturum Vattenriket / Patrik Olofsson/N

### About the site

Kristianstads Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve ("Vattenriket") includes most of the Municipality of Kristianstad. This rich cultural landscape, formed by nature and people, is endowed with almost every type of natural habitat to be found in Sweden. The River Helge flows through the area. The river is fringed by wetlands and seasonally flooded grasslands, but there are also leafy forests and dry, sandy arable land within the reserve. Such variety creates numerous habitats for flora and fauna. The reserve is exceptionally rich in diversity and a refuge for many threatened species. In less than two tenths of one percent of the area of Sweden, live no less than 20% of Sweden's red listed species. Kristianstads Vattenrike was designated as UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 2005.

**Ongoing or planned activities aimed at enhancing the Centre:** For the next few years the centre will focus on improving opportunities for outdoor activities, by creating inter alia an accessible fishing platform, boardwalks, and a bird-hide. Naturum will also invest in educating 200 volunteers as "Biosphere ambassadors", who will support the centre in education, sensitization and community engagement.

Further information is available at: <https://vattenriket.kristianstad.se/>



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### About the site

The four castles of Beaumaris, Caernarfon, Conwy, Harlech and the attendant fortified towns at Caernarfon and Conwy inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1986. These are the finest examples of late thirteenth-century and early fourteenth century military architecture in Europe. The four castles are a single serial World Heritage inscription, located in four separate locations in mountainous Gwynedd, North Wales. The inscription reflects the unique logistical feat of the construction, during one short campaign. The castles are each military architectural masterpieces, constructed under the orders of Edward I of England to subdue and control his newly conquered territories in Wales. As such, they present a contested historical narrative demonstrating acts of conquest and power struggles between medieval dynasties. The interpretation of this story to international and local visitors is challenging.

### Impact and main results:

- Increased visitors' numbers and satisfaction
- Increased income
- Active engagement of local community at both individual and group level
- Improvement of presentation of Welsh history
- Staff professional development
- Benefits arising from partnerships developed during the project

**Ongoing or planned activities to enhance the Centre:** The two main projects include the conservation of Porth Mawr Gatehouse at Caernarfon Town Hall and its development into a visitor interpretation centre, and the installation of new visitor facilities within the historic King's Gatehouse of Caernarfon Castle.

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 2017

**Country:** United Kingdom

**Key facilities:** as a serial WH property, each castle has an entrance point with a visitor centre to provide welcome, ticketing, orientation and interpretation. The centres are designed to suit the individual circumstances of the sites. The most recent installation consists of a new visitor centre in Harlech with retail and cafeteria. The centres also play a key role in facilitating physical access to the sites.

**Number of visitors:** The castles attract about 630,000 visitors per year (amounting to 46% of all visitors to heritage sites in Wales).

**Management and staff:** The castles and the related centres are managed by Cadw, the Welsh Government Historic Environment service. The World Heritage site board (composed of local authorities, associations, and community representatives), oversees the implementation of the site's Management Plan, while the day-to-day operations are managed by the Cadw staff. Each of the four sites is staffed by a team of custodians (25 in total) who also engage directly with visitors.

**Financing sources:** all site operating costs are met from Cadw, for about £3million per year (half for staff and half for running costs). Further £0.5 million is spent each year buying stock for sale in shops, the sales of which generate income towards running costs. Development of projects are funded by Cadw plus funds from other sources, including the EU.

### Main lessons learned:

- The centres greatly helped to interpret complicated messages about the OUV and local contested histories, and to facilitate access to them, also resulting in the enhancement of the sites' OUV
- Economic drivers are to be balanced with heritage conservation and technical challenges deriving from operating in archaeologically sensitive locations

*Further information is available at: <http://cadw.gov.wales/historicenvironment/protection/worldheritage/cstlsedward1/?lang=en>*

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 2011

**Country:** United Kingdom

**Key facilities:** housed in a refurbished 19th century alm house, the Centre is a free facility providing visitors and locals with information on the local WH site, and on what to see and do in Durham. The Centre also features an art gallery available for local artists and students, a retail outlet for books and gifts, and rooms for lectures and exhibitions.

**Number of visitors:** more than 150,000 visitors in 2017.

**Management and staff:** Durham University owns and manages the Visitor Centre, which is staffed by two paid members, supported by ca. 50 volunteers.

**Financing sources:** Durham University pays for the day-to-day running and staffing of the Visitor Centre and for events and activities.

**Main lessons learned:** Volunteers are vital to the Centre operation, both in providing additional visitor support and to engage more with the local communities. With the closure of the Tourist information centre in Durham, this Visitor Centre has become the go-to place for visitor orientation and planning.

#### Centre's impact and main results:

- Presentation of the WH site in a coherent and integrated manner
- Enhanced visitor experience and knowledge of the site and its values
- Increased benefits brought to the region by sustainable use of the WH site as a visitor attraction (e.g. extending dwell-time in Durham)
- Encouraged visits to less-well-known parts of the site
- Increased community engagement, especially through volunteering
- Share experiences as model for other WH sites in the country.



© Ko Hon Chiu Vincent

### About the site

The Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site is located in the North East of England, and comprises Durham Cathedral and Castle and the buildings between them. It was one of the first sites in the UK to be inscribed on the WH List in 1986. The Durham Cathedral and Castle are among the greatest monuments of the Norman Conquest of Britain, and the Cathedral is one of the finest examples of Norman architecture in Europe. The site is also outstanding because of its political history, with the proximity of the Castle and Cathedral reflecting the unique status of the Prince-Bishops of Durham, governing a virtually autonomous state. The Durham site has remained in use for almost 1000 years: the Cathedral as a religious building, educational centre, and place of pilgrimage; and the Castle, first as the home of the Prince-Bishops, and then as the home of Durham University, established in 1832 — the third oldest university in England.

**Ongoing or planned activities aimed at enhancing the Centre:** Extend the activities through public lecture series related to WH and other UNESCO designations in the UK; continue researching on the so-far sporadic visitor survey activity, in order to expand it and make it more stable and structured as a key planning tool.

Further information is available at: <https://www.durhamworldheritagesite.com/visit/whs-visitor-centre>

### About the Visitor Centre

**Year of establishment:** 1985

**Country:** United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

**Key facilities:** The building is on two floors and has a limestone façade built in a traditional technique using local limestone, minimizing aesthetic environmental impacts. Facilities include an exhibition area, multi-functional room, auditorium, a restaurant, trails and walking routes, and educational and event services.

**Number of visitors:** ca. 235,000 per year.

**Management and staff:** The Marble Arch Caves Visitor Centre is owned and managed by Fermanagh & Omagh District Council. The staff includes one Geopark and Cave manager based at the Visitor Centre. In addition, there are eight permanent officers and a seasonal team of up to 45 staff.

**Financing sources:** The Centre is funded by the Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, and revenues from its activities.

#### Main lessons learned:

- Importance to build consensus of opinion on the centre's activities
- Importance of data collection on visitors and environmental impact to ensure appropriate planning, monitoring, and evaluation
- Necessity to address carrying capacity, dwell-time and inclusive access (physical and virtual).

#### Impact and main results:

- Conservation efforts encouraged for local geological/environmental/historical heritage
- Direct and indirect economic benefits generated though job opportunities and support to local economy (including through increased tourism)
- The centre was instrumental in facilitating the achievement of the Geopark status (2001), and its expansion as a cross-border park (2008)
- The centre allowed for developing important partnerships with local communities and businesses, which provided tangible benefits to the area



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### About the site

The Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark is located in the north west of Ireland and straddles the international border between Northern Ireland (UK) and the Republic of Ireland. Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark was recognized as UNESCO Global Geopark in 2004. Since then, the Geopark has continued to grow with the most significant development being a major expansion into County Cavan in 2008 meaning that the Geopark was the first cross-border Geopark in the world. Gently rolling drumlins and winding rivers set against a backdrop of spectacular cliffs, rugged rocky outcrops and upland blanket bog set the stage for the Geopark offering. The variety of landscapes has also contributed to the natural and cultural heritage of the area. The limelight belongs to the Marble Arch Caves and Cuilcagh Mountain both located at the heart of the Geopark.

- Contribute to cross-border cooperation and to develop a sense of pride among the local communities
- Provide educational opportunities for all.

**Ongoing or planned activities to enhance the Centre:** Main projects for 2019 include the enhancement of visitor experience and opportunities for inclusive sustainable access; implementation of online booking systems with dwell-time demand; the development of capacities to stock and sale local products as part of the future Geopark business programme.

Further information is available at: <https://www.marblearchcavesgeopark.com>

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