

Submission Form

At its 35th session (UNESCO Paris, 2011), the World Heritage Committee (Decision 35COM12D.7) “requested the World Heritage Centre, with the support of the Advisory Bodies, **to develop, for further consideration the proposal** contained in Document WHC-11/35.COM/12D [...] and to further **explore ways of recognising and rewarding best practice through a one-off initiative** at the closing event of the 40th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention (November 2012, Japan)...”.

States Parties to the World Heritage Convention are invited to participate in this initiative by proposing World Heritage properties in their country that they regard as an example of successful management and sustainable development.

In order to be eligible the site has to apply with the following criteria:

- The suggested site must be a property inscribed on the World Heritage List;
- Successful management and sustainable development has to be clearly demonstrated;
- Best practices are considered those that are tried, tested and applied in different situations and in a wider context;
- An overall good performance on all headings mentioned in the submission form, with an exemplary performance in at least one of the areas;
- An outstanding example of innovative management in dealing with one or more management challenges / issues that could offer lessons to other sites.

Each State Party may propose a maximum of two properties, preferably relating to one cultural and one natural site.

This form contains 9 topics for demonstrating best management practice – it is not necessary to comply with all of them but it would be appreciated if you could provide a comprehensive response to as many topics as possible. In your responses to the question, please provide all facts and figures to substantiate the answers, and describe the before and after situation of implementing the best practice intervention. The objective is to illustrate clearly why the example can qualify as a best practice and can be used as a source of inspiration for other World Heritage properties.

The topics are based on questions dealt with in the Periodic Reporting questionnaire.

Recognizing and rewarding best practice in management of World Heritage properties

State Party: **Slovenia**

Title proposed World Heritage property: **Škocjanske jame (Škocjan Caves)**

Brief description of the property:

Škocjanske jame are a combined system of a long and deep underground canyon and vast halls that are cut into a limestone bedrock by the Reka River. Distinguished by 6 km of underground passages the total depth of the system is more than 200 ms.

With persistent force the Reka River disappears in the karst underground passing through an impressive and picturesque 146 m height and 123 m wide channel, making the dynamic river dramatically roaring and flowing with many cascades and waterfalls to one of the largest known underground chambers. Its volume exceeds 2,200,000 m³. The caves' halls and chambers are characterised by distinguished variations of limestone bedrock and speleothem formations.

Rich biodiversity is a result of specific conditions in the collapse dolines and the underground environment. The walls of the collapse dolines represent habitats for rare and threatened animal and plant species. Within the cave percolating and underground river water provides a living environment to endemic cave fauna.

Karst research started in Slovenia. The first studies of karst phenomena in the world started in the region called Kras/Karst. Many expressions that are nowadays used in speleological terminology worldwide originated in the local language.

Additionally, impressive archaeological finds, dating from the Mesolithic to the Bronze and Middle Ages, indicate the importance of the site as a special place for settlements, burial grounds and rituals.

The managing authority, Javni zavod Park Škocjanske jame, a public agency, was established by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia in 1996, and became operational in 1997. The protected area (a Regional Park) covers 413 ha, including the surface area above the cave system and three villages, Škocjan, Betanja and Matavun, with the population of 70 inhabitants. The buffer zone covers the entire catchment of the Reka River, encompassing 45,000 ha.

In 1999, the area of Škocjan Caves was included in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. They were the first Ramsar site included in the list according to the criteria for identification of underground wetlands.

In October 2004, the Škocjan Caves Regional Park became a member of the international network of Man and Biosphere as the Karst Biosphere Reserve. The transition area was additionally included covering the remaining territory of the Municipality of Divača and covering 1065 ha.

Please answer the questions below demonstrating the successful management and sustainable development of the World Heritage property and why it is an example of a best practice.

	Topics for demonstrating best management practice:	Please indicate in this column why your World Heritage property is a best practice in relation to the topic:
1.	<p>Conservation:</p> <p><i>What innovative management practices or strategies are being applied in order to ensure the conservation of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property (e.g. better resource management, restoration and rehabilitation, addressing various man-made or natural threats and challenges, etc.)?</i></p>	<p>The managing authority of the WH property has undertaken a holistic approach in managing natural and cultural heritage. This approach includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working with local stakeholders and local people (the activities are listed under the topic “Local People”). - Monitoring and safeguarding the core and buffer zone, including the cave and the surface area (microclimate, chemical conditions of the Reka River and its tributaries, cultural heritage, etc.) - Managing visitors to the area (guiding the visitors through the cave system, the park, museum collections, raising awareness among of the visitors, etc.) - Research activities (in speleology, geology, biology, hydrology, ethnology, etc.) - Education activities (these are listed under the topic “<i>Educational and interpretational programmes</i>”) <p>The additional value of the WH property is in balancing the conservation with all the other activities and actors.</p>

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<p>2. Local People:</p> <p><i>What exemplary practices are you using in order to effectively address the needs of local stakeholders within the management system for the property, and enable their full and active participation?</i></p>	<p>Local community and local inhabitants have their representatives in the Council of the public agency and thus are involved in the management of the protected area.</p> <p>The characteristics of the WH property (i.e. the protected area) provide basis for sustainable development of the area (promotion of local stakeholders and with the involvement of local people in different activities).</p> <p>The public agency is providing training and building public awareness of local people and visitors, it is the centre for training and learning about the natural and cultural values, as well as the use of natural resources.</p> <p>The income generated by the entrance fees to the caves and museum collections (the main financial source of the protected area) remains in the area and is used for working with local people, renewing and maintaining the infrastructure, building public awareness, education, research, training and employing local guides, etc.</p> <p>The managing authority organizes common activities with local people, such as traditional and other social events. Local people are also involved in safeguarding and maintaining the natural and cultural heritage.</p>
<p>3. Legal framework:</p> <p><i>What special measures have you taken to ensure that the legal framework for the World Heritage site is effective in maintaining the OUV of the property?</i></p>	<p>In 1996, the Parliament of the Republic of Slovenia passed the Law on the Regional Park on the Škocjan Caves Regional Park (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 57/96) in order to preserve and study its outstanding geomorphologic, geologic and hydrologic formations, rare and threatened plant and animal species, palaeontological and archaeological sites, ethnologic and architectural characteristics, cultural landscape, and to ensure conditions for local development. The managing authority, Javni zavod Park Škocjanske jame, a public agency, was established by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia in 1996, and became operational in 1997.</p>

Topics for demonstrating best management practice:	Please indicate in this column why your World Heritage property is a best practice in relation to the topic:
	<p>The legal basis, provided by the Law on the Škocjan Caves Regional Park and the Law on Nature Conservation form the basis for the affective protection and management of the WH property:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The WH property has the buffer zone, covering the catchment area of the Reka River (i.e. the buffer zone), and the management authority is working with six local communities in this area. • The public agency has prepared the Management Plan (2006-2010) which has been approved by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Slovenia. The new Management Plan (2011-2015) in the process of adoption. • The public agency is the main agent for raising public awareness about the protected area, its natural and cultural values and the natural resources in general. • The public agency has also the scientific council and is actively working with research institutions, such as Karst Research Institute of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Slovenian Environmental Agency, Institute of the Republic Slovenia for Nature Conservation and Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, and others. • The results of the implementation of the above mentioned legal framework show that the natural resources and the natural environment of the area are in favourable conditions.

Topics for demonstrating best management practice:	Please indicate in this column why your World Heritage property is a best practice in relation to the topic:
4. Boundaries: <i>What innovative ways of dealing with the boundaries of the property, including for management of the buffer zone do you have in place, to effectively to manage the site and protect its OUV?</i>	<p>It is critical to actively manage the WH property (i.e. protected area), the quantity and quality of water in the catchment area of the Reka River (i.e. buffer zone) and to participate in sustainable development and land use planning of the buffer and transitional zone.</p>
5. Sustainable finance: <i>What effective strategies have you developed and implemented to assure adequate and sustainable financial resources for implementing the management measures required to maintain the site's OUV?</i>	<p>The financial resources are provided from different sources:</p> <p>The public agency is partly financed from the state budget, particularly for its conservation activities.</p> <p>The visits of the cave and park are generating income that is used for maintenance and running cost of the agency, implementation of the conservation measures, educational programmes and research activities.</p> <p>The public agency is also actively implementing national and international projects which are also contributing to the sustainable financing. In the last ten years the public agency has implemented over 15 national and international projects in the total amount of over 3 mio €.</p>
6. Staffing training and development: <i>What approaches and strategies have you developed and implemented to assure that the human resources are adequate to manage the World Heritage property?</i>	<p>Training of employees, such as participating at international meetings, cooperation with other WH properties, protected areas, show caves, Ramsar and MAB sites and other partners (stakeholders, NGOs, etc) in Slovenia and abroad (exchange of know – how and experience). Training of employees is integrated part of its activities.</p> <p>Through an international project the public agency restored a cultural monument that is now used as a congress – promotion centre, enabling additional training activities for the staff and other stakeholders.</p>
7. Sustainable development:	<p>The public agency is actively building on public awareness by working with local schools and</p>

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<p><i>What are the effective mechanisms in place to ensure that resource use permitted in and around the World Heritage site is sustainable and does not impact negatively on OUV?</i></p>	<p>promotion of the area through guided tours, management of visitors and working with different media. It is also involved in local, regional and national land use planning.</p> <p>The Government of the Republic of Slovenia has prepared a special document on sustainable development of the Kras region that involves all the ministries and local communities and decision makers at national and local level when developments are planned.</p>
<p>8. Education and interpretation programmes:</p> <p><i>How do the education, interpretation and awareness programmes you have developed and implemented significantly enhance the understanding of OUV of the site among stakeholders?</i></p>	<p>In 2003, the public agency founded the school network which includes the primary schools within the catchments area. Five of them are from the buffer zone and two of them are from Italy. It is a very powerful instrument in raising awareness of the importance of the protected area, UNESCO and other related conventions and natural resources in the area.</p> <p>The public agency also organizes training activities for teachers and organizes events together with the National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia.</p> <p>Visitors of the protected area have the possibility to walk on the education trail. The trail includes collections on geology, biology, archaeology, ethnology and history of cave exploration.</p> <p>The public agency established an internet site on biodiversity between nature and culture, inviting school children to provide data on climatic parameters within the buffer zone. The internet site "Biodiversity between nature and culture" (http://www.biodiverziteteta-bok.si/) has only started and will be elaborated to include other environmental parameters as well.</p> <p>Workshops are organized <i>ad hock</i> on different issues during the high season for the visitors to actively participate. Thematic workshops are carried out every year for local people (cooking traditional dishes, uses of medical plants, uses of spices, etc.).</p>
<p>9. Tourism and interpretation:</p>	<p>The cave management plan includes all interventions which are planned to be carried out in</p>

Topics for demonstrating best management practice:	Please indicate in this column why your World Heritage property is a best practice in relation to the topic:
<p><i>What innovative plans have you designed and successfully implemented to ensure that visitor management does not negatively impact on the maintenance of the property's OUV?</i></p>	<p>the cave, such as renovation of the cave infrastructure, illumination, taking out all the used material that was brought to the cave, renaturation of the cave when needed, etc.</p> <p>One of the main tasks is to properly manage the visitors to the area, especially in the high season. To reduce the impacts to the cave in the high season visitors are guided to the different parts of the park and the buffer zone. Additionally, all groups have to be booked in advance and the schools visits are organized out of the high season.</p> <p>At present there are three possibilities to visit the site, i.e. two trails through follow the caves and one is the education trail including the museum collections. Additionally, the visitors centre will be renewed to provide more information on the park and the region.</p> <p>The protected area is considered a natural site but it includes cultural heritage as well and the park is working to include the technical heritage of the cave on the national register which will provide additional information on the cave and cave protection.</p> <p>The public agency is also working with local stakeholders to provide new opportunities and work on possibilities to combine the visit of the WH property (i.e. protected area) and other sites in the buffer zone.</p>
Additional comments:	
Brief description/ summary of the best practice, including a statement on how it can be useful for other sites (max.600 words)	
<p>To exchange the know – how between the sites, the best practice of the Škocjanske jame is an approach, combining the school network and good participation of young people and involvement of local communities and local people in the management of the protected area (i.e. WH property). Fifteen years of the protected area in this area has significantly contributed to local development and the park is still considered the main touristic attraction providing for sustainable development of the area.</p>	

Finally, please provide us, if possible, with up to ten images of the concerned World Heritage property that can be used free of rights in UNESCO publications (commercial and/or non-commercial), and on the UNESCO website. Please provide the name of the photographer and the caption along with the images (he/she will be credited for any use of the images).