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UK UNESCO sites lead the way on sustainable development and create value for local communities

- New research shows UNESCO projects across the UK can help build a greener, more equal and more peaceful world.
- UNESCO status adds an additional £151 million of financial benefit for local communities each year.
- UK UNESCO sites have the potential to assist the UK in meeting the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Published today (25 June 2020) by the **UK National Commission for UNESCO**, new research shows UNESCO projects can help build a greener, more equal and more peaceful world, while also creating financial value.

The research shows how UK UNESCO projects create local networks to protect and conserve some of the most important places across the country and generate an estimated £151 million of financial benefit to local communities each year.

Set up as a specialised agency of the United Nations in London in the wake of the Second World War, UNESCO harnesses the power of education, culture, science, communication and information to advance global peacebuilding, sustainable development, intercultural dialogue and the eradication of poverty.

From expansive mountain ranges in the Highlands of Scotland to densely populated urban areas such as Bradford and Manchester, UNESCO certified projects include Global Geoparks, World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves and Creative Cities. The projects span 12% of the UK's land area and comprise of partnerships between 1,300 organisations, charities, and businesses.

These partnerships are made mainly on a local level, between hundreds of groups all working together to support efforts in conservation, research, education, capacity building and tourism. This new research shows that continued investment in UNESCO projects is critical in helping the UK and devolved governments meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The report is the first to examine the cultural, environmental and financial benefits to UK life from these diverse UNESCO projects, and their active contribution to the SDGs. Along with preserving precious landscapes, buildings and archives, UNESCO projects are also leading

research on vital issues such as water scarcity, refugee integration, climate change and child literacy.

"At a time when we all look for solutions to build more resilient societies after Covid-19, UNESCO sites offer a wealth of concrete actions to reinvent our relationship with nature, to develop decent jobs and foster social cohesion. This report by the UK National Commission to UNESCO is a blueprint for sustainability, and I believe all Countries can take inspiration from this research."

Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO Director-General

Environment and Community

The research highlights the cultural, environmental and financial value of 76 UNESCO projects in the UK. It reveals a creative network rooted in community, rich in potential, and impacting lives here and around the world.

Examples of UNESCO projects with a positive impact on the environment and communities (See link for case study photos: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/reTGY15GAkuLQNzY9>) :

1. The Jurassic Coast Trust in Dorset is an umbrella organisation responsible for a UNESCO World Heritage Site covering 95 miles of beautiful coastline. The Trust believes the Jurassic Coast is best looked after by the people who visit it, use it and love it, and are focused as much on the people and communities as upon the rocks, landscape and fossils. They are working to ensure a financially sustainable coastline that is supported by a network of dedicated schools, community groups, volunteers and businesses.

"We are part of this huge global family of World Heritage Sites that celebrate these outstanding features, natural or cultural; it is a very powerful concept that these values transcend national and political boundaries."

Anjana Khatwa, Programme Manager, Learning at the Jurassic Coast Trust.

2. Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark is the first cross-border Geopark in the world, and crosses the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The geopark is dedicated to telling the story of our planet through its unique natural, cultural and geological heritage, and its cross-border nature forms a crucial part of the Geopark's outreach and engagement programme. The Geopark Science Week brings 500 schoolchildren from both sides of the border together to study their shared geological heritage. Demand for the Science Week is high, but a lack of resources restricts the Geopark from hosting it more often.

"The joy and excitement and delight when we present material to young people in a fashion that engages them – you can see that you are igniting that enthusiasm in them for our geological heritage and they want to find out more."

Martina O'Neil, Marble Arch Caves Geopark Development Officer.

3. The Isle of Man UNESCO Biosphere Reserve has launched a badge with the UK's Girlguiding charity. The initiative seeks to support girls and young women to get closer to nature, learn more about sustainability and tackle issues such as hunger, poverty, gender inequality and climate change.

"The badge encourages young members and leaders in our organisation to think about the world around them – to understand the meaning of 'community', get involved and make things better. If we can instil these thoughts and actions in our young people, it will make our Island and beyond a better place."

Karen Walker, Commissioner of Girlguiding Isle of Man.

4. The UNESCO trail in Scotland is a digital asset to be launched in partnership with VisitScotland, the UK National Commission for UNESCO and Scotland's UNESCO designations. The trail connects 13 UNESCO designations and aims to increase the value of tourism to these sites by encouraging visitors to stay longer and spend more locally, improving, in turn, the quality of life of the local communities. The trail was due to be launched in early 2020 but has been delayed until after the coronavirus crisis.

"If we lost UNESCO status, what would make us different from any other community organisation? I feel that it gives me more confidence both to be entrepreneurial and to write a funding application. It's not just us that thinks we're special, the UN thinks that it's special. It shows you that you've got the outside support – that something beyond the UK, Europe, globally, has said that "We believe that this organisation has the ability to manage this heritage and we believe that it's special."

Dr Laura Hamlet, Geopark Coordinator at the North West Highlands UNESCO Global Geopark

5. The Dyfi UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in Wales has been struggling to make the desired impact on the region and local communities. There is a commitment to celebrate and support the Welsh language and culture, but a lack of resources limits the necessary collaboration needed. Vital funding is essential to strengthen the network and support sustainable development, in line with Wales' Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015.

"The visitors and potential visitors are an important audience but actually not really as important as the local community, including business. So, it's critical for us that we have that sort of groundswell of support."

Andy Rowland, Coordinator, Dyfi Biosphere Reserve

"Particularly striking is how all designations place the community at the core of their work. Their commitment to UNESCO's values and objectives means they share a strong interest in bringing people together to build and nurture meaningful relationships with nature, heritage and each other."

2020 UNESCO National Value Report

Economy

UNESCO World Heritage Sites rank among the most visited attractions in 2018 and are significant contributors to the UK economy. The research analysed the impact of being granted official UNESCO status, which has helped the 76 sites and projects surveyed generate an estimated £151 million to the UK economy in just one year.ⁱ

However, the total figure disguises significant variations, even before the challenges brought by Covid-19. Some sites struggle to secure sufficient funding whether through tourism or other means, due to a low profile and lack of resources, and these problems will have been exacerbated during the lockdown. Investment in these sites is critical to increase cross-disciplinary work and enhance their contribution to the UK economy.

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<https://photos.app.goo.gl/reTGY15GAkuLQNzY9>

Approved Quotes:

UK Government Heritage Minister Nigel Huddleston MP said:

"From Stonehenge to Jodrell Bank, our UNESCO sites tell the story of our shared history and attract visitors from all over the world. This research is testament to the important role these sites play in their local communities and, once it is safe to do so, we will be encouraging people to visit."

Scottish Culture Secretary Fiona Hyslop said:

"At a time when our culture, heritage and tourism sectors face great challenges, this report is a timely and welcome reminder of the incredible value of Scotland's world class UNESCO sites."

"As we chart our path out of the COVID-19 crisis, building an inclusive and sustainable recovery for the people of Scotland and playing our part on the international stage, these sectors will play a vital role at the heart of our communities."

Ambassador Matthew Lodge, UK Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, Foreign and Commonwealth Office:

"This excellent report shows how UNESCO projects play a crucial role at a local and community level, highlighting diversity, supporting the economy and contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. As the UK and the world economy begin to open up once again, we are reminded of the important contribution and potential they continue to offer for the UK."

James Bridge, Secretary-General of the UK National Commission for UNESCO said:

“This research shows the unique value offered by UNESCO projects in the UK. They embody community and enable us to preserve and enjoy our most special places and culture. They also pioneer solutions to some of the world’s most pressing problems and inspire hope in these unprecedented times. Within this report are a number of case studies that can help inform the UK’s path towards a green recovery from the coronavirus crisis.”

Colin McInnes, Chair of the UK National Commission for UNESCO:

This report marks the 75th anniversary of UNESCO's founding in the UK. The UK co-founded the organisation to help build the structures to create a better world after the carnage of World War II. Seventy-five years later we find ourselves again in crisis.

This report highlights the economic and social value of UNESCO projects to communities across the UK, and which will need significant investment as the economy recovers.

Notes to Editors

About the UK National Commission for UNESCO

The [UK National Commission for UNESCO \(UKNC\)](#) works to support the UK’s contribution to UNESCO and bring the benefits of UNESCO to the UK. It is the hub for UNESCO-related matters in the UK.

The UKNC has four core priorities:

1. We provide expert, independent policy advice to the UK and devolved governments on UNESCO related issues.
2. We advise and support individuals and institutions in the UK, its Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies on accessing UNESCO accreditation and prizes and how to derive more value from their involvement with UNESCO.
3. We support the UK Government’s agenda in helping UNESCO to become more effective.
4. We act as a hub for the UK’s 165 UNESCO designations.

UNESCO

For more information and consolidated data on the Culture Sector and the Covid-19 Crisis, please consult UNESCO website <https://en.unesco.org/news/culture-covid-19-impact-and-response-tracker>

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