

## **Adaptive and transformative visitor management**

### **Applying the UNESCO World Heritage Visitor Management Assessment & Strategy Tool (VMAST)**

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#### **Introduction**

World Heritage sites are among the most visited places and attractions in the world. Unmanaged, tourism can threaten heritage values, exploit resources, and make communities less resilient. While facing many similar challenges, sites' uniqueness and diversity prevents a 'one model fits all' approach. Recent and increased risks of future disruptions make long term strategic planning difficult.

The poster presents a methodology and theory of change developed through World Heritage Catalysis applying the World Heritage Visitor Management Assessment & Strategy Tool (VMAST) for adaptive and transformative visitor management.

#### **VMAST**

The World Heritage Visitor Management Assessment & Strategy Tool (VMAST) is the newest addition to the World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Toolkit availed through the UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/tourism/>). As a free and voluntary self-assessment tool it helps site management authorities manage tourism for the protection of heritage values while localizing sustainable development goals.

The tool was developed with input from a broad spectre of stakeholders including the Advisory Bodies (IUCN, ICOMOS, ICCROM), site managers, sustainability- and tourism professionals, aligning with relevant policies, guidelines, and resources.

#### **Methodology and theory of change**

Structured upon for main goals, forty management objectives and more than 200 achievement indicators VMAST recognises many different efforts that can be considered good visitor management, and that 'best practice' is an ongoing process rather than status (Figure 1).

The methodology for applying VMAST elaborated through World Heritage Catalysis involves five main steps and an ongoing visitor management cycle (Figure 2):

1. *Baseline assessment / progress monitoring* - Use VMAST to assess to what degree visitor management meets objectives set out through achievement/ success indicators;
2. *Collaborative anticipation and prioritization* – Involve key stakeholders in a VMAST based SWOT analysis to identify local development/resilience needs and opportunities, prioritising objectives and success indicators that should be brought forward through strategy development/revision;
3. *Strategy development* - Make use of VMAST to facilitate an open, participatory and SMART strategy development process leading to a more distributed and potentially polycentric governance model;
4. *Strategy implementation* – Support multi stakeholder and distributed strategy implementation potentially applying an incentives mechanism (see WHETS);
5. *Monitoring* – Regularly apply VMAST in adaptive and transformative visitor management.

The VMAST *Theory of change* set out through UNESCO builds on a consistent design focusing on efforts that can be made through fundamental management efforts (a-e):

**a. *Monitoring -> Improved understanding***

Use VMAST to improve protection of heritage values while contributing to sustainable development objectives.

**b. *Budgeted activities -> Feasible ambitions***

Use VMAST to budget for activities and support feasibility of strategic ambitions.

**c. *Communication -> Improved outreach***

Use VMAST to effectively and in a culturally appropriate manner communicate with stakeholders.

**d. *Capacity development -> Strengthened capacities***

Use VMAST to engage with relevant stakeholders and strengthen capacities towards the achievements of identified sustainability and development objectives.

**e. *Collaboration -> Increased impact***

Use VMAST as a framework to enhance engagement and dialogue with local and national authorities, rights-holders, and other relevant stakeholders.

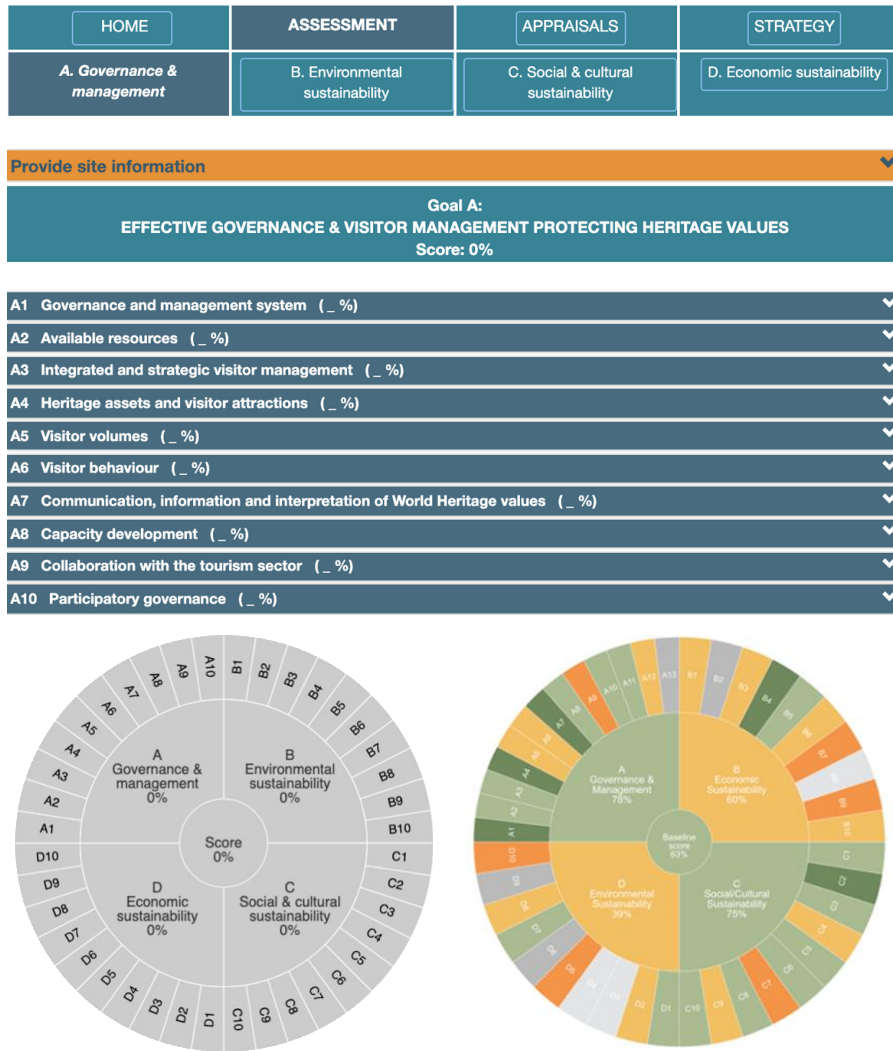


Fig. 1. The World Heritage Visitor Management Assessment & Strategy Tool (VMAST)

**The visitor management cycle**

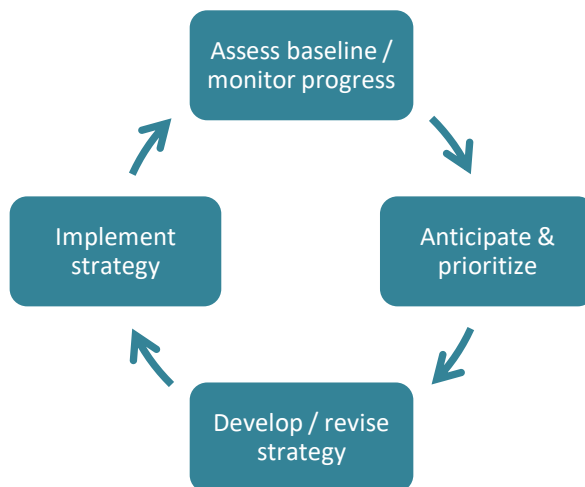


Fig. 2. The visitor management cycle

## An emerging community of practice

World Heritage Catalysis ([www.whcatalysis.org](http://www.whcatalysis.org)) hosts and supports an emerging community of practice applying innovative technologies including VMAST aiming to enhance adaptive and transformative capacities for building resilient and thriving communities.

WHETS - the World Heritage Exchange Trading System ([www.whets.club](http://www.whets.club)), incubated through World Heritage Catalysis, is an emergent innovative platform cooperative including a time-based currency (medium of exchange) and marketplace enabling collaborative exchanges among community members. Current efforts explore how WHETS could be integrated into VMAST strategy development and implementation through incentives and exchange circuits envisioning WHETS as a local complementary currency that could be applied across World Heritage sites developing economic resilience while placing the protection of heritage values and localising the SDGs at the core (Figure 3).



Fig. 3. VMAST as the foundation for an emerging community of practice

### Author contributions:

**Conceptualisation:** Cecilie Smith-Christensen

**Methodology:** UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme (VMAST); World Heritage Catalysis (VMAST application)

**Project administration:** Cecilie Smith-Christensen

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**Visualization:** UNESCO VMAST; World Heritage Catalysis

**Writing - original draft:** Cecilie Smith-Christensen

### References:

UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tourism/>

UNESCO World Heritage Visitor Management Assessment & Strategy Tool (VMAST), UNESCO 2021

World Heritage Catalysis <https://www.whcatalysis.org>

World Heritage Exchange Trading System (WHETS) <https://www.whets.club>