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The Role of Visitor Centres in UNESCO Designated Sites

Report of the Fourth Regional Workshop for Europe

B u z ă u , R o m a n i a , 7 - 9 N o v e m b e r 2 0 2 2

2022

**Tourism Sustainability and
Visitor Management**

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- Madlen Șerban, representing the National Commission of Romania for UNESCO;
- all other local partners in Buzău for their support and hospitality in their amazing territory;
- all the participants and guests of the workshop, whose expertise and contributions were critical in making the event successful.

The organisation of this series of workshops was made possible thanks to the annual contribution of the Italian government to the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe.

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FOREWORDS

The series of regional workshops for visitor centres in UNESCO designated sites is part of the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe's broader programme of interdisciplinary activities, in place since 2015. This set of innovative, cross-sectoral initiatives, focusing on the integrated management of cultural and natural values at the local level, address the complexity of today's global challenges and propose context-sensitive solutions to support Member States implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

These workshops aim to share experiences and advance knowledge on how visitor centres can better serve the site management objectives in line with the principles and processes of their respective designation systems, notably World Heritage properties, Biosphere Reserves, and Global Geoparks.

The initiative started 5 years ago, and to date, 4 workshops have been successfully organised. The first workshop (2018) took an overview of the functions and potential of such centres and was followed by 3 thematic sessions, each focusing on one of the identified sub-topics, namely, heritage interpretation (2019), community engagement (2021), and sustainable tourism (2022).

This most recent report presents the outcomes and conclusions of the fourth regional workshop, exploring the role of visitor centres for improving sustainable tourism and visitor management in UNESCO sites. The workshop took place from 7-9 November 2022 in Buzău, Romania, generously hosted by the Buzău County Council and organised in cooperation with the Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark, the University of Bucharest, the Hațeg County UNESCO Global Geopark, and the National Commission of Romania for UNESCO.

The Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark in Romania provided an excellent case study for participants to reflect on sustainable tourism, inspired by the Geopark's commitment and incipient activities to enhance local geological and cultural assets, as well as sustainable tourism.

I would like to express my appreciation for the precious support and hospitality offered by Romania, and thank all the participants from the 22 UNESCO designated sites involved for their active engagement and precious insights. I am very grateful to the Government of Italy for its annual contribution to the activities of the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, which has made this series of workshops possible.

I believe this report, which summarises and systematises the rich information and experiences exchanged during the meeting, lays the foundation for further regional cooperation on the management of UNESCO designated sites, particularly visitor centres, for sustainable tourism.

Ana Luiza Massot Thompson-Flores

Director

UNESCO Liaison Office in Geneva

UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe

FOREWORDS

Buzău County Council is honoured to have hosted such an important international event, held for the first time in Romania.

We would like to express our gratitude to UNESCO, through its Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, for selecting our territory to host this event and invite representatives from all over Europe on its behalf.

We strongly believe that Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark testifies to a sustainable development approach, involving the scientific community, public institutions, entrepreneurs, visitors, and the local communities.

The event was an excellent opportunity for us to express our partnership and support to all those involved in promoting UNESCO's values in Romania and abroad.

Petre Emanoil Neagu

President of the Buzău County Council

I had the opportunity and privilege to attend the 3 previous workshops dedicated to UNESCO designated sites organised by the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe. Every time I had the feeling of being in the right place with the right people to understand the meaning of the hard and passionate work required to protect and interpret the universal values of UNESCO natural and cultural heritage.

The Buzău regional workshop, the first one organised in Romania and the first one hosted by a Global Geopark, offered a good opportunity to highlight synergy between different UNESCO designations and their role in fostering sustainable tourism.

The Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark is a good example of the University of Bucharest's involvement in implementing the UNESCO Geoparks Programme in Romania and of the importance of cooperation between public institutions, universities, associations, museums and other entities in the management and promotion of all UNESCO designations.

Alexandru Andrasanu

President of the National Forum of Geoparks, University of Bucharest

FOREWORDS

The National Commission of Romania for UNESCO welcomes the event hosted by the Buzău County Council, alongside the Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark, the University of Bucharest, the Hațeg County UNESCO Global Geopark - so important for the designated sites of Romania and the other 16 participating countries.

The workshop intended “heritage” to refer to both local cultural and natural values in designated sites, such as World Heritage properties, Biosphere Reserves and the UNESCO Global Geoparks. The latter, in particular, use their combined heritage to enhance awareness and understanding of the key issues facing society, using Earth’s resources sustainably, mitigating the effects of climate change and reducing natural hazard-related risks.

The event, aiming to strengthen the essential action of visitor centres in explaining and humanising UNESCO designated heritage, highlighted the importance of a “bottom-up” approach, combining conservation with sustainable development while involving local communities.

The National Commission of Romania for UNESCO thanks the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe for its support and collaboration.

Madlen Șerban

Secretary General of the National Commission of Romania for UNESCO

The regional workshop was a great opportunity for our team, in the Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark, to exchange knowledge and best practices with colleagues from other UNESCO designated sites in Europe.

Using some of our visiting points as case studies, like the GeoGate Visitor Centre and the outdoor interpretation areas of our mud volcano geosites, led to good discussions on digital versus physical interpretation, on integrating cultural, biological and geoheritage elements in communication, on local and regional partnerships, on site management and on building local brands around heritage elements, such as our neighbourhood’s friendly seven-headed dragon.

Undoubtedly, this report, based on the feedback and contribution of many specialists with hands-on experience in managing UNESCO designated sites, will be a valuable resource for colleagues around the world.

We are grateful for the chance to co-host this event and work together with so many experts, and we look forward to future similar opportunities!

Dr. Răzvan-Gabriel Popa

General Manager of the Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark

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INTRODUCTION

The definition of “**visitor centre**”, used within the present framework, refers to any kind of organised service with front-desk activities, the main purpose of which is to facilitate the presentation and interpretation of and/or visit to UNESCO designated sites. This concept includes a broad range of different structures, sometimes carrying other names, such as “interpretation centre”, “information centre” and “site centre/house/hub” .

Although the name “**visitor centre**” may imply a focus on visitors as the primary target group, this definition was taken as a reference because of its wide use, while assuming that the role and services of such centres should aim at multiple stakeholders, starting from local communities.

© Răzvan-Gabriel Popa - Group photo of the participants of the workshop



What is this report about, and who is it for?

The report presents the key findings of the fourth regional workshop for Europe on “The Role of Visitor Centres in UNESCO Designated Sites,” organised in 2022 by UNESCO and hosted by the Buzău County Council in collaboration with the Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark, the University of Bucharest, the Hațeg County UNESCO Global Geopark, and the National Commission of Romania for UNESCO. This workshop convened 22 professionals from different sites in 16 European countries, to share experiences on how to manage visitors and foster sustainable tourism in UNESCO designated sites (e.g. World Heritage properties, Biosphere Reserves, and Global Geoparks) and to explore how visitor centres can contribute to such a process while supporting their broader management goals.

The report primarily targets professionals servicing UNESCO designated sites, including staff of visitor centres, site managing authorities and partners. The report is also envisioned as an impetus and reference for whoever is seeking advice on improving the management of UNESCO designated sites, especially national and local authorities and other actors planning to establish new visitor centres in their respective sites.

Background: the initiative and the workshop series

“Exploring the Role of Visitor Centres in UNESCO Designated Sites” is an intersectoral, interdisciplinary initiative launched in 2018 by UNESCO through its Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe.

The initiative aims to exchange knowledge and build the capacities of professionals to improve the contribution of visitor centres to the management of UNESCO designated sites, with a particular focus on World Heritage properties, Biosphere Reserves, and Global Geoparks in the European region.

Under the initiative, UNESCO has planned and organised 4 regional thematic workshops in cooperation with different partners and conducted 2 additional surveys on the impact of COVID-19 on such centres. So far, the series of workshops have seen

participants from 28 different European countries, representing 46 World Heritage sites, 10 Biosphere Reserves, and 11 UNESCO Global Geoparks (including multi-designated areas).



The first workshop (Palermo, Italy, 2018)¹ identified 3 main working areas for visitor centres in UNESCO designated sites, namely 1) interpretation of heritage and education; 2) community engagement and community-oriented services; 3) tourism sustainability and visitor management. The identified working areas served as themes of the subsequent 3 workshops, each focusing on one particular topic.

The second edition of the workshop (Bamberg, Germany, 2019)² explored the role of such centres in heritage interpretation and education, as one of the 3 main focuses identified, as well as the challenges and opportunities of using information and communication technologies (ICTs) for all kinds of operational activities in such centres. The workshop generated a separate regional training course on interpretive planning in World Heritage sites in Europe (also known as WH-Interp; 2021, 2022)³ with a special focus on how heritage interpretation can improve the management and increase the educational capacities of World Heritage properties.

¹ UNESCO. (2019). *The Role of Visitor Centres in UNESCO Designated Sites - Report of the First Regional Workshop for Europe, 30 September-2 October 2018, Palermo, Italy*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000369983>.

² UNESCO. (2020). *Interpretation of Heritage and Education for Sustainable Development: The Role of Visitor Centres in UNESCO Designated Sites - Report of the Second Regional Workshop for Europe, 6-8 October 2019, Bamberg, Germany*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373167>.

³ Information on the WH-Interp training courses is retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/node/355459>

The third edition (Ercolano, Italy, 2021)⁴ focused on the relationship between visitor centres and local communities, looking at how community engagement and community-oriented services can help promote local ownership, empower local actors and contribute to a more inclusive, participatory and integrated approach to site management.

The fourth workshop, which took place from 7-9 November 2022 in Buzău, Romania, discussed the third and last identified working area of visitor centres servicing UNESCO designated sites: tourism sustainability and visitor management. The Buzău Land UNESCO Geopark provided a stimulating case study for the workshop, thanks to its rare and spectacular geological phenomena, its connection between cultural and geological heritage, and its experience in visitor management, which includes developing a network of information points, site museums and visitor centres.

⁴ UNESCO. (2021). *Working with Communities: the Role of Visitor Centres in UNESCO Designated Sites - Report of the Third Regional Workshop for Europe, online, 23 September 2021, Ercolano, Italy, 29 September - 2 October 2021*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381201.locale=en>

How is this report structured?

The main body of the report starts with a brief concept note on the theme of sustainable tourism and visitor management in UNESCO designated sites, which includes the results of a pre-workshop survey conducted with participants on positive aspects and challenges in relation to visitor management at the participating UNESCO designated sites.

The following sections are structured around the main 4 sub-topics that were discussed in the workshop. Each section blends over relevant points in the presentations, group discussions, background information on the workshop case study, cases provided by participants during the pre-workshop survey, participants' feedback, as well as additional desk research.

The last section put forward some common threads of visitor management in UNESCO designated sites that may interest and inspire broader audiences.



Other reports produced in the framework of the initiative of exploring the role of visitor centres in the UNESCO designated sites. To consult all, search for "visitor centres" at unesdoc.unesco.org.

CONCEPT NOTE

Sustainable tourism and visitor management in UNESCO designated sites

© Cristian Radu - Participants visiting the Buzău Land UNESCO Geopark



Common duties of UNESCO designated sites

World Heritage properties may support a variety of uses, including tourism, that are ecologically and culturally sustainable and which may contribute to the quality of life of concerned communities. In fact, World Heritage sites are important travel destinations that, if managed properly, have a great potential impact on 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.

Biosphere Reserves, as stated in the [MAB Strategy 2015-2025](#), 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.

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 Sustainable Development Goal Target 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.

Potential role of visitor centres

Visitor centres can play an important role in the management of those UNESCO designated sites promoting sustainability, supporting **visitor management, influencing tourist behaviours, and collecting visitors’ data** along with information on their needs, expectations and site visit experience.

The visitor centres should be seen as active promoters of the site within a broader destination management approach based on multi-stakeholder participation and the needs of local communities. In their basic form, they provide **information to facilitate the visit, experience and appreciation** of a UNESCO designated site. By concentrating on the **quality of the experience** for the visitor, visitor centres can provide rich content that reflects the values of the site, encouraging visitors to respect it, spend more time, and get to know the broader territorial context.

Visitor centres are hubs within a destination that can be utilised to manage the flow of visitors to help alleviate **congestion** problems experienced by many sites. Acting as **gateways** and **central information points**, visitor centres can help managing tourism flows in the sense of regulating access, avoiding congestions, proposing **itineraries and experiences that are more respectful of the site’s values**, or improving the **interaction with local communities** through more responsible behaviours and mutually benefiting exchanges. Staff of visitor centres are key resources for 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, **visitor centres can provide a space to generate income and create jobs**, directly and indirectly, stimulating **both tourism offer** and demand. They may offer paid services such as the sale of tickets, merchandise, local handicrafts, guided tours, food and beverages, parking or other comfort facilities. They also have the capacity to sustain the local market by providing information on restaurants, accommodation, events and festivals, and other experiences offered by local providers.

Positive aspects and challenges of visitor management

A pre-workshop survey of 22 participants from visitor centres servicing different UNESCO designated sites provided an overview of the concerned sites' positive aspects and challenges in visitor management.

On the **positive** side, site managers confirmed the values of heritage sites and protected areas, and of the related tourism activities, in terms of contribution to the local development. In most cases, cultural and/or eco-tourism has boosted the local economy; supported the restoration or rehabilitation of historic structures; stimulated hospitality, social inclusiveness and innovation; and gradually formed an effective mode of operation in terms of knowledge transfer and supply chain management. Many sites have introduced or are planning to introduce visitor monitoring tools and facilities to better inform tourism management.

The identified **challenges** in sustainable tourism management revolve around several aspects, including the potential negative impact of visitors' pressure

on heritage preservation (e.g. micro-climate change, erosion, loss of authenticity), the spatial and/or temporal congestion of the site and the surroundings caused by mass tourism, the loss of cultural significance, the social and economic negative externalities for local communities, and the insufficiency of services and facilities to meet the needs of mass tourists and those of particular groups (e.g. families, children, the advantaged). The lack of financial support often adds another level of difficulty in solving these issues.

Interestingly, quite a few factors were recognised as **strengths in some cases** and as **challenging aspects in others**. Many of these points also appeared to be practical and crucial means to address broader or transversal issues and backstop the integrated site management and sustainable tourism, such as **strategic promotion and awareness-raising towards local sustainability, leveraging digital technology and data for visitor management, enhancing on-site education and interpretation for meaningful visiting experience, advancing cooperation and partnership with local and regional actors**, etc. These subtopics also turned out to be points of interest during the group discussions of the workshop.

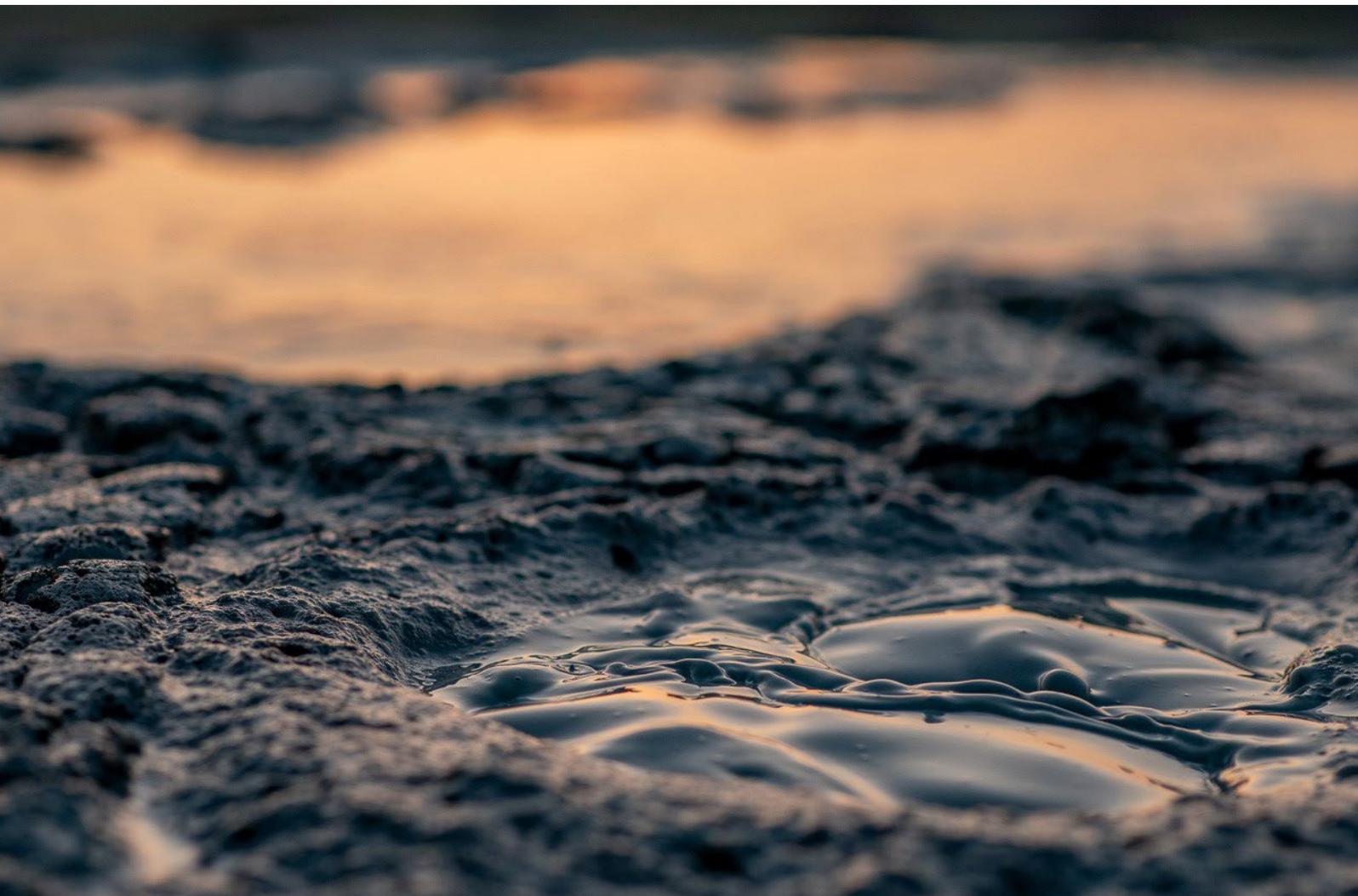
Positive aspects	Both positive and challenging	Challenges
Heritage values	Cooperation and partnerships	Accessibility
Curiosity	Promotion (of the site and local economy)	Budget
Tourism activities	Digitalisation	Defining the carrying capacity
Hospitality	Education	Heritage preservation
Visitor monitoring equipment	Human resources (skilled and dedicated; shortage)	(Micro)climate change
Diverting visitors	Visitor statistics collection	Low flux of tourists to the site museums/visitor centres
Influence	Visiting experience	Seasonality
Exploration	Influencing visitors' behaviour (e.g. etiquette)	Facilities and maintenance (e.g. car park, toilets, and nursing rooms)
Growth	Interpretive services and strategy	One-day excursions/short stay
Knowledge transfer	Management-organisation-planning	Over-tourism
Inclusiveness	Raising awareness	Tailored services for special visitors (e.g. families, children, and people with disabilities)
Innovation	Authenticity	Price performance
Localisation	Security	Harmful emissions
Quality	Tourism sustainability	
Reconstruction	Visibility	
Short supply chains		

Table 1 Positive aspects and challenges in relation to visitor management at the participating sites

HIGHLIGHT 1

**Rethink tourism
promotion strategy in a
new context**

© Cristian Radu - Mud volcano in the Buzău Land UNESCO Geopark



“

*You can shape the tourism
that affects you in the future
– make it what you want and
need it to be.*

”

Excerpt from Peter Debrine presentation

The year 2022 saw a strong rebound in tourism arrivals and spending, resulting in the recovery of pre-pandemic levels in income across many destinations. International tourism recovered 63% of pre-pandemic levels in 2022, with Europe and the Middle East in the lead. Europe remains the world’s largest destination region, with a record of 585 million arrivals in 2022 reaching nearly 80% of pre-pandemic levels (-21% over 2019) and Western Europe came closest to its pre-pandemic level (87%). Looking ahead, international tourism is set to consolidate its recovery in 2023, backed by pent-up demand, particularly from Asia and the Pacific as destinations and markets open up while important risks remain ahead, especially economic and geopolitical.⁵

Against the backdrop of the coming back of mass tourism in Europe, the global tourism recovery is an opportunity not to be missed for UNESCO designated sites in the region, which are usually popular destinations and may serve as laboratories to rethink their tourism strategies and models. Sites are thus called to assess their status-quos, potentials and restrictions to outline a shared vision of their tourism industries; consolidate principles that should be upheld at the conjunction of cultural and natural heritage protection and tourism development; and leverage emerging trends in tourism that can benefit the local economy, society and environment in a sustainable way.

Principles of tourism strategy

In the context of UNESCO designated sites, a destination tourism development strategy should place value-based and people-centred principles at its core. In particular, it should:

- ensure the protection and safeguarding of the internationally recognised values of cultural and natural assets, e.g. the Outstanding Universal Values of World Heritage;
- enable a free, active, and meaningful engagement of all duty-bearers, stakeholders, and right-holders, including national and local authorities, tour operators, property owners, etc.;
- empower local communities to take part in and take responsibility for the sustainable management of local tourism;
- encourage visitors to develop an appreciation of the cultural and natural heritage, experience local culture, and adopt responsible behaviours.

⁵ UNWTO. (2023). *UNWTO World Tourism Barometer and Statistical Annex, January 2023*. Retrieved from <https://www.e-unwto.org/loi/wtobarometereng>

Tourism trends observed in destinations

In the wake of COVID-19, the way people live, work and travel has changed. Some of these changes may be short-lived and some may linger in the long term. Observations of workshop participants who service UNESCO designated sites and associated visitor centres echoed various studies⁶ in this regard. The **accelerated trends and emerging ones** include:

- **being experience-driven.** As travellers get less interested in cookie-cutter vacations focusing on attractions, they begin looking for an authentic experience to explore the uniqueness of their destination. Travellers have been increasingly attending local art and culture events, visiting museums and other cultural institutions, tasting the local gastronomy, and co-creating experiences with locals through engaging in everyday activities;
- **increased interest in nature and outdoor activities.** Natural sites saw increased visitation during and after the pandemic. People showed more interest in exploring nature and the countryside and practising relevant activities, including hiking, biking, and kayaking;
- **rediscovery of the locality.** Sites and museums have attracted more domestic tourists and visits from inhabitants in the surroundings. As international travel returns, domestic travel may slow proportionally but the trend of rediscovering destinations within our own countries' borders or the areas we call home is likely to linger in the long-term. Besides, tourists are inclined to increasingly seek value for money and travel close to home in response to the challenging economic environment;

⁶ World Travel & Tourism Council. (2021). *Trending In Travel - Emerging consumer trends in Travel & Tourism in 2021 and beyond*, retrieved from https://wtcc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2021/Trending_In_Travel-Emerging_Consumer_Trends-231121.pdf; OECD *Tourism Trends and Policies 2022*, retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/tourism/oecd-tourism-trends-and-policies-20767773.htm>; REGIONDO (2022). *12 Tourism Trends That Will Shape the Travel Industry in 2022 and Beyond*, retrieved from <https://pro.regiondo.com/blog/tourism-trends-2018-2/>; REVFINE (2022). *Tourism Trends: The Latest Opportunities for the Tourism Industry*, retrieved from <https://www.revfine.com/tourism-trends/#artificial-intelligence>.

- **longer stay.** Holidaymakers have looked for new ways to have meaningful travel experiences by working around COVID-19 restrictions, including taking longer trips. Some people also extended their business travel to leisure activities. The trend towards extended stays is expected to remain longer as travellers attempt to make the most of their trips (though, at the opposite end of this polarising phenomenon, an increase in one-day or even shorter stays is also discernible in many destinations);
- **planning ahead.** Travellers are increasingly doing research about the destination and the related potential experiences in advance, and booking travel, accommodation, and restaurants with a flexible cancellation policy. They are also more costumed to buy tickets to attractions and make reservations for visits online.

Travellers' attitudes towards sustainability

The trends mentioned above could be leveraged to build tourism back in a more sustainable way, combined with a more mindful attitude of many tourists to the environment and local cultural values. If properly addressed and integrated into broader planning programmes, such trends may help increase the contribution of tourism to the destination's economy while at the same time enhancing stewardship of inhabitants and reducing the potential negative externalities of tourism.

A recent study⁷ conducted by Expedia Group confirmed a highly positive attitude of travellers towards sustainable tourism at a global level (Figure 1). The study showed that:

- many people (50-70% of the 11,000 survey respondents) are already trying to make more conscientious choices before, during, and after the visit and are willing to improve their behaviours in the future;

⁷ Expedia Group (2022). *Sustainable Travel - Consumer Attitudes, Values, and Motivations in Making Conscientious Choices*. Retrieved from https://go2.advertising.expedia.com/rs/185-EIA-216/images/April_2022-Sustainable-Travel-Study-PDF-No-URL.pdf.



Figure 1

Sustainable decisions made when people travelling for either leisure or business. Information source: Expedia Group (2022). Sustainable Travel - Consumer Attitudes, Values, and Motivations in Making Conscientious Choices.

- people are willing to make some sacrifices in money, convenience, comfort, and time to be a more responsible traveller when the value of a “greener” choice is convincing;
- people find it overwhelming and confusing to look for sustainable travel information, and thus reliable information sources and understandable communication materials are in need.

Digital trends of destination promotion

Prior to COVID-19, the use of digital platforms and tools in destination promotion was already popular and it has grown even more. A study of UNESCO conducted in 2020 with visitor centres in 42 UNESCO designated sites in Europe showed that the majority of the investigated centres (24 out of 42) relied on digital tools and contents to cope with the operational difficulties encountered during the pandemic and the most used means is social media campaigns.⁸

As a complement to other promotion channels (e.g. official government resources, official websites of the destination, and specialised tourism portals), social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) are particularly favoured by destination managers for their flexibility and agility. Site managers in the workshop used social media platforms to promote special events and activities, maintain visibility of the site, and interact with partners and audience.

It is noteworthy that social media promotion is not

as free of cost as it seems. Success in the operation of social media channels and campaigns usually requires clarity in messages to convey, high-quality content, and adequate engagement with audiences, which all require expertise and human resources. In real cases, the work of running official social media channels is sometimes outsourced to specialists or companies or, more commonly, shared by staff of site managing bodies - compatible with their other duties, according to the experience of workshop participants.

Previous studies also acknowledged the role of word-of-mouth (Wom) as one of the most relied-upon sources of information for destination selection and, in recent years, the effect of electronic word-of-mouth (e-Wom) has increased as a source of information and as a means of sharing opinions (Figures 2, 3). The growing significance of web/app platforms as a source of information may own to the fact that the volume of information online is so large that nearby sources do not have the capacity to process and synthesise the information in all its breadth and at the high rate at which it is generated.⁹ From the perspective of the destinations, site managers also see web/app platforms (e.g. Google Maps, Tripadvisor, Facebook, Twitter) as an important source of information for visitors' feedback.

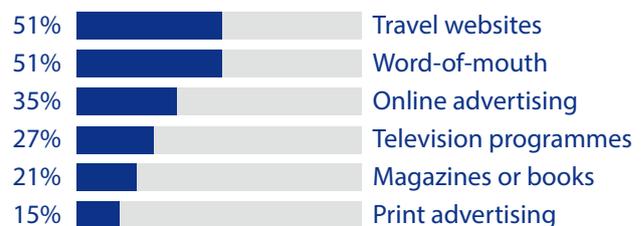


Figure 2

Sources of information for making tourism decisions before pandemic. Source: The Digital Traveller, Criteo, March 2017.

⁸ UNESCO. (2021). *The Impact of COVID-19 on Visitor Centres in UNESCO Designated Sites in Europe: A General Review*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377614.locale=en>.

⁹ *Changes in Consumption Patterns and Tourist Promotion after the COVID-19 Pandemic*, retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.3390/jtaer16050075>

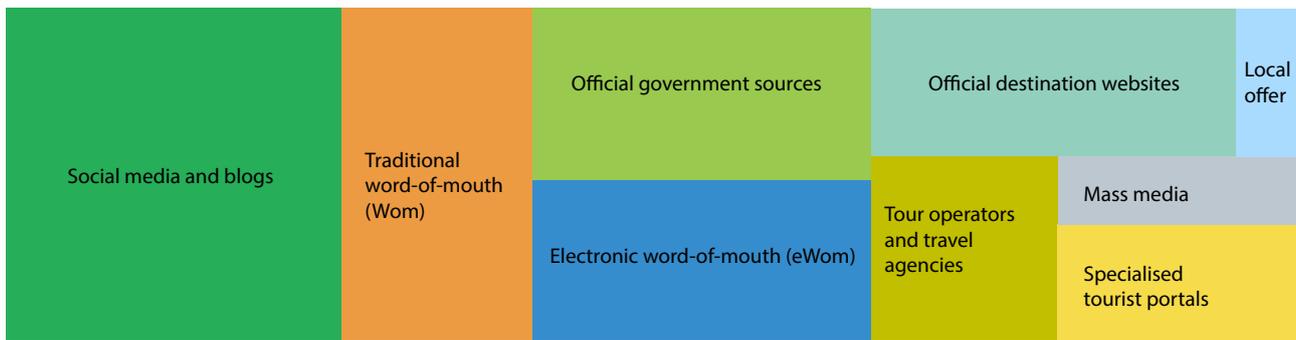


Figure 3

Sources of information for making tourism decisions after the pandemic. Changes in Consumption Patterns and Tourist Promotion after the COVID-19 Pandemic. Based on the figure retrieved from the following source: J. Theor. Appl. Electron. Commer. Res. 2021, 16(5), 1332-1352; <https://doi.org/10.3390/jtaer16050075>

Rethink promotion strategy

Tourism destination promotion can take different priorities depending on the peculiarities of each site and region. It may emphasise rebuilding the image of a region, branding a lesser-known place to expand tourism, or redirecting mass tourism according to the site's carrying capacity. Yet, a successful destination promotion in a UNESCO designated site is expected to not only affect people's decision on where to go but also guide people to plan a visit in a more mindful, responsible, and sustainable way.

The following points can be taken into consideration when promoting a UNESCO designated site as a tourism destination.

- Is there an overall theme for the UNESCO designated site you want to promote? And does it convey the core value(s) of the site?
- What other sites are nearby that fit with the theme?
- What experiences fit with the theme and/or offer an emotional story?
- Are there more sustainable travel, visit, stay, and food choices on the site and its surrounding areas? How can this information be communicated in a concise and compelling way?
- What are the target groups of the promotion campaign? Which promotion channels reach them better?
- How to collect feedback, evaluate the effectiveness and iterate the promotion strategy and action plan?
- How can stakeholders and right-holders, including local communities, be engaged in the planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes?
- Are the site and its surroundings enjoyed by locals as much as by tourists? If not, what are the reasons for it and how can they be most effectively tackled to promote local appreciation and stewardship for the site?

“

I was surprised by the different situations presented by the site managers. When it comes to tourism promotion, I thought everyone aimed to expand tourism as I did, but in many cases, the situation is quite different. I was able to learn from the ones whose reality is similar to mine, as well as from those with opposite circumstances.

”

Feedback out of an anonymous post-workshop survey

HIGHLIGHT 2

**Improve visitor
management with the
support of data**

© Cristian Radu - Landscape of the Buzău Land UNESCO Geopark





The biggest takeaway for me was the insights into the use of visitor data, reviews and the rewards for tourists for sending feedback. I will try to incorporate into our system some rewards for visitors for filling out the questionnaires.



Feedback out of an anonymous post-workshop survey

How to collect and use data to inform visitor flow management was at the core of discussions during the workshop. Participants showed that the majority of sites either started or planned to collect and interpret their tourism data, for instance customer satisfaction, customer profiles, how long they are staying, and where they are going, to inform their decision-making.

How surveys are structured (cross-sectional or longitudinal), and data is interpreted and used depends on how the UNESCO site is structured, whom the site coordinator is employed by, and ultimately, who pays for the data collection and processing. For example, if visitor management at a site is operated by a tourism board, the data are more likely to be fed into national tourism statistics; if the lead organisation is a museum, a natural park, or a different agency focusing on archaeology and culture, the data relate more to interpretation and improving how artefacts and places are presented/represented.

Site managers gave varied responses on how they use and collect data to manage visitor flows, improve their visitor experience and services in the visitor centres and across the sites. They also shared the challenges that they are facing in this process.

How are data used by sites

Site managers are using data, including unstructured information, collected through online and in-person surveys, monitoring systems, and observations to:

- **understand and optimise the visitor flows in the site.** This helps to determine why people are staying in some parts of the sites and not

others, with a view to influencing, redirecting or optimising flows (where visitors go, for how long, to do what);

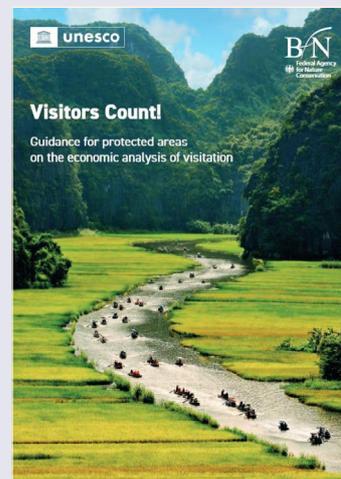
- **develop routes and recommendations based on common interests.** Sites ask visitors to outline the heritage attractions that they had enjoyed visiting across the site in order to package them together for future visitors with shared interests;
- **improve site interpretation.** For example, advertising and creating resources in different languages to suit different audiences. This is also important for creating long-term links with tourists from different countries (creating resources from tourists from different countries that have helped shape and develop these places to make it more personal and meaningful for them). In one of the participating sites, the managing authority found that visitors spend around 4 seconds reading a site's brochures and panels, which would normally take around 4-5 minutes, and eventually decided to redesign its panels to get across its messaging in a shorter time;
- **plan and prioritise renovation works.** With tight human and financial resources, site managers have to carefully plan the site renovation and restoration works. These decisions need to balance conservation needs with the necessity to ensure a satisfying site experience (as in planning essential work and repairs when a lower numbers of visitors is expected);

- **understand their visitor profile and meet the needs of certain groups of visitors.** With data disaggregated by different nationalities, people with young families, disabilities, the elderly, communities and diaspora groups, sites and visitor centres are able to make tailored services for different groups and make their space more inclusive, meaningful and accessible;
- **understand the impact of visitors on local communities.** By understanding where in a site there is a large number of tourists and where this is having a negative impact on local communities (e.g. when large numbers of tourists visit small villages), site managers could work more productively with local communities to mitigate the effects;
- **promote data exchange for greater knowledge and integration.** Exchange data with local universities and/or other relevant stakeholders, such as territorial development agencies, can support synergies for better analysis/research and for a more integrated planning at destination level. This applies to developing more sustainable tourism promotion strategies and policies across different sectors, including with regard to basic public services such as transport infrastructure and health;
- **support local businesses' entry into the local tourism sector.** Data may help local communities to improve their tourism offer, and also allow young people in the local community to create businesses and to access the tourism market more effectively;
- **understand and cater to visitors' consumer habits.** In the experience of a participant, when found that visitors were not purchasing books about the site in the visitor centre, but were rather looking online after their visit, the managing authority prioritised the creation of online digital resources, which were disseminated through post-site newsletter/information;
- **promote destinations.** Many sites are using survey data to better target audiences/potential tourists across social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram), including through paid advertising. One participant mentioned the use of survey data to understand through which borders/places people are entering and visiting the site. This information was used to shape better the visibility of different tourist attractions and the sites on road/train/bus infrastructure. The data was also shared with train/bus companies to improve their services from a tourism and commercial perspective.

Guidelines for measuring the economic value of tourism in heritage sites and protected areas

The guidelines "Visitors Count!" published by UNESCO and the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) put forward a standard methodology to help national stakeholders, site managers and researchers count visitation to heritage sites and protected areas and measure the economic impacts of tourism. Guidance is outlined on how to do visitor counting and surveys effectively and consistently, how to best report and communicate findings, and how to use findings to adapt tourism management strategies sustainably. It demonstrates how the positive impact of protected areas can lead to greater buy-in and ownership of conservation practices, less poaching and land encroachment, and help offset human-wildlife conflict where it occurs.

Guidelines available at <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2323/>



Challenges in using data to support visitor management

- **Overtourism and seasonality:** There are issues around getting reliable data year-round. For example, data concentrated on a large number of tourists in the summer, if not properly analysed, can distort and alter the results and also their interpretation. Besides, the transformations generated by the COVID-19 pandemic also made many pre-existing data models no longer trustworthy;
- **GDPR/data confidentiality:** Many sites have issues with anonymising data and complying with laws. This is another hidden cost to be considered when planning for data collection and analysis;
- **Polling full range of visitors and audiences:** For example, audiences may prefer different forms of media when collecting data (e.g. the elderly are less likely to use online questionnaires);
- **No centralised way of managing data:** Many different tourist agencies have different collection methods, which often are not centralised. How to address this issue is critical for a harmonised approach;
- **Lack of funding:** The collection, harmonisation, interpretation, and storage of the data are all crucial but expensive activities that require to carefully understand and plan for the related costs.

Challenges in data collection through questionnaires - Kutná Hora (Czechia)

In order to monitor tourist attendance and improve visitor management, the site managing authority annually prepares questionnaires distributed in Kutná Hora's information centres. Questionnaires are collected continuously throughout the year and evaluated at the beginning of the new year. In recent years, the questionnaires were supplemented with a free-response question "What did you enjoy in Kutná Hora? What did you not like about Kutná Hora?". Although the answers are bringing valuable information, the amount of collected or fully filled-in questionnaires is not always satisfying.

Visitor management tool for predicting the number of tourists - The Old City of Dubrovnik (Croatia)

Mass tourism in Dubrovnik is characterised by high spatial and temporal concentration that overburdens the most recognisable landmarks in peak periods, with risks for the population and the Outstanding Universal Value of the site. While the economy in Dubrovnik is highly dependent on tourism, this requires the continuous monitoring of positive and negative impacts of tourism on heritage and the community's life. To this end, a visitor management tool that utilises sensor technology has been applied for understanding and to some extent predicting the number of visitors. Yet, the collection and utilisation of data for tourism management, such as defining the carrying capacity, is still a challenge.



Dubrovnik's visitor management tool. Available at <https://dubrovnik-visitors.hr/>
See more details of both cases in Annex 3.

HIGHLIGHT 3

Create a meaningful site experience and influence visitors' behaviours towards sustainability

© Zhi Ye - GeoGate, the main visitor centre of the UNESCO Buzău Land Geopark



Site visit and group work: experience at the Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark

The Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark serviced as a case study for the workshop. Participants visited GeoGate, the main visitor centre of the Geopark, and the nearby mud volcanos, the most beloved tourist attractions in the Geopark. After the visit, participants shared their impressions of the attractions, the visitor centre and the relevant facilities. They also reflected on how the Geopark could potentially improve the overall visiting experience in the future.

Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark and its main visitor centre – GeoGate

Buzău Land

Buzău Land is territory aspiring to sustainable development, located in the Carpathian's Bend Area, in Romania, which has been **designated as a UNESCO Global Geopark in April 2022**. The territory marks the transition between hills and mountains. It is a rural territory covering approximately 1,036 km², which overlaps with the administrative boundaries of 18 communes and is part of the Buzău County, one of the administrative subdivisions of Romania.

About 45,000 people live here, the earliest signs of habitation dating back to the Bronze Age. Buzău Land is a place where strategies and tools for sustainability are developed, experimented and improved, with a view to **developing a sustainable tourism in line with the Geopark principles**. Its underlying objective is to improve the social, cultural, educational, civic and economic life of local communities, by enhancing its natural, cultural and human values in an inclusive and sustainable way.

Partnership

The Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark is the result of a **partnership** between the **Buzău Land NGO**, the **Buzău County Council** and the **University of Bucharest**.

Tourism strategy

One of the main strategies implemented by the partners is to build and promote Buzău Land as an **alternative visiting destination**, based on exploration and discovery, which leads to a sustainable and equitable tourism that brings benefits to visitors, locals and to the natural and cultural environments. The harmonious blend of rural and wild landscapes is one of the main resources of this area. Hence, the flux of tourists is actively managed in order to reduce the negative impact on the environment, and new visiting infrastructure is planned based on the very values that make this place attractive: **nature, culture, peacefulness and wilderness**. Buzău Land is a rural destination that attracts, hosts and needs travellers. However, Buzău Land is **not a touristic resort**. This

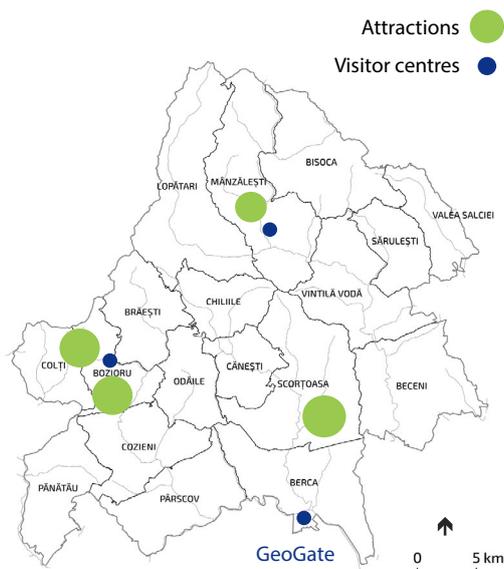


Table 2 *New visitor centres and the nearby attractions in the Buzău Land. Source: the presentation by Răzvan-Gabriel Popa*

means that tourism development is intended as a means for improving life conditions of the local communities and for contributing to the preservation of the natural and cultural values of the area.

Heritage resources

The natural and cultural key features of the Buzău Land are tied to plate convergence.

- **Geodiversity:** The active tectonic regime has enriched the area's geodiversity and generated many spectacular phenomena. From a touristic point of view, some of the most important geoheritage sites that attract most visitors include the mud volcanoes, the eternal flames, the amber hills, and the sandstone concretions;
- **Biodiversity:** The fragmented landscape and diversity of landforms have allowed the development of at least 77 different habitats at the intersection of 3 bioregions;
- **Cultural diversity:** The Carpathian Bend Area has provided a natural border and a transit zone throughout history, with many populations leaving their mark. Buzău Land is rich in both tangible heritage (e.g. old churches, monasteries, old cottages and mansions, ancient and medieval fortifications, ancient rock-hewn dwellings, and countless Bronze Age sites) and intangible cultural heritage (e.g. sheepherding practices, various crafts, stories and legends, and a rich variety of customs and local beliefs).

Another key feature of Buzău Land is the clear **connection between cultural and geological heritage**. Each valley has its own **geological peculiarity** (e.g. amber, mud volcanoes, and salt), and these have shaped **distinct tangible and intangible cultural features**. In times long gone, when people had no explanation for the geological phenomena occurring here, they crafted stories to explain these occurrences. For example, mud volcanoes erupt the blood of a wounded dragon hiding underground, while mud boilers are traps laid by ogres to catch cattle. As the example shows, Buzău Land is a place where the human imaginary has been closely tied to the geological environment.

Visitor centres connect Earth and people

Currently, there are **7 visitor centres/museums** in Buzău Land (with other facilities in the pipeline). Two are managed by the County Museum, 3 are built by the Geopark and managed by the local communities, 2 are opened by other partners and managed privately. Works are in progress to establish 3 more visiting points, established by the Geopark together with the communities, which will increase the total number to 10 by the end of 2023. Among the 3 visitor centres that are currently in different stages of progress (i.e. GeoGate, EduSENSE and 25 MILLION), **GeoGate** is planned to be the **main visitor centre** of the Geopark.

An important **objective** of the establishment of new visitor centres, in addition to **increasing the attractiveness** of the area, is to **involve the local community**. In this regard, the Geopark has a 3-point strategy called the "Triple-E" - Engage, Empower and Enable:

- **Engage:** The team approaches the community with a plan (e.g. transform an abandoned building in a visitor centre, to tell the story of the sandstone concretions). Members of the community are convinced to participate in the work, and the local administration to offer a building for this purpose;
- **Empower:** The work is done together with the local community, from painting walls to changing the flooring, to discussing interpretation and concept, to preparing the stands, creating the collection and exhibition, preparing the opening day ceremony. It is a great process to generate ideas, to attract other volunteers and to engage them with good practice principles;
- **Enable:** The results are celebrated during the opening day of the visitor centre, inviting people from other communities and from outside the Geopark to join. This is the moment when the effort of the community is rewarded, and they can see the first impact of, and reactions to their work.

More information is available at: <https://buzauland.org/about-buzau-land/>

Intended as the main entry point of the Geopark, the visitor centre GeoGate gave participants an initial impression of the natural and cultural heritage of the entire area. The heritage interpretation is effectively supported by **multiple information and communication means**, including traditional communication (e.g. information panel, specimen, scenery) and **digital media** (e.g. augmented and virtual reality).

On the site, **creative solutions in guiding visitors' behaviour** are especially appreciated by participants. The crafted explanatory writing found in the information and communication materials on site conveys information in a concise and interesting way through **connecting local natural and cultural values**. **Panels on safety precautions** are installed next to a site of mud volcano to remind visitors of the potential dangers of the natural phenomena and instruct on visitors' behaviours. Unlike the plain and blunt words commonly found on such signs, these panels were designed as comics, with humorous language communicating the warning messages through the mouth of "dragons living in volcano" in local legends.

The first impression after the visit is that the available commutation and information materials and relevant facilities are of good quality, endeavouring to promote local heritage while catering to visitors' curiosity and needs. Understandably, as some materials and services are still in the process of development, the interpretation facilities appeared not yet sufficient or easily accessible.



The workshop participants proposed the following outlook for the future development of on-site experience, in the aspects of heritage presentation and interpretation, accessibility and connectivity of the sites, and engagement of communities:

Presentation and interpretation

- **providing thematic guided tours** across the site that appeal to different audiences and are tailored for different trails;
- **adapting interpretation services and facilities for specific groups**, e.g. children, people with disabilities;
- **improving the visual identification of the site for better branding**. For example, the design of road/trail signs can use the theme colour of the Buzău Land logo.

Accessibility and connectivity

- **improving the navigating system** in the Geopark, including the installation of more and prominent **road/trail signage** leading up to the attractions or across key parts of the site;
- **creating more spaces for rest** aside the viewpoints and between attractions;
- **creating trails that connect different attractions of the Geopark**. The trails can be used for outdoor activities such as cycling, walking, and hiking;
- **enhancing digital connection of different attractions of the Geopark**. A mobile app with interactive maps, combined with a network of QR codes, could show the locations of the roads, trails, visitor centres, hiking tours, bike rental points, and toilets in the geopark;
- **using combined tickets and coupons to promote less visited points**. A multi-functional pass may encourage visitors to stop, stay and spend more across the Geopark;
- **improving accessibility across the site**, such as the installation of facilities for people with disabilities;
- **promoting local products both online and offline**. Participants suggested to increase

the offer of locally made products (e.g. typical food, arts and crafts), with additional outlets across the site, taking examples from what the GeoGate is already doing. A market for local products could also be created during the peak seasons;

- **offering choices on local businesses.** An accreditation process for guest houses, restaurants, and craft workshops can be established to help with their promotion, possibly conditioned on the respect of shared sustainability principles.



Engagement with local communities

- The further **promotion of community engagement** seems crucial to the development of the site, including by training and **empowering community members** as storytellers, stewards and “ambassadors” of the site for both tourists and young generations;

- A **dedicated programme and calendar of events** could be enhanced to attract more local visitors and provide local communities with a richer cultural and educational offer. This may include the design of **study trips and workshops for local communities** to make them more aware of their heritage and committed to its protection and promotion;
- Community engagement activities would benefit from an in-depth **stakeholder mapping and analysis**, to identify key actors (e.g. civil society organisations, schools, businesses, and community leaders) and get a better understanding of their needs, expectations, potential roles and contribution.



“

Tourism offers many opportunities for the sustainable development of the site and local communities. It is vital to offer visitors a deeper experience through heritage interpretation, to educate them about the importance of heritage, and to monitor the impact of tourism on the destination and the local communities.

”

Feedback out of an anonymous post-workshop survey

Group work: expected takeaways of visitors

In group discussions of the workshop, participants shared lessons learnt from their own professional experience, reflecting on the takeaway they expect from visitors to their sites – in terms of both mentality and behaviour.

Site managers envision the visitors having multiple gains from their site experience, varying from more in-depth knowledge and appreciation of local heritage values, to respect for local communities and traditions, to increased awareness of the universal values underpinning our shared heritage. Site managers also hope visitors can extend their positive learnings and behaviour changes to their own contexts.

What intangible things are the visitors taking with them?

"We want people to not only focus on dinosaurs as the T-Rex, but to think of a more complex world."

"How they connect with other places, understanding the broader cultural processes that are bigger than just the site."

"Inspire feelings and emotions through the site experience."

"We want visitors to take with them the feeling of community and interdependence."

"Get the spirit of the place."

"Stimulate appreciation of the site and a more general respect for heritage."

"Heritage can be fun!"

"Learning some local words/culture!"

"Be more aware of the universal values we all share."

What do you expect the visitors to change in their behaviour, during and after the site experience?

"People's actions have consequences. We want people to understand that places that they are now treasuring will be gone in thirty years."

"No graffiti – People should not deliberately alter the site."

"Less littering!"

"People learn to respect their cultural heritage."

"Be more open-minded!"

"To treat the community with more respect."

"We want people to be more curious."

"The visitors learn to walk, use to be more active – better for their health and the environment."

"Connect the site experience with broader values of resilience, respect, and sustainability."

"Appreciate all the things they have!"

HIGHLIGHT 4

Build partnerships with multiple actors and enhance connectivity in the territory

© Zhi Ye - Folk dance performance during the workshop in Buzău





We need to work more and create networks of UNESCO sites and people involved with site management and thus find a common voice for more efficient communication with visitors, authorities and media.



Feedback out of an anonymous post-workshop survey

As highlighted in the previous section, connectivity in a destination is crucial to its tourism development and can significantly affect tourists' visiting experiences and behaviours. Both physical connections (e.g. roads, trails, and signage systems) and digital networks (e.g. integrated platforms and apps) are needed to bridge a territory's cultural and natural resources, increase the competitiveness of a tourism destination, and bring out the agglomeration effect.

UNESCO designated sites usually have a core managing body consisting of key stakeholders, though their functions, composition and dynamics may vary greatly depending on the local contexts. In the case of Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark, the management is based on a partnership between the Buzău Land NGO (a professional, non-governmental entity), the Buzău County Council (the highest regional administrative authority) and the University of Bucharest (one of the oldest and most prestigious higher-education institutions in Romania). This balanced and comprehensive partnership qualifies the managing team as a capable agent with professional knowledge and executive capacity to lead various projects concerning the territory's conservation, management, and development.

The site management team should also bring a range of local and external stakeholders on board to manage, participate and benefit from the area's values and its UNESCO designation. From the perspective of tourism management, vital stakeholders include local communities and civil society organisations, local tourism establishments and enterprises, schools and universities, local and national authorities in the relevant field.

Partnerships with **local communities and civil society organisations** help mobilise local knowledge and

resources for the conservation and management of the site. Local volunteers prove to be a fundamental resource for many visitor centres in various activities, including those related to tourism management. Volunteering also provides opportunities for meaningful interaction between visitors and local communities, which is key to the social dimension of sustainable tourism.

Partnerships with **private sectors** can increase the site's contribution to the local economy, provided that the concerned activities, whether commercial or non-commercial, are compatible with the sites' values and sustainable uses. Good practices are available on the accreditation of **local businesses** (e.g. restaurants, accommodation establishments, and shops) to brand sustainable and quality products and services of the territory. If managed well, the partnership with local businesses can help build a more regulated market, improve the image of the region's industries, and bring growth in the local economy and employment, while also generating additional resources for the protection of the site.

Partnerships with the **education sector** are crucial to tapping the potentialities of a site with regard to heritage interpretation and education for sustainable development, especially through direct cooperation with the on-site visitor centre. On the one hand, **schools, universities, and other educational actors** may contribute to developing heritage interpretation products and services; on the other hand, students are one of the main audiences of the interpretive and educational activities of the site and visitor centre.

Partnerships with other **local and national authorities** across different policy sectors, in particular those operating in the field of heritage, environment, tourism and economic development, agriculture, are conducive

to better aligning the activities of the site and centre with local/national needs and expectations and to improve the integration of the overall site management with broader planning programmes. It may also increase the financial capability of the site.

Partnerships may include, whenever applicable, the reinforcement of coordination with **other UNESCO designated sites** in the same territory. This is especially relevant with regard to multi-designated areas or serial designated properties with more than one site in the same area. In the case of transboundary sites, international cooperation is necessary to ensure integrated management and consistent communication, and it can help mobilise resources (e.g. access to EU funds). Building networks among different UNESCO designated sites, as well as with other relevant institutions in the territory, can increase the overall attractiveness of the area while also help to develop more balanced and sustainable tourism flows, connecting overcrowded with less visited areas or reducing the negative effects of seasonality.

Finally, cooperation with actors at the **international** level has a great potential for sites to benefit from the exchange of knowledge and experiences, twinning technical assistance, joint projects and resource mobilisation, etc.

Drawing on local volunteers' support to change visitors' behaviour – Hațeg, Romania

Shaping visitors' behaviour to enhance sustainability was very difficult during the Daffodils Festival, when many visitors and locals celebrated by picking every flower in the protected site. For 3 years, the managing authority deployed different tactics with no real impact. In 2015, the Geopark started involving the youth volunteers in awareness actions. Suddenly, the impact was relevant, and the flowers were left in the nature reserve after the event. Seeing young volunteers out for many hours passionately sending a message in a personal, direct manner shaped the behaviour of the visitors and locals. This was a model for later projects and activities in nature and geo-heritage protection.

See more details in Annex 3.

Networking domestic UNESCO designated sites and promoting local sustainable businesses - The Scotland's UNESCO Trail, UK

Scotland's UNESCO Trail is a project that established the digital network of the 13 place-based UNESCO designations across Scotland. The project built a unique partnership between the Scottish Government, United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO, VisitScotland, and Scotland's site designation representatives. It is the first national trail that brings together Scotland's full range of UNESCO place-based designations (World Heritage Sites, Global Geoparks, Biosphere Reserves and Creative Cities) while promoting responsible tourism.

Through the **digital aggregation of tourism resources** in the territory and **promotion of local sustainable stakeholders and businesses**, Scotland's UNESCO Trail not only increases the tourism value of the sites to visitors but also adds the value of visitors to the sites. In particular, it encourages the geographical spread of tourism, aids in the recovery of the tourism sector by prioritising responsible tourism and green recovery and allows Scotland to tell its own story in a new innovative, exciting, and responsible way.

To accompany the Trail, VisitScotland published an **industry toolkit** for all types of tourism businesses, including accommodation providers, visitor attractions, activities or experiences, places to eat and drink, transport providers, and tour operators. The toolkit provides information on sustainable tourism itineraries, digital assets for business promotion, and technical advice for promoting responsible tourism businesses and their communities.

The project also works with **private sector partners** at the national, regional, and global levels (e.g. ScotRail, Enterprise Rent-A-Car, Skyscanner, and Expedia) to ensure the availability of **sustainable travel options** for visitors.

Explore the project at: <https://www.visitscotland.com/things-to-do/unesco-trail>

CONCLUSIONS

UNESCO designated sites - such as World Heritage properties, Biosphere Reserves and UNESCO Global Geoparks - attract a variety of visitors and have the potential to support different types of ecologically and socially sustainable uses, including tourism, that have a great potential impact on local development. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many destinations in Europe have seen a strong rebound in tourism arrivals and spending, resulting in the recovery approaching its pre-COVID-19 level, while important economic, social, and environmental challenges and risks remain ahead.

In this context, UNESCO designated sites need to rethink their **tourism strategies and models** as a destination, and enhance their capacities to manage visitor flows, influence visitor behaviour, and develop visiting experiences that are meaningful and beneficial to tourists and local communities alike. Adequate **collaboration among public, private and civil society actors** is also necessary for the sustainability of the overall site management, both financially and operationally, as well as the collection and analysis of data on visitors' profiles, numbers and feedback.

Visitor centres in UNESCO designated sites have a unique role to play in this sense, thanks to their nature as an interface between designated territories, visitors, communities, the site managing system and other partners.

Besides providing specialised services to increase the appreciation and the sustainable access to local cultural and natural values, visitor centres can stimulate the participation of multiple local actors to the formulation and iteration of of a consistent **communication and**

promotion strategy for the destination, which is expected to:

- reflect a shared vision of all duty-bearers, stakeholders, and right-holders;
- consolidate basic principles to be upheld at the conjunction of tourism with cultural and natural heritage protection;
- leverage emerging trends in tourism that can benefit the local economy, society and environment in a sustainable way;
- identify channels for destination promotion, which appeal to the target groups and fit the defined tourism models;
- improve, diversify and incentivise sustainable options for tourists.

Visitor centres are key collectors and users of **visitor data** to improve the **management of visitor flows**. More accurate information can help:

- define the carrying capacity and optimise visitor flows on the site;
- understand visitor profiles and meet the needs of certain groups;
- plan activities at the site;
- improve facilities, services and products (e.g. heritage interpretation and visit itineraries) based on reliable information on common interests and the preferences of specific target audiences.

When partnering with other actors in relevant fields, such data can also transversally enhance other partners' work and businesses (e.g. the academies, local industries, and local public authorities). Yet, it is important to be aware of the challenges, restrictions, and costs of collecting, processing, and storing personal data in compliance with relevant regulations on privacy and data security.

Visitor centres can be crucial to **create a meaningful site experience** - be it physical or digital – by means of:

- presenting natural and cultural resources of the territory and showcase the comparative attractiveness of a destination;
- combining various interpretative means and tools to help visitors understand the scientific, social, aesthetic, historical, and economic values of local heritage;
- guide visitors to explore the site and its surroundings in a diversified, responsible and sustainable way;
- engage communities in protecting, exploring and communicating their local heritage.

It is expected that visitors have multiple gains from the visiting experience, from more knowledge and appreciation of local cultural and natural values, to a greater awareness of the universal values connected to our shared heritage. Ideally, visitors can extend the positive learnings and **behaviour changes** to their own contexts.

Visitor centres can promote and greatly benefit from increased **cooperation among different partners**, with a view to stronger synergies for sustainable destination development. Specifically, visitor centres may partner with:

- local communities and civil society organisations, who can help mobilise local knowledge and resources for the conservation and management of the site, including through volunteering programmes;
- private sectors, including local businesses (e.g. restaurants, accommodation establishments, and shops), to promote quality products

and services of the territory which meet the standards of sustainability;

- the education sector, such as schools, and universities, to improve the quality and impact of its heritage interpretation and contribute to education for sustainable development;
- other local and national authorities to seek greater integration of the site management into broader planning programmes, which may also increase the financial capability of the site;
- other UNESCO designated sites and cultural institutions in the same territory to bring out the agglomeration effect and create conditions for integrated tourism management at the territory level;
- actors at the regional and international levels to benefit from joint promotion, knowledge sharing, technical assistance, etc.

THE WAY FORWARD

Participating site managers expected UNESCO to strengthen the network of visitor centres in UNESCO designated sites built by this series of workshops. The proposed activities for the network varied from peer sharing events, to exchanging programmes, to transboundary collaboration. In terms of the peer sharing and capability building opportunities, participants showed particular interest in advancing their knowledge in how to enhance accessibility for all, countering both physical and communication barriers; how to meet the needs of different target groups, including children and young people, the elderly, and people with disabilities; and how to use data and digital tools for visitor management and heritage interpretation.

ANNEXS

- 1 | Programme
- 2 | List of participants
- 3 | Info sheets of participating designated sites

Annex 1 PROGRAMME

Day 1

November 8, 2022

- 09:00 – **Photo Exhibition:** Romanian geoparks
- 09:30 **Poster Exhibition:** participating UNESCO designated sites
- 10:00 – **Welcoming Speeches**
- 10:45 **Petre Emanoil Neagu**, President, Buzău County Council, Romania
- Janina Sitaru**, Secretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Romania
- Alexandru Stoica**, Secretary of State, Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, Romania
- Răzvan Popescu**, Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Investment and European Projects, Romania
- H.E. Simona Mirela Miculescu**, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Delegate of Romania to UNESCO (online)
- Valeria Oana Zaharia**, Manager, Romanian National Institute for Heritage
- George Sava**, General Director Deputy, State Property Agency
- Madlen Șerban**, General Secretary, National Commission of Romania for UNESCO
- Jonathan Baker**, Head of Science unit, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe
- 10:45 – **Setting the Stage**
- 11:15 **Alexandru Andrașanu**, President of the Romanian Geoparks Forum, Director of Hațeg Country UNESCO Global Geopark
- Răzvan-Gabriel Popa**, General Manager of Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark
- Matteo Rosati**, Programme Specialist for Culture and Intersectoral Activities, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe
- 11:30 – **Keynote Presentations**
- 14:30 **Nickolas Zouros**, President of the Global Geoparks Network – *The place of geoparks amongst UNESCO designations and its reflection in the visitor centres* (online)
- Matthew Rabagliati**, Head of Policy, Research and Communication, United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO – *Addressing over tourism and promoting sustainable travel in UNESCO designated sites: highlights from the partnership between the United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO and Visit Scotland*
- Marie Louise Frey**, Managing Director of the Messel Pit UNESCO World Heritage Site – *Visitor centre's role and experiences in activities for visitor management and tourism sustainability at Messel Pit UNESCO World Heritage Site* (online)
- Peter Debrine**, Senior Consultant to UNESCO – *Sustainable heritage-based tourism: key principles and the potential role of visitor centres in UNESCO designated sites* (online)
- 14:30 – **World Café Session**
- 17:30 **Theme 1 Before the visit: the role of visitor centres in creating conditions for a meaningful site experience and promoting UNESCO designated sites.** Moderated by Matteo Rosati
- Theme 2 During the visit: the role of visitor centres in managing visitor flows at UNESCO designates sites.** Moderated by Mihai Dragomir
- Theme 3 After the visit: the role of visitor centres in improving the site experience and influencing visitors' attitudes towards sustainability.** Moderated by Cristian Ciobanu

Day 2

November 9, 2022

- 08.00 – **Field Trip in the Buzău Land UNESCO**
14:00 **Global Geopark**
Visit & Workshop at GeoGate Visitor Centre
Visit to the mud volcanoes
- 14:30 – **Keynote Presentation**
15:00 **Barbara Engels**, Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, Secretariat of the German MAB Commission - *Visitors Count! Guidance for protected areas on the economic analysis of visitation* (online)
- 15:00 – **World Café Session**
17.30 Moderated by Răzvan-Gabriel Popa and Cristian Ciobanu
- Theme 1 Impressions of Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark: the potential role of the site visitor centres before, during and after the visits**
- Theme 2 Feedback about the series of workshop on the Role of Visitor Centres in UNESCO Designated Sites: takeaways and expectations**
- 17.30 – **Closing Session**
18.00 Presentation of group-work outcomes and conclusions

Annex 2 LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Table 1 List of representatives of UNESCO designated sites in the workshop

Participant	Country / Organisation	Category	Designated Site
Elchin Karimov	Azerbaijan	WH	Historic Centre of Sheki with the Khan's Palace
Sabina Yadullayeva	Azerbaijan	WH	The Walled City of Baku with the Shirvanshah's Palace and Maiden Tower
Davor Baković	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Tentative WH	Vjetrenica Cave
Maja Lopin	Bosnia and Herzegovina	WH	Stećci Medieval Tombstone Graveyards
Mina Megalla	Bulgaria	WH	Boyana Church
Mihaela Skurić	Croatia	WH	Old City of Dubrovnik
Konstantina Theofylaktou	Cyprus	UGGp	Troodos UNESCO Global Geopark
Kristyna Šimonová	Czechia	WH	Kutná Hora: Historical Town Centre with the Church of St Barbara and the Cathedral of Our Lady at Sedlec
Marie-Pierre Fernandez	France	WH and UGGp	Pont du Diable / Saint Guilhem le Désert
Diana Katharina Büttner	Germany	WH	Town of Bamberg
Calogero Casserà	Italy	UGGp	Madonie UNESCO Global Geopark
Maria Peroni	Italy	UGGp	Maiella UNESCO Global Geopark
Stefania Siano	Italy	WH	Archaeological Areas of Pompei, Herculaneum and Torre Annunziata
Carolina Taddei	Italy	WH	Historic Centre of San Gimignano
Ivan Malezanov	North Macedonia	WH	Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region
Juliana Strogan	Norway	WH	Rjukan-Notodden Industrial Heritage Site
Marzena Chwast	Poland	WH	Wieliczka and Bochnia Royal Salt Mines
Paula Calado	Portugal	WH	Garrison Border Town of Elvas and its Fortifications
Cristian Radu	Romania	WH	Villages with Fortified Churches in Transylvania
Marko Tucakov	Serbia	BR	Bačko Podunavlje Biosphere Reserve / Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve
Valerija Božič	Slovenia	UGGp	Idrija UNESCO Global Geopark
Davor Vodopija	Slovenia	WH	Heritage of Mercury. Almadén and Idrija

Table 2 List of representatives of the organising partners and other resource persons

Participant	Site Organisation
Cristina Partal	Senior Inspector for Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark, Buzău County Council, Romania
Răzvan-Gabriel Popa	General Manager of Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark, Romania
Alexandru Andrașanu	President of the Romanian Geoparks Forum, Director of Hațeg County UNESCO Global Geopark, Romania
Cristian Ciobanu	Local Coordinator of Hațeg County UNESCO Global Geopark, Romania
Cristina Toma	Secretary of the UNESCO Geoparks National Forum, Coordinator of the Geological Heritage Interpretation Working Group, Romania
Mihai Dragomir	President of Mioritics Association, Romania
Daniel Costache	Manager Buzău County Museum, Romania
Matthew Rabagliati	Head of Policy, Research and Communications at the United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO
Jonathan Baker	Head of Science unit, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe
Matteo Rosati	Programme Specialist for Culture and Intersectoral Activities, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe
Zhi Ye	Assistant Programme Officer for Culture and Intersectoral Activities, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe
Nickolas Zouros	President of the Global Geoparks Network (online)
Marie Louise Frey	Managing director of the Messel Pit UNESCO World Heritage Site, Germany (online)
Peter Debrine	Senior Consultant to UNESCO (online)
Barbara Engels	Secretariat of the German MAB Commission (online)

Annex 3

INFO SHEETS OF PARTICIPATING DESIGNATED SITES

Prior to the workshop, participants provided information on their designated site and their experience in tourism management, which was displayed during a poster session of the workshop to facilitate peer exchange. The information provided by participants is presented in this section.

01 Historic Centre of Sheki with the Khan's Palace (Azerbaijan)	34
02 The Walled City of Baku (Azerbaijan)	35
03 Cave Vjetrenica (WH tentative list, Bosnia and Herzegovina)	36
04 Stećci Medieval Tombstone Graveyards (Bosnia and Herzegovina)	37
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09 Pont du Diable and Gellone's abbey (France)	42
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11 Madonie UNESCO Global Geopark (Italy)	44
12 Maiella UNESCO Global Geopark (Italy)	45
13 Archaeological Park of Herculaneum (Italy)	46
14 Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region (North Macedonia)	47
15 Rjukan-Notodden Industrial Heritage Site (Norway)	48
16 Garrison Border Town of Elvas and its Fortifications (Portugal)	49
17 Hațeg County UNESCO Global Geopark (Romania)	50
18 Bačko Podunavlje Biosphere Reserve (Serbia)	51
19 Heritage of Mercury. Idrija (Slovenia)	52
20 Idrija UNESCO Global Geopark (Slovenia)	53



© S. Mammadov - Main trade street of the historic centre of Sheki



© S. Mammadov / Reserve Management Centre of the State Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan - Khan's Palace



Participant: Elchin Karimov

Visitor Centre: Sheki Tourism Information Centre

Strengths of management at my site:

Skilled staff
Professional service
Coordinated management

Challenges of management at my site:

Digitalisation
Accessibility
Raising awareness

My Designated Site

The historic city of Sheki is located at the foot of the Greater Caucasus Mountains, rebuilt in the 18th century, is characterised by a traditional architectural ensemble of houses with high gabled roofs. Located along important historic trade routes, the city's architecture is influenced by Safavid, Qadjar and Russian building traditions. The Khan Palace and a number of merchant houses reflect the wealth generated by silkworm breeding and the silk trade in the late 18th and 19th centuries.

My Visitor Centre

Sheki Tourism Information Centre operates under the State Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Sheki DMO), while Khan Palace is under the administration of Yukari Bash Reserve. Essentially funded by the state, the Centre provides information and assistance to the tourists coming to Sheki about sightseeing. Reserve Management Centre, which manages the UNESCO designated site in Sheki, is one of the main partners of the Centre, collaborating it in responsible tourism in the heritage area.

Tourism Management at My Site and Centre

The main achievement of the Centre has been to build a local partnership with the key stakeholders for better managing the tourism flow to Sheki in line with the site sensibilities, as well as leveraging data in managing visitors' behaviour and sustainable tourism. The Centre consulted and cooperated with Yukhari Bash Reserve Administration in managing the carrying capacity of Khan's Palace - the main monument of the historic centre of the city where only 20 visitors can enter at one time. During the high tourism season, managing incoming visitors efficiently without harming visitor satisfaction is challenging. Therefore, practical digital tools need to be improved in managing visitors in Sheki. Also, there is an accessibility problem to the Centre, which locates currently within the Fortress. Due to this problem, the Centre's location will be changed according to the Tourism Master Plan of the site. Awareness raising about the Centre's services among tourists is another problem.

Website: whc.unesco.org/en/list/1549



© Icherisheher Reserve Administration - Shirvanshahs' Palace



© Icherisheher Reserve Administration - Arched religious complex

My Designated Site

The Walled City of Baku reveals evidence of Zoroastrian, Sasanian, Arabic, Persian, Shirvani, Ottoman, and Russian presence in cultural continuity. The Inner City (Icherisheher) has preserved a significant portion of its 12th-century defensive walls. The 12th-century Maiden Tower (Giz Galasy) was constructed on top of earlier structures dating back to the 7th and 6th centuries BC, while the 15th-century Shirvanshahs' Palace stands as one of Azerbaijan's architectural gems.

My Visitor Centre

"Icherisheher" Tourist Information Centre is located at the main entrance of the Old City of Baku and is open every day since 2018 March. The core functions of the Centre include selling tours, and tickets for the museums and monuments of the Icherisheher Administration, answering questions of visitors, and delivering maps. Funding sources of the Centre are the state budget and income generated from tour and ticket sales. Key partners are tour agencies, the Ministry of Science and Education, Ministry of Finance, "Gala" State Reserve, State Tourism Agency, and Azerbaijan Guides Association.

ICHERISHEHER

ADMINISTRATION OF STATE
HISTORICAL-ARCHITECTURAL RESERVE



Participant: SabinaYadullayeva

Visitor Centre: "Icherisheher" Tourist Info Centre

Strengths of management at my site:

The existence of mechanisms and infrastructures, e.g. a paid entrance and parking for vehicles; cameras, wayfinding and warning signs; a visitor centre office

Challenges of management at my site:

Insufficient collection and digitalisation of visitor statistics
Seasonality of tourism flow
Low flux of tourists to the house-museum

Tourism Management at My Site and Centre

Having installed cameras in the territory of the walled city helped to observe scammers who drew graffiti on the protected old walls and facades. Nowadays, visitor management in the territory of the old city is controlled by the staff of the museums, tour guides as well as the paid entrance for the car vehicles. Way-finding arrows, warning signs, speed signage and cameras installed within the territory of castle walls are also applied in order to regulate the movement of cars and pedestrians. The Information Centre is open every day to help visitors regarding to ticketing, registering and working hours' issues. Online ticketing, waiting spots/halls, visitor engagement activities in front of the cashier desks are to be applied in the old city of Baku. Attracting more visitors to the less visited museums is the current discussion in the administration. Counting every visitor who entered the walled city from 5-6 different access points is the biggest challenge nowadays to collect statistics.

Website: icherisheher.gov.az



© Željko Curić - Cave Vjetrenica



© Emil Jonanov - Cave Vjetrenica



Participant: Davor Bakovic

Institution: Public Company Vjetrenica d.o.o, Ravno

Strengths of management at my site:

Protected landscape
Attraction site
Science

Challenges of management at my site:

Sustainable tourism management
Microclimate change
Education

My Site

Vjetrenica (“the wind cave”) is one of the biggest cave systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina, protected landscape of the country and in the category of special geological reserves. The cave is well known for its biodiversity with over 230 taxa of living organisms and over 90 cave taxa with different cave habitats. The Biospeleological Museum of Vjetrenica is based on a synthesis realised based on previous research, which includes all elements of Vjetrenica cave.

Vjetrenica is a complex cave system with passage length of 7,323.9 m; as such, it is the second longest cave in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is located within the protected landscape “Vjetrenica-Popovo polje”. Cave Vjetrenica sits in the area of the south Dinaric karst, in a karst hill stretching from the outer edge of the western part of the Popovo polje plains (Eastern Herzegovina) to the Adriatic Sea. It is one of the richest caves in the world in terms of its biological diversity.

Management of My Site

The first form of protection of Vjetrenica took place already in 1952, and the relevant spatial planning documentation so far suggested that this area of Vjetrenica cave with the surroundings of the karst plateau and part of the Popovo polje should be under protection. In 2021, the Municipality of Ravno held a session on 31 August 2021, adopted the Management Plan for the protected landscape “Vjetrenica-Popovo polje” for a period of 10 years.

The Nomination Document for the Inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List was submitted in 2021.

Website: vjetrenica.ba/en

04 | Stećci Medieval Tombstone Graveyards (Bosnia and Herzegovina)



© Ivan Puljić - Stećak necropolis Radimlja



© Andrea Marković - Multimedia hall of the Radimlja Public Institution



Participant: Maja Lopin

Institution: Tourist Information Centre and Public Institution Radimlja

Strengths of management at my site:

**Promotion
Cooperation
Tourism activities**

Challenges of management at my site:

**One-day guests
Additional content
Road**

My Designated Site and My Institution

The Public Institution Radimlja is a tourist organisation of the town of Stolac. It is a city institution that covers the entire touristic part of the city of Stolac. The necropolises of Radimlja and Boljuni and the Old Town of Vidoški are under the management of the Public Institution Radimlja. Although the other sights are not under the management of the institution, the institution still takes care of them and promotes tourist attractions and the city of Stolac in various ways.

The Public Institution Radimlja is a city institution that manages the necropolis of Radimlja and Boljuni (part of the World Heritage property "Stećci Medieval Tombstone Graveyards") and the Old Town of Vidoški. Employees of the Radimlja Public Institution welcome guests to the necropolis and take them on a tour of the necropolis. If the guests are interested, then the employees go out into the field and take them on a tour of the city. The target groups of the Radimlja Public Institution are school trips and excursions, parents with children, domestic and foreign citizens.

Tourism Management at My Institution

The Public Institution Radimlja cooperates with other city institutions. Currently, it has the best cooperation with the Centre for Culture and Sports, and together they entered into the project of organising winter activities in the city of Stolac. The aim of such activities is to improve the tourist offer for all the inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition to winter activities, this cooperation also improved cultural activities in Stolac. These 2 institutions will jointly organise music concerts, children's concerts and puppet shows. The Radimlja Public Institution took over the organisation and promotion of the event. The previous events were successfully organised and there was a large attendance. With all this, greater visibility of the city of Stolac and cultural and tourist attractions was achieved. Stolac has not had events like this for a long time, so one of the challenges was to attract people.

Website: radimlja.ba



© Boyana Church Museum - The exterior of the Boyana Church



© Boyana Church Museum - The interior of the Boyana Church

**Participant:** Mina Megalla**Institution:** The Boyana Church Museum

Strengths of management at my site:

Organisation
Communication
Education

Challenges of management at my site:

Accessibility
Timing
Etiquette

My Designated Site

Located on the outskirts of Sofia, Boyana Church consists of 3 buildings. The eastern church was built in the 10th century, then enlarged at the beginning of the 13th century by Sebastocrator Kaloyan, who also ordered the construction of a second church, whose frescos, painted in 1259, make it one of the most important collections of medieval paintings. The third church, built at the beginning of the 19th century, completes the site as the best example of eastern European medieval art.

My Visitor Centre

Our visitors enjoy the beautiful park and gardens of the museum, with the giant sequoia trees planted by Tsar Ferdinand I of Bulgaria in 1907. In the park, they get to learn the final chapter of the Boyana Church and the story of Queen Eleonore who was buried right next to the Church. Additionally, we have a permanent exhibit of few showcases, with objects and artefacts that were found during excavations conducted in 2018. The artefacts are promoting a better understanding of the site's history.

Tourism Management at My Site and Centre

We welcome visitors from all over the world as well as from our community. I enjoy a lot communicating and keeping them informed of our recent activities. In 2020, the Boyana Church Museum organised a cleaning campaign involving the local community in an effective way. We received positive answer to our call, as many volunteers came to join us in the activity. To show our gratitude, we gave the volunteers special guided-tours around the Boyana Church. However, challenges do exist, and one of the main one is timing, since visitors are allowed to stay only 10 minutes inside of the Church (for limiting stresses for frescos). It is difficult to explain this to our visitors in order to maintain a sustainable flowing of tourists at the site. Therefore, ensuring that visitors adhere to the site's etiquette is a challenging task. To address this issue, we have prominently displayed multiple signs that clearly outline the restrictions and request visitors to comply with these rules.

Website: boyanachurch.org



© Institute for the restoration of Dubrovnik



© Institute for the restoration of Dubrovnik



Participant: Mihaela Skuric

Institution: Institute for the Restoration of Dubrovnik

Strengths of management at my site:

System for visitor number prediction
Installation of security cameras
Memoranda of Understanding with The Cruise Lines International Association

Challenges of management at my site:

Defining carrying capacity
Heritage interpretation
Strategy of visitor centres

My Designated Site

The Old City of Dubrovnik is an example of a well-preserved, planned medieval city, a unique urban area with a historic core surrounded by city walls on the coast and slopes of Mount Srđ, and nearby Lokrum island which is protected as a special reserve of forest vegetation. The city is a symbol of Croatian culture, traditions, and outstanding achievements in the fields of urbanism, architecture, fine arts and literature.

My Visitor Centre

It is proposed to create a network of Dubrovnik World Heritage centres, a capillary system for interpretation, education and strengthening of all involved stakeholders. It would consist of spaces located inside the World Heritage site, but also in other parts of the city. Their function will be threefold - to interpret the World Heritage area, to educate different levels of users, and to serve as new-generation community centres.

Tourism Management at My Site

Mass tourism of the City of Dubrovnik characterised by high spatial and temporal concentration overburdens the most recognisable landmarks in peak periods, putting the entire World Heritage site and its population at risk. In terms of the economy, Dubrovnik is highly dependent on tourism. At the same time, there is a lack of systematic tourism management and the continuous monitoring of positive and negative impacts of tourism on heritage and the community's life. The City of Dubrovnik signed Memoranda of Understanding with the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) to limit the number and schedule of cruise ships, initiated the reduction of vehicles around the core zone, and diversified tourist offers.

Website: dubrovnik-visitors.hr



© Troodos UNESCO Global Geopark - Xyliatos Dam



© Troodos UNESCO Global Geopark - Troodos Geopark Visitor Centre

**Participant:** Constantina Theofylaktou**Visitor Centre:** Troodos Geopark Visitor Centre

Strengths of management at my site:

Experience**Innovation****Influence**

Challenges of management at my site:

Promotion**Collaboration****Accessibility**

My Designated Site

The Troodos Geopark Visitor Centre is located in the old Asbestos mine area. Inside the building, there is a maquette that depicts the geology of the area and various sites of geological importance. There is also an exhibition with rocks and minerals and a room where visitors can watch educational documentaries about Troodos' geological treasures. At our site we give special emphasis to geo-education and we strive to educate visitors through outdoor teaching and interactive lessons.

My Visitor Centre

Our centre aims to educate visitors through interactive programs and exhibitions about the geology and of Cyprus, elevate the Geopark's area through promotion of traditional products and make people appreciate the environment. The management body is the Troodos Development Company. Main partners are the Forest Department & Cyprus Geological Survey Department, which is also the main source of funding together with various EU programmes (Interreg Greece & Cyprus).

Tourism Management at My Site and Centre

The Troodos Geopark Visitor Centre has made enormous progress during the year in building local and regional partnerships to foster the tourism sector in the area. One of the most important initiatives was to introduce Mountain Guiding Sessions. Visitors have the opportunity to have a mountain guiding trip as part of their visit. Another initiative that fosters the tourism sector in the area is the close cooperation with local restaurants and hotels. The Troodos Geopark Visitor Centre promotes local enterprises in the tourist sector and we can clearly see a material pick-up in the tourist flow in the area – restaurants, hotels, cafes and pubs. A shop was created in the Centre, where visitors have the opportunity to buy traditional products – sweets, honey, sausages, local wine and many others. The shop has had enormous success and we firmly believe that this initiative is fundamental in our effort to promote a robust tourism sector.

Website: troodos-geo.org/cgibin/hweb?-A=247&-V=amiantos



© Libor Sváček - The city of Kutná Hora



© Information centre of Kutná Hora



Participant: Kristýna Šimonová

Visitor Centre: Information Centre of Kutná Hora

Strengths of management at my site:

Authenticity
Exploration
Cooperation

Challenges of management at my site:

Prolongation
Communication
Authenticity

My Designated Site

Kutná Hora was inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1995 including the Historical Town Centre with the Church of St Barbara and the Cathedral of Our Lady at Sedlec. Thanks to the silver mine, Kutná Hora used to stand just behind the royal City of Prague some centuries ago, and nowadays it is a favourite and friendly destination for Czech and foreign tourists. Kutná Hora is known for its historical monuments, crooked medieval lanes and romantic lookouts.

My Visitor Centre

The town of Kutná Hora runs 2 information centres located in the main train station and at in downtown. They provide information about Kutná Hora, and recommendations, sell tickets for cultural events held in the city, to create online calendar of culture events and run Kutná Hora's bike rentals. Employees take part in events and tourism exhibitions. In 2022, the information centre in downtown was ranked as the third most popular in central Bohemia.

Tourism Management at My Site and Centre

In order to monitor tourist attendance and to manage better the tourism, our department annually prepares questionnaires distributed in Kutná Hora's information centres. Questionnaires are continuously collected throughout the year and evaluated at the beginning of the new year. My colleague and I evaluated last year's questionnaires and we decided to supplement the questionnaire with a free-response question "What did you enjoy in Kutná Hora? What did you not like about Kutná Hora?". In my opinion, the questionnaires are well composed and the answers bring valuable information, but I see a pitfall in the final number of collected questionnaires. Some of the already small number of questionnaires are not filled in completely or correctly, and thus cannot be included in the evaluation. In 2021, out of a total of 535,612 visitors, only 165 valid questionnaires were submitted. However, even this small number is a form of feedback for us to work with.

Website: kutnahora.cz



© Benoit Piquart – OTI-SGVH - Le pont du Diable (Devil's bridge)



© Leclair Hervé/Sud de France Développement - OTI-SGVH - Maison du Grand Site de France, Pont du Diable Visitor Centre

My Designated Site

The "Pont du Diable" (Devil's Bridge) at the entrance of the gorges, and Gellone Abbey, situated in Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert, were and are 2 essential steps for pilgrims coming from Montpellier on their way to Lodève and Toulouse. Founded in 804 by Guilhem, Gellone Abbey, was rebuilt from the 11th century. Built between 1028 and 1031 by the Abbays of Aniane and Gellone who were in control of both banks of the Hérault river, the "Pont du Diable" is one of the oldest bridges existing in France.

My Visitor Centre

The district community Hérault Valley owns the infrastructure. The Tourism Office manages the structure and the services: the car park, visitor centre, shop and the relationships with the restaurant inside the Maison du Grand Site de France. The Tourism Office is in charge of maintaining the principles of sustainable development: environmental, economic, and ethical.



Participant: Marie-Pierre Fernandez

Institution: The Intercommunal Tourism Office
Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert Vallée de l'Hérault

Strengths of management at my site:

Sustainable tourism
Short supply chains
Hospitality

Challenges of management at my site:

Car park
Security
Heritage preservation

Tourism Management at My Site and Centre

With more than 700,000 visitors per year, Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert and the Gorges de l'Hérault decided to follow the principles of the French label managed by the Ministry for Ecology, Grand Site de France. This label motivates a sustainable tourism method: preservation of the unique landscape and a quality hospitality. We chose the path of management tourism flow on the Pont du Diable's site, the first entry. Regarding the mobility, a car park and seasonal shuttles services between the Pont du Diable and Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert village, both registered on the World Heritage List, allow to regulate the flow. Agents work every day to clean and to assure the security. Moreover, the Tourism Office builds a solid policy on partnerships: craftsmen, wine makers, food producers, restaurants, hotels, leisure activities. The goal is to direct this flow of visitors to all of these local economic actors. Signing a partnership, these economic actors imply themselves in the tourism activity. We are strongly acting to develop professionalism and to create a positive and legal economy for the community. We are still facing problems due to the unfair competition with unauthorised tourist guides.

Website: saintguilhem-valleeherault.fr



© City of Bamberg - Old Town of Bamberg



© Lara Müller - Bamberg World Heritage Visitor Centre



Participant: Diana Katharina Büttner
Visitor Centre: Bamberg World Heritage
 Visitor Centre

Strengths of management at my site:

Knowledge transfer
Raising awareness
Promoting local economic cycles

Challenges of management at my site:

Over-tourism
Flow of visitors
Harmful emissions

My Designated Site

The “thousand-year-old synthesis of the arts” of Bamberg’s old town was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1993 because of its unique urban ensemble. Gothic and bourgeois Baroque define the image of the city, which is medieval at its core.

The awareness of the irreplaceable value of this old town is also very pronounced among the people of Bamberg themselves. People live in and with the treasure of history, and modernity comes to terms with the historic city anew every day.

My Visitor Centre

Located at the heart of the city, Bamberg’s World Heritage Visitor Centre displays Bamberg’s outstanding universal value and serves as an interpretation aid for the World Heritage site. It aims at raising interest in the cultural facets of the City of Bamberg and its historical and geographical parameters. Here, locals and visitors of all ages are addressed, sensitised to the special features of the site and encouraged to explore it independently.

Tourism Management at My Site and Centre

The narrow alleys of Bamberg’s old town are crowded with a very large number of people. This repeatedly leads to a temporal and localised overload of public space. Tourists are not the only cause of this, but they are one of the main ones. The residential population subjectively perceives this selective pollution of the old town as an impairment of their quality of life. In short, to medium terms, this has a negative effect on the locals’ acceptance of tourism.

We are currently working on a programme using sensors in the city to guide the flow of visitors. The focus will be on a central database that combines all points of interest (POI) with real-time information on the current pedestrian frequency. Such a web app not only provides users with an overview of all desired POIs in and around Bamberg, but also simultaneously shows the corresponding routes to avoid crowded areas. We are planning to complete the project in 2027.

Website: welterbe.bamberg.de/en/visitor-centre



© Angelo Merlino - Petralia Sottana, Geosite leap of Sant'Otiero



Left: © Carlo Mazzaresse - Cefalù Tourist Point

Right: © Giovanni Caruso - Pollina Tourist Point

My Designated Site

The territory of the “Madonie Unesco Global Geopark” is located in central-northern Sicily. Its extension is equal to about 400 km² of territory and includes 15 municipalities. Its relief heights are between a few tens of metres above sea level and 1,979 metres. On 2% of the surface of Sicily, more than half of the species of the most evolved flora grow on the Madonie, about 1,800 plants. The path network is spread over about 300 km and is divided into 44 paths.

My Visitor Centre

Madonie Park has a net of visitor centres spread in each municipality. Furthermore, one important Information Point is in the centre of Palermo. The most important activities are supporting visitors by giving information on the Park and the correlated services (i.e. the multiple ways of paths). Besides, we offer assistance to school groups and groups visiting the countries and sell publications, gadgets and so on.



Participant: Calogero Casserà

Visitor Centre: QuiParco Point - Information Point

Strengths of management at my site:

Localisation
Assistance
Fruition

Challenges of management at my site:

Implementation
Formation
Update

Tourism Management at My Site and Centre

Among the 44 paths in the Park, certain paths exhibit hydrogeological vulnerabilities due to their formation, while the environments of others must not be disturbed during specific periods (e.g. the path of L'Aquila during the nesting period of eagle). Therefore, the Park has tried to manage the accessibility of these paths according to their particularities: for hydrogeological risks, alarming signs in 3 languages are used to notify visitors of the prohibition of access in case of a weather alert, or after seismic events, and the access to the path of the eagle (L'Aquila) is authorised in the non-nesting period and overflight with the drone is forbidden. The results of these interventions are generally positive. For example, visitors are more conscious to avoid the paths affected by bad weather and seismic events.

Website: parcodellemadonie.it



© Maiella UNESCO Global Geopark



© Fabio Di Carlo - Conservation centre for the biodiversity of Abruzzo



Participant: Maria Peroni

Visitor Centre: Maiella Information Centres

Strengths of management at my site:

Localisation
Quality
Visibility

Challenges of management at my site:

Accessibility
Seasonal adjustment
Interacting activities (experiences)

My Designated Site

The site is situated in a mountain area in central Italy, with an area of 740,095 km² covering 39 municipalities. Its notable geological and cultural heritage are deeply linked to the communities living in it. In specific, the site possesses 95 geosites (22 of international value), 100+ caves, plateaus and inaccessible valleys, 40+ hermitages, abbeys and mines. 2,300+ plant species (200+ endemics) and 40+ mammals, hundreds of bird species and many invertebrates (e.g. 800+ butterflies) inhabit the area. In terms of tourism facilities, there are 950+ km of trails for hikers, mountain bikes and horses.

My Visitor Centre

There are 18 information centres, 7 museums, 2 botanical gardens, and 10 wildlife areas directly managed by the Geopark or outsourced to local associations/cooperatives. These centres' main functions/services include the front office, guided tours, activities and educational-recreational initiatives for schools and other users to promote the Geopark and sustainable behaviours. The finance of the centres is supported by the management of Geopark and also complemented by incomes from their activities.

Visitor Engagement at My Site and Centre

A successful activity of my site is "Maiella Geopark bombs" - balls made of soil, clay and seeds that can be planted to promote biodiversity. Since this event has been held in various places, the main challenges concern the logistical aspects, such as which materials to use (e.g. the right seeds), how to compose them and how to involve children. It is important to experience the activities live which can create memories and emotions rather than simply transmit notions. The laboratory in this regard has been put into practice by the Geopark and our cooperatives have also proposed this kind of activity to their users. The activity provoked a feeling of responsibility in participants. It allowed participants to understand, with a holistic view, the complex ecosystem relationships, sensitise them about the importance of the preservation of nature, and strengthen their bond with the land.

Website: parcomajella.it



© PAE photographic archive - Panoramic view of Herculaneum



© PAE photographic archive - Tour in Italian Sign Language (LIS)

My Designated Site

Situated at the foot of Mount Vesuvius, Herculaneum was once a bustling seaside resort and trading port town. Thanks to special burial conditions during the eruption of 79 BC, it is a very unique place for the good state of preservation of the buildings and for the exceptionally preserved organic matter, giving back to us a unique complex of common everyday objects such as textiles, foodstuffs, wooden furniture, architectural elements, hundreds of wax tablets and more than 1,800 papyri scrolls.

My Visitor Centre

Despite being now undersized to the increased needs of the site, which annually welcomes more than 500,000 visitors, the Visitor Centre collects all the essential services for tourists: reception and information, surveillance, ticketing, audio guides, bookshop, toilets, baggage storage, a small food court. All these services are provided by external personnel, both as service dealers and as contractors. On special occasions, some activities may involve local cultural and voluntary associations.



Participant: Stefania Siano

Visitor Centre: Visitor Centre of the Archaeological Park of Herculaneum

Strengths of management at my site:

Spirit of service

Promptness

Perfect knowledge of the organisation of the site

Challenges of management at my site:

Services for blind people

Services for families and children

Larger and renovated toilets

Visitor Engagement at My Site and Centre

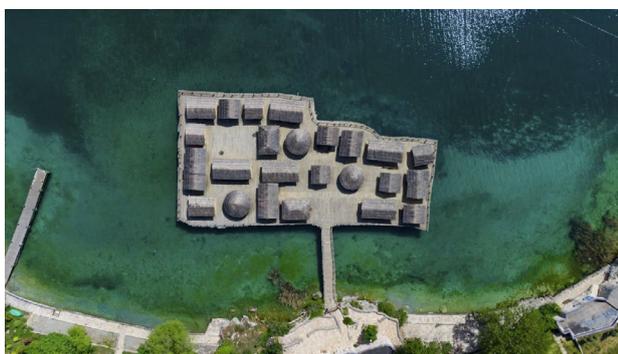
One aspect on which the institute is particularly committed is to increase the visitor knowledge and awareness of the conservative dynamics of the archaeological area, which imply the constant involvement of architects, restorers and archaeologists both for the daily cleaning and small maintenance activities, and for ordinary maintenance and extraordinary restoration. We firmly believe that this awareness naturally leads to increased attention and respect for archaeological evidence, as well as for the tremendous efforts dedicated to its preservation for future generations.

Among the activities that we put in place in this regard, one of the most significant is represented by the close-up programme, which involves tourists in visiting the restoration sites underway in the site, giving them the opportunity to meet restorers and archaeologists to get to know their work closely and to have additional information on future conservation programmes.

Website: ercolano.beniculturali.it



© Ivan Malezanov - Medieval church of St. John



© Slavco Malezanov - The Bay of Bones museum



Participant: Ivan Malezanov

Institution: National Institution for Protection of Monuments of Culture and Museum - Ohrid

Strengths of management at my site:

Reconstruction
Digitalisation
Rich cultural heritage

Challenges of management at my site:

Access
Education
Communication

My Designated Site

Ohrid region is one of the most visited places in North Macedonia. In 1979 Ohrid region was inscribed as a natural World Heritage, and in 1980 it was extended as cultural and natural World Heritage. Later in 2019, the property was extended to include the rest of the Ohrid Lake located in Albania. In this region there is the town of Ohrid which is one of the oldest human settlements in Europe.

My Institution and Visitor Centre

Institute for Protection of Monuments of Culture and Museum - Ohrid is working on the protection, conservation, promotion, and presentation of cultural heritage in the municipalities of Ohrid, Struga, Vevcani and Debarca. It is one of the main institutions connected with cultural heritage. The Institute consists of 6 visitor centres, each exhibiting and presenting different parts of cultural heritage (e.g. icons, archaeological artifacts, ethnological artifacts, and modern art).

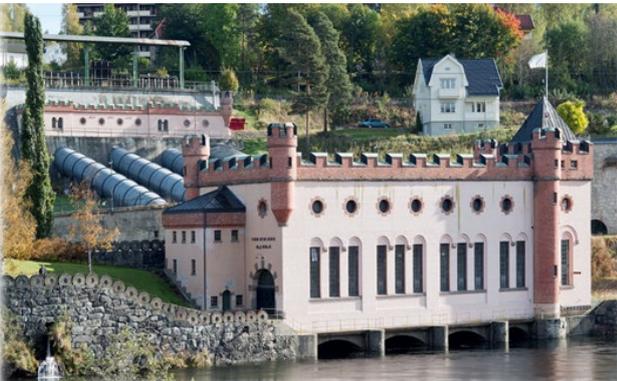
Heritage Presentation at My Site

For the last 2 years, I have been working on 2 projects which included promoting cultural heritage inaccessible to the general public. One of the archaeological sites, "Karagulevci", is a private property, and the other archaeological site, "Vidobista", is in an area far away from the old part of the town. The 2 sites feature tombs. The tomb found in the archaeological site of "Karagulevci" is a Macedonian type and it is one of the 2 found in North Macedonia. The other tomb from the archaeological site of "Vidobista" is from the Roman period, and is a family tomb. In order to promote the little known heritage, we made digital documentation of the tombs, and created an Ideal Virtual Reconstruction of the tombs. The digital models are now presented in the Museum - House of Robev Family, together with all archaeological and ethnological exhibitions.

Website: muzejohrid.mk/en/



© Ian Brodie - Rjukan-Notodden Industrial Heritage Site



© Per Berntsen - Rjukan-Notodden Industrial Heritage Site

My Designated Site

Located in a dramatic landscape of mountains, waterfalls and river valleys, the site comprises hydroelectric power plants, transmission lines, factories, transport systems and towns. The complex was established by the Norsk-Hydro Company to manufacture artificial fertiliser from nitrogen in the air. It was built to meet the Western world's growing demand for agricultural production in the early 20th century.

My Visitor Centre

World Heritage Visitor Centres in Norway are part of an authorisation scheme by the Norwegian Environment Agency. Since 2017, the Rjukan-Notodden Industrial Heritage Site Visitor Centre has been granted the responsibility of interpreting the site by the local World Heritage Council. It is organised as a department at the Norwegian Industrial Workers Museum and it has one visitor facility in each town. It is financed by the Norwegian Environment Agency, the county council and 3 municipalities.



Participant: Juliana Strogan
Visitor Centre: Rjukan-Notodden Industrial Heritage Site Visitor Centre

Strengths of management at my site:

Knowledge/based interpretation
Digital accessibility
Transport management

Challenges of management at my site:

Short stay visits
Adequate financing
Adequate visitor facilities

Tourism Management and Heritage Interpretation at My Site

Since authorisation in 2017, there have been positive developments in interpretation projects. Significant progress has been made in interpretation for children. The Norwegian Workers Museum has thematic visits included in a national cultural programme, Cultural Schoolbag, for schools and individual projects as activity books and brochures using the sites "child-characters" Sam and Sara. While the interpretation offer is diverse and of quality, a particular set back is at the facility level: financing of the buildings' adaptation to host the local and national World Heritage exhibitions, as for their production is not in place and poses challenges to the existing plans. As the visitor centre in Rjukan is operating in the hydropower station of Vemork, 7 km uphill in the outskirts of the company town, the museum has organised a bus from the town to help manage the visitor flow. The museum has also several partnerships with local actors and volunteer organisations.

Website: industriarven.no/en



© Elvas Tourist Office - Old town of Elvas



© Elvas Tourist Office - Santa Luiza fortress

My Designated Site

The site is composed of a set of constructions: the Old Town and its walls (Dutch school), the Aqueduct, 2 big and 4 small fortresses. It represents the largest bulwarked dry-ditch system in the world. Within its walls, the town contains barracks and other military buildings as well as churches and monasteries. While Elvas contains remains dating back to the 10th century AC, its latest fortifications were built when Portugal regained independence in 1640.

My Institution

Elvas Tourist Office, as well as Forte da Graça and Forte de Santa Luzia, welcome all visitors to the city of Elvas and its heritage. Their function is to promote the city and its monuments to the public and encourage visitors to experience the place sufficiently. They all belong to and are managed by the City Hall. They sell merchandise, tickets and useful informative materials and provide guided tours.



Participant: Paula Cristina Henriques Mota Calado

Institution: Elvas Tourist Office

Strengths of management at my site:

Growth
Authenticity and amount of monuments
Surprise for visitors

Challenges of management at my site:

Maintenance
Human Resources
Limited budget

Tourism Management at My Site and Centre

Based on our estimation, in order to stimulate the local economy through tourism, it is necessary to “persuade” visitors to stay in Elvas for a minimum of 3 days. With this objective in mind, we are actively working on establishing a network with Elvas as the central hub. This network encompasses all the captivating sites, including other UNESCO designated sites, within a 100 km radius of Elvas, spanning across both Portugal and Spain. The main idea is that, by having Elvas as a base, people can spend a week visiting and experiencing different sites in the vicinity. Partnership and cooperation are crucial to the achievement of this vision.

Website: cm-elvas.pt



© Constantin Crețescu - Volunteers at the House of Stones



© Adina Popa - Scientific reconstruction of Balaur bondoc

My Designated Site

Hațeg County is the first UNESCO Global Geopark in Romania recognised for the creative way of harnessing our unique geological and cultural heritage, from a tourism, educational and scientific point of view. Situated in the Hunedoara district, the Geopark encompasses a magical land of many old commercial and cultural routes. The Geopark offers the opportunity of a "Journey through Ages" in the times of dinosaurs, ancient Romans, knights and castles, traditions and nature.

My Visitor Centre

From 2013, the Geopark implements an interpretation strategy based on small interpretation points spread out in the communities, called Houses of the Geopark. After the pandemics, the Houses are facing financial and visibility problems, so the Geopark team is trying to rethink this strategy which might lead to a new flagship project of a comprehensive interpretation centre.



Participant: Cristian Ciobanu
Visitor Centre: Houses of the Geopark

Strengths of management at my site:

Inclusion
Community driven
Youth involvement

Challenges of management at my site:

Data collection
People with special needs
Capacity of support

Tourism Management at My Site and Centre

Shaping visitors' behaviour to enhance sustainability was very difficult during the Daffodils Festival, when many visitors and locals celebrated by picking every flower in the protected site. For 3 years, we tried different tactics with no real impact. In 2015, we started involving the youth volunteers in our awareness actions. Suddenly, the impact was relevant and the flowers were left in the nature reserve after the event. Seeing young volunteers out for many hours passionately sending a message in a personal direct manner, shaped the behaviour of the visitors and locals. This was a model for later projects and activities in nature and geo-heritage protection.

Website: hateggeoparc.ro/new/index.php/en/home/



© PE Vojvodinašume - RS Karapandža, entrance and observation tower



© PE Vojvodinašume - RS Karapandža, open air classroom

My Designated Site

Bačko Podunavlje comprises wide floodplains along the left Danube bank in the northwest of Serbia, being 176,635 ha large area of valuable alluvial ecosystems, as well as agriculture, forestry, fishing, recreation and tourism with many aspects of sustainability and rich mix of cultural practices. It was designated as Biosphere Reserve in 2017, being the second one in Serbia, first in the lowlands. It is part of the transboundary Biosphere Reserve "Mura-Drava-Danube in 5 countries".

My Visitor Centre

River's Cool is an educational-recreational concept developed under the project coopMDD. It serves as a unique place for learning about nature in the transboundary Biosphere Reserve "Mura-Drava-Danube in 5 countries". River's Cool Karapandža is an outdoor learning centre on the river Danube inside the Biosphere Reserve (part of Eco-centre Karapandža), while River's Cool in Novi Sad is an indoor structure placed in the biggest urban centre close to the Biosphere Reserve.

Participant: Marko Tucakov

Visitor Centre: River's Cool in Novi Sad; River's Cool in Karapandža

Strengths of management at my site:

Education
Curiosity
Inclusiveness

Challenges of management at my site:

Promotion
Staff shortage
Lack of planning

Tourism Management at My Site and Centre

Bačko Podunavlje and the protected areas within it did not have a single visitors point until 2015. Visitors' activities have been spread throughout the area, where available walking trails have been set up provisionally. There was the need for at least one point where visitors' programme could be set up and interpreted and the idea of transboundary conceptualisation seemed to be adequate. Site managers of PE, Vojvodinašume, in partnership with INCVP, have designated Karapandža site as a favourable one, right after the biosphere reserve was established. Thus, they started to promote River's Cool and adjacent infrastructures.

Moreover, the number of visitors, including primary and secondary school kids, in the premises of Institute for Nature Conservation of Vojvodina Province in Novi Sad was very high and we wanted to offer them a new experience related to the area that we are coordinating. River's Cool concept was exactly adequate for that, regardless the fact that it is a bit outside the area.

Website: en.unesco.org/biosphere/eu-na/backo-podunavlje



© Jani Peternelej / CUDHg Idrija - Old town of Idrija



© Stane Jeršič / CUDHg Idrija - Hg Smelting Plant

My Designated Site

Our site is part of the transnational serial World Heritage property "Heritage of Mercury. Almadén and Idrija". Idrija is a town with the oldest mining tradition in Slovenia, a town developed above one of the richest mercury ore deposits on our planet. Idrija's mine was the second largest mercury mine in the world. The site in Idrija includes different infrastructure relating to its mining history, Anthony's Main Road, the Hg Smelting Plant, klavže water barriers, Gewerkenegg castle, etc.

My Visitor Centre

Hg Smelting Plant is one of the most important World Heritage sites in Idrija. The exhibition is tailored to suit different target groups. Idrija Mercury Management Centre as manager is financed by the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, the Ministry of Culture, from the budget from entrance fees, projects. Our main tasks are preservation, protection, interpretation, and education. In terms of tourism management, our key partners include Idrija UNESCO Global Geopark and Idrija Tourist Board.



Participant: Davor Vodopija

Visitor Centre: Hg Smelting Plant

Strengths of management at my site:

Interpretation programmes

Relevant data

Partially diverting visitors

Challenges of management at my site:

Visitor management technologies

Managing visitor behaviour

Partnership

Tourism Management at My Site and Centre

We have been trying to balance the volume of visitation to different attractions in Idrija by diverting visitors from overcrowded sites to less visited ones. The main local attraction in Idrija is a tour of the underground mine, Anthony's Main Road. This is the oldest preserved entrance to the mine in Idrija and has limited space due to small and narrow galleries. Tours are conducted at specific hours and the site can easily become overcrowded. To relieve some of the pressure at those hours, visitors were redirected to the Hg Smelting Plant. For this purpose, the managing authorities introduced a combined ticket for Anthony's Main Road and the Hg Smelting Plant. One of the solutions was to create a special tour for families. Family experience is strategically timed to relieve some of the busiest hours at Anthony's Main Road. In the future, a reservation system is planned to better control the visiting hours and further improve tourism management.

Website: cudhg-idrija.si/en/home



© Centre Bojan Tavčar



© Centre Bojan Tavčar

My Designated Site

The Idrija UNESCO Global Geopark covers the area of the Municipality of Idrija. Its rich natural and cultural heritage makes it one of the most fascinating regions of Slovenia. Its position at the crossroads of the Alps and the Dinarides accounts for an extremely diverse and varied terrain with deep ravines, vast plateaux, and high peaks offering vistas ranging from the Alps to the Adriatic Sea.

My Visitor Centre

The Idrija Geopark Visitor Centre is part of UNESCO Global Geopark Idrija, which is managed by the Idrija Tourism Board (ITB). ITB is a public institution financed mostly from the budget of the municipality of Idrija, but part of its operating funds also come from marketing activities and projects.



Participant: Valerija Božič

Visitor Centre: Idrija Geopark Visitor Centre

Strengths of management at my site:

Digitalisation
Natural heritage
Cultural heritage

Challenges of management at my site:

Promotion
Visibility
Price performance

Tourism Management at My Site and Centre

Visitors can tour the exhibition with models, interesting exhibits, animations, and video presentations that are suitable both for those who only want a brief overview and for those who are looking for a more in-depth presentation. Our youngest visitors can visit 3 children's corners where they can explore the natural phenomena in a playful and interactive way.

The exhibition can be toured individually or with our guides, who will adjust the tour to the visitors' interests and prior knowledge. For those who prefer to take the tour alone, an app is available to reveal the content step-by-step and sets tasks that can be solved while touring the exhibition. Those who would like to be accompanied by the famous scientist Johannes Antonius Scopoli can use a QR code to access the audio guide "A Walk with Scopoli", which will present the exhibition and Idrija through Scopoli's eyes.

Website: geopark-idrija.si/en/experiences/visitor-centre

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