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# Estimating the wider value generated by UNESCO's designations in the United Kingdom

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## Abstract

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a set of objectives related to promoting and supporting sustainable development around the globe through education, human knowledge, communication and culture. These objectives are commonly known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and are an inter-dependent set of 17 goals that 195 Member States have agreed to achieve by 2030. As a specialised agency of the United Nations, and the global lead on education, UNESCO has a vital role to play in delivering the SDGs. UNESCO's global network of 'designations', including World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves, UNESCO University Chair Programme, and Global Geoparks, also play an essential role in promoting and supporting local sustainable development and achieving the SDGs. However, the different geographic, cultural and political regimes under which UNESCO designations are called to operate, poses significant challenges for the network to effectively be managed and contribute towards the SDGs. Moreover, the heterogeneity of organisational structures and boundaries in terms of efficient, power and competence, prevents UNESCO designations "value-added" activities from reaching their full potential. We performed a survey of 35 designations in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Drawing from the business model component framework, our research aims to i) identify value generating configurations of organisational structures that transcend designations' type; ii) estimate the value generated by the designation and their contribution to UNESCO's SDGs; and, iii) develop a framework that can be used by national governments to make sense of UNESCO's value generated activities. The framework can help UNESCO's National Commissions to improve the efficient management of the designation's global network and allow countries with different levels of economic and societal development to cooperate to tackle contemporary global challenges.

Keywords: *UNESCO, value, non-profit organisations, SDGs*

## 1. Introduction

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, namely UNESCO, as it is most commonly known, was founded in 1945 as the product of the ECO c/CONF onference in London by the representatives of 45 countries. The goal was the creation of an organisation that would promote and help maintain peace through educational, scientific and cultural cooperation among countries (UNESCO, 2019). UNESCO is governed by the bi-annual general conference through which member states vote for policies and the organisation's budget. Through the conference, the executive board is elected, which consists of 58 members and supervises the implementation of the conference's decisions. Finally, the secretariat, the executive branch of the board, consists of more than 700

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professional and general staff. As a result, UNESCO is a large, complex organisation that faces many challenges, especially when forming consensus among the member state and supervising the implementation of the corresponding policies.

UNESCO’s overall role is advisory and lacks the capacity to impose the implementation of the policies voted by the conference. Moreover, a large portion of the budget is dedicated to administrative tasks and limited funds are directed to projects. On a national level, policy implementation is supervised by the National Commissions. Their members are appointed by the governments and act as the liaisons between UNESCO and member states. Although the role of the national commissions is crucial to promote the UNESCO policies around the world, their organisational structure, governance and budget varies significantly among member states. In turn, National Commissions are required to closely cooperate with both government and non-government organisations to monitor a vast network of national designations which are responsible to sustain and support physical, environmental and cultural heritage. The size and the heterogeneity of the network makes it very challenging to manage on behalf of both the national governments and UNESCO. First because UNESCO has no agency to implement policies within the sovereign nations and second the vast majority of the budget of designations stem from the governments and as a result be subject of different laws and socioeconomic conditions. Designations, or internationally designated areas, are the organisational manifestations of UNESCO’s intergovernmental instruments that cover all three missions of UNESCO: education, culture and science. For instance, World Heritage Sites stem from Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1972, while Biosphere Reserves are the result of the Man and the Biosphere (MaB) Programme in 1971. The remaining designations and corresponding list of intergovernmental instruments can be seen in Table 1. UNESCO designations are a crucial vehicle for UNESCO to achieve its goals through many activities such as short- and long-term local policies and actions.

Table 1: The intergovernmental instruments and the resulting designations of UNESCO

UNESCO Mission	Intergovernmental Instruments	UK presence	Internationally designated areas
Culture	Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972)	Yes	32 World Heritage Sites (cultural, natural or mixed)*
Culture	1954 Hague Convention for the protection of cultural property	No	Blue Shield Emblem
Natural Sciences	Man and the Biosphere Programme (1971)	Yes	6 Biosphere Reserves*
Culture	Memory of the World Programme (1992)		72 Memory of the World Register (National and International)*
Education	UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities	Yes	Learning Cities
Culture	UNESCO Creative Cities Programme	Yes	10 UNESCO Creative Cities
Natural Sciences	International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme (IGGP)	Yes	10 UNESCO Global Geoparks
Natural Sciences	International Hydrological Programme	Yes	1 UK Delegation to the IHP
Natural Sciences	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission	Yes	1 UK Delegation to the IHP
	UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme	Yes	25 UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks

In 2015, UNESCO, as part of the 70<sup>th</sup> session of the UN general assembly, adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Framework, namely the 2030 Agenda titled: “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” which succeeded the millennium development goals as

was adopted by the UN in 2000 (UN, 2015). SDGs consist of 17 development goals that vary from education, to environmental and cultural goals, among others. UNESCO aims to make those goals visible by measuring them and tracking them globally (New York Times, 2015). The process of the SDG implementation by nation states is called “localisation of SDGs”. Although the adoption of the SDG framework has been regarded as a positive step towards global cooperation’s, there has also been criticism. To successfully implement the arguably ambitious framework by 2030, significant effort needs to be placed into governance and management of the vast network of organisations involved along with mobilisation of the necessary resources (Begashaw, 2017). The role of the nation states is important for the 2030 Agenda by raising public awareness, passing legislation and by mobilising necessary resources. UNESCO designations, as liaison organisations between UNESCO and the states can play an important role promoting the SDGs and contributing towards the countries’ commitments.

The present research aims to develop a framework to help support the promotion of SDGs by the UK government based on primary data collected through an open survey of 35, UK-based UNESCO designations. First, we attempt to evaluate and assess the value generated by the UNESCO designation within the UK. Second, we empirically identify five main value types through which UNESCO designations, and consequently national governments, contribute towards promoting the 17 SDGs working towards the 2030 Agenda. More specifically, the framework allows us to identify both complementary and substitutive activities of the designations per SDG, facilitating the synergies among the designations.

The remaining of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a review of the theoretical underpinnings of our research followed by Sections 4 focused on the sample and methodology. Section 5 presents the results of our analysis and discusses the corresponding implications. Finally, Section 6 summarises and concludes our analysis.

## **2. Theory**

The value that is created by all the organisations that operate to promote the goals and policies of UNESCO is understudied within the contemporary academic literature. Researchers working towards that direction face two main challenges: First, UNESCO is a complex organisation that consists of many organisational units around the world. The structural heterogeneity of those organisations and the complexity of the environments (political, cultural, social and economic) they are called to operate pose additional challenges. Second, the organisations that are related to UNESCO are non-profit organisations and consequently, traditional frameworks and structures are inadequate to capture the value generated by the activities of such organisations (Kong, 2008). Yet it becomes ever more important for governments to be able not only to measure the value generated by such organisations but also make sense of how the value is created to be able to manage it more effectively in order to meet their goals for the Agenda 2030 (Begashaw, 2017).

Value depends on the viewpoint and as a result there is not one unifying theory of value (Lepak, Smith, & Taylor, 2007). Consequently value, both in terms of content, process and measure depends on the target of value creations such as: shareholders (Porter, 1985), customers (Adner & Helfat, 2003) or shareholders (Kang, Morris, & Snell, 2007). Another characteristic of value is that it usually refers to both its content and the process of creating it too (Lepak et al., 2007). As a result, focusing only on the content of value vis-à-vis UNESCO network, and specifically the economic value, provides only a limited view over the total value generated by the network.

At the organisational level of analysis there are two types of value: use value and exchange value (Bowman & Ambrosini, 2000). According to Lepak et al., (2007, p. 181) use value refers to the specific quality of a new job, task, product, or service as perceived by users in relation to their needs while

exchange value is defined as the monetary amount realized at a certain point in time. The difference between these two types is that use value is relative to the user and as a result too subjective to be estimated. On the other hand, it is appropriate to study the qualitative characteristics of use by focusing on the content and process of value creation. At the organisational level, which is the focal point of our analysis, value is created through various ways such as: innovation, invention, new knowledge generation, structure and social conditions, and incentives selection and training (Kang et al., 2007; Priem, 2007). The goal of this study is to build a value creation framework of UK UNESCO designations by identifying the value creation process types.

On the other hand, value capture is one of the most challenging issues for non-profit organisations because it is a process closely related to exchange value (economic value) and as a result not directly observable. Not all of the value generated by non-profit organisations can be captured or (using a better term) appropriated by the organisation because they share this value with their stakeholders (society, government etc.: Makadok & Coff, 2002). However, value capturing process goes beyond the scope of this paper.

Several models, frameworks or architectures were proposed to describe the processes of value creation and capture using different dimensions and relationships among them (Zott, Amit, & Massa, 2011). There are two main approaches to value capture and value creation: the activity-based view and the resource-based view. From an activity-based perspective, the focal point are the capabilities of the organisations that permit the configuration of their resources (Seelos & Mair, 2007) that lead to societal improvement (Thompson & MacMillan, 2010). Osterwalder & Pigneur, (2005), based on a review of the literature, suggested 9 main dimensions bridging the gap between the two viewpoints. Particularly regarding value creation, which is the focus of this paper, three are the main dimensions: resources, partnerships and activities. In this paper, by employing a bottom up approach, we aim to identify the types of configurations of the above three dimensions and, as a result, provide a typology of the value creation processes of the UNESCO designations in the UK.

### **3. Sample and Methodology**

The sample covers 74 designations (out of 93 in total), including England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and Overseas territories. The responses were collected using a questionnaire which was distributed by the National Commission of UNESCO in the UK and overseas territories. The questionnaire consists of both close and open-ended questions including multiple choice, rating scale, Likert scale, demographic and dropdown. The questionnaire consists of four parts. The first part focuses on demographic data. The second part focuses on collecting data related to the exchange value generated by the designations. More specifically, we aim to collect data related to the sources of funding received during the last fiscal year (2018-2019), the amount of funding received by the corresponding source, and a scale of the importance of being affiliated with UNESCO, as a designation, to the ability of the corresponding organisation to generate income from that particular source. The rationale behind the scaling questions is to avoid potential bias. UNESCO designations are also non-profit organisations, and, in many cases, they are affiliated with the UK government, which would support these organisations regardless of their affiliation with UNESCO as designations. As a result, to circumvent these limitations, respondents were asked to assess the influence of UNESCO's affiliation on their activities and most importantly the resources available to them from various sources.

The second part of the questionnaire consists of open-ended questions that aim to collect qualitative data related to the use value generated by the UK-based UNESCO designations. As we focus on the process and content of value (value creation as opposed to value capture) the questions revolve around three main dimensions: the resources, the partnerships and the main activities performed by the designations following the business model canvas framework developed by (Osterwalder &

Pigneur, 2005). Finally, the third part of the questionnaire consists of Likert scale questions in order to assess the designations' contribution towards the 17 SDGs of the Agenda 2030.

However, another source of bias stems from the assessment of UNESCO's influence on the value generated by the designations, particularly concerning the exchange value, which is measurable, is based on the personal experience of the respondent and as a result it may be influenced by their corresponding bias. Moreover, as governance of non-profit organisations usually lacks formality and bureaucratic processes, answers related to the exchange value (funding received) by the designations could be over or underestimated by the respondent. To limit the effect of the personal bias, we triangulated the responses against publicly available data related to funding received the National Heritage Lottery fund. In a couple of cases, responses the were significantly different compared to the official data were omitted from the analysis.

Our aim for a new conceptual development (Glaser, Anselm, Strauss, & Strutzel, 1968) by identifying the main types of value generated processes by UNSECO designations, particularly use value. As a result, our methodological approach is that of applied empirical research (Maxwell & Reibold, 2015). NVIVO was used to code and classify the data collected using the business model canvas and permit the analysis of the data to permit the emergence of common themes and structures related to the value generating processes of UNESCO designations.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

The 74, out of 93, designations of our sample generated approximately £151m in economic value between 2018 and 2019. The figure is higher by £51m compared to the Wider Value Report (2015) which estimated the contribution to £100m. Given that the sample does not cover the entire population of designation, and the variability of the generated income as we will discuss shortly, the figure for the exchange value is expected to be higher. Moreover, the research does not take into considerations other UNESCO programmes such as the L'OREAL programme for Women in Science. This also affects the results of the contribution of the designations to the SDGs.

One of our key findings is that economic value varies considerably among designations (Figure 1). Some designations are more successful than other in generating income which is influenced by many factors related to geography, local economy and public awareness related to the designation. For instance, the Royal Botanical Gardens Kew, a World Heritage Site located in London, managed to generate more than £9m, significantly more compared to any other designation, regardless its type and location. Indeed, World Heritage Site, arguably the most successful in terms of population programme of UNESCO, attracted significantly more funding compared to any other type of Designation (Figure 2). World heritage sites usually refer to cultural sites of world-wide importance needing preservation and protection. The affiliation with UNESCO verifies this importance and facilitates funding. As one of the respondents mentioned:

“For us, the designation very much sets us apart from the other properties which are in the government portfolio. And for external funders as well. [...] UNESCO designation does add that stamp of significance. When we are asking for funding either from the government or from private sponsors.”.

Moreover, World Heritage sites are the most visited sites in the UK generating significant funding from tourism (ALVA, 2019). In fact, based on our research, they generated 98% (£36.8m) from tourism compared to all other designation types. Moreover, as an affiliated UNESCO organisation, designations are obliged to follow certain policy procedures which in turn improves managerial processes considerably and as a result improves their ability to attract funding. As one of the respondents mentioned:

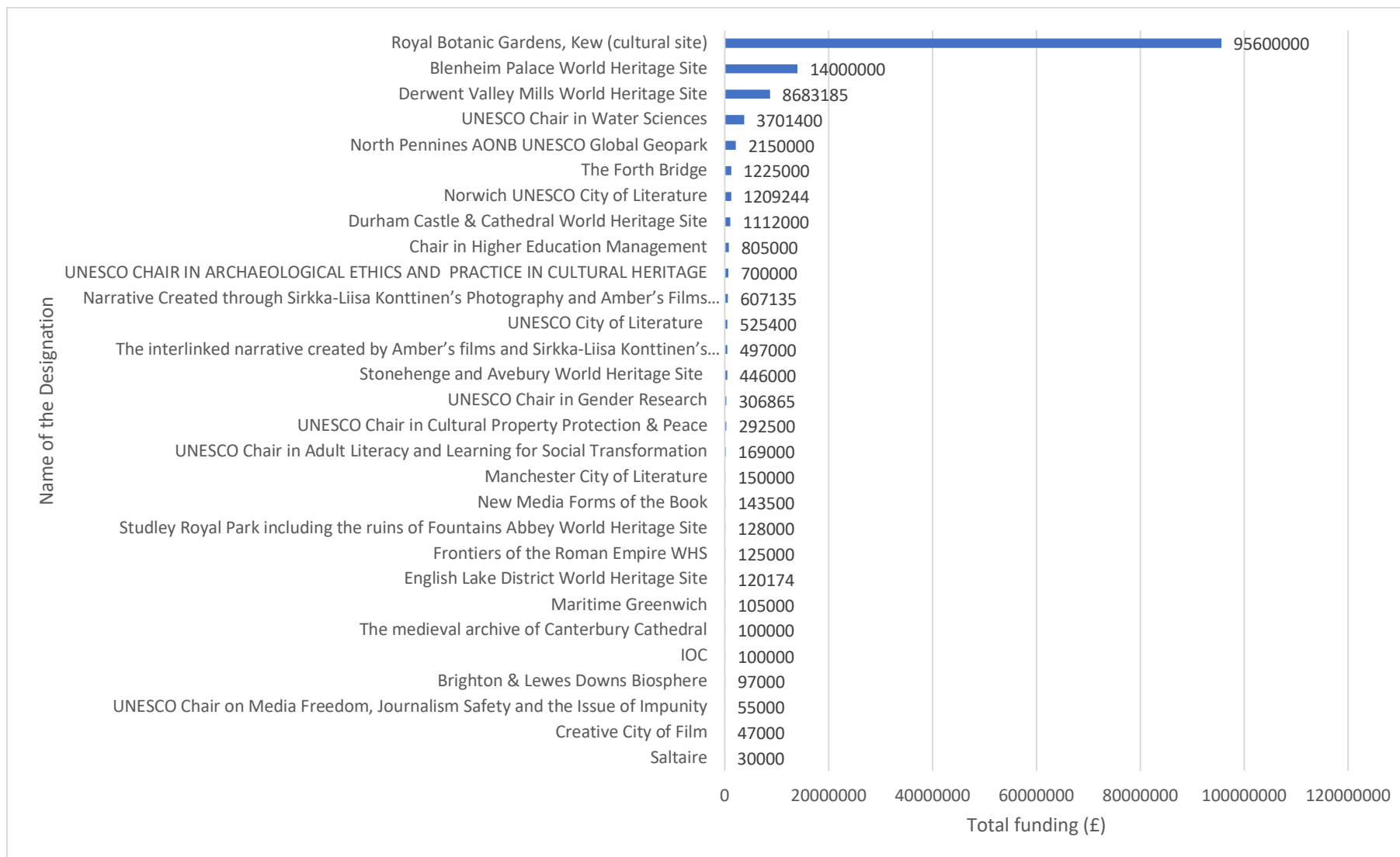


Figure 1: total funding (exchange value) generated by the UK UNESCO designations between 2018 and 2019



“There’s lots of designated funds available. We’ve just been given funds for delivery of some strategies including improving landscape access, sustainable transport, sustainable tourism. So that’s related to designation funds being available for reaching beyond the road scheme itself. Because we are a WHS, we already have a very clear vision and set of aims and policies for the site. [...] We’ve been able to get quite quick access to funds to deliver actions within that management plan and that management plan is the direct result of having WHS status and being able to bring together partners to agree their over-arching vision, having funding to do that work on management planning.

On the other hand, UNESCO Chairs, launched in 1992, promotes the collaboration among Universities and research institutions to generate and disseminate new knowledge (UNESCO, 2019). UNESCO Chairs generated £9m in funding, and consequently they come second to World Heritage Site in terms of exchange value generation. However, Chairs are fundamentally different designations in terms of value generation procedure which demonstrates the variability among designation types.

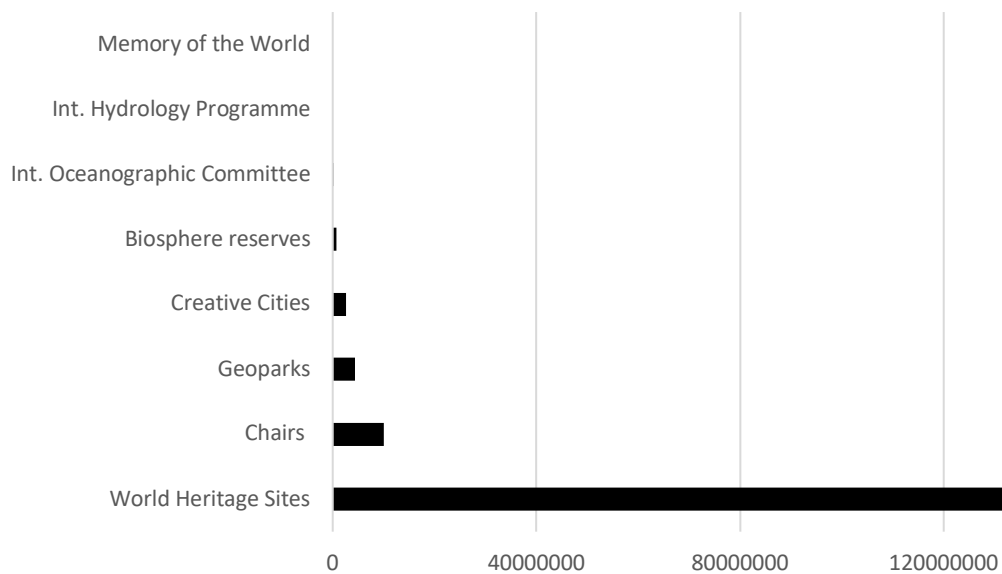


Figure 2: Income generation distribution among UNESCO designations in the UK per type. The heterogeneity among designation types in terms of funding persists when it is studied from a geographical point of view as well. Designations based in England (£133m) attracted considerably more funding between 2018 and 2019 compared to Scotland (£7.7), Wales (£3.4), and Northern Ireland (£8).

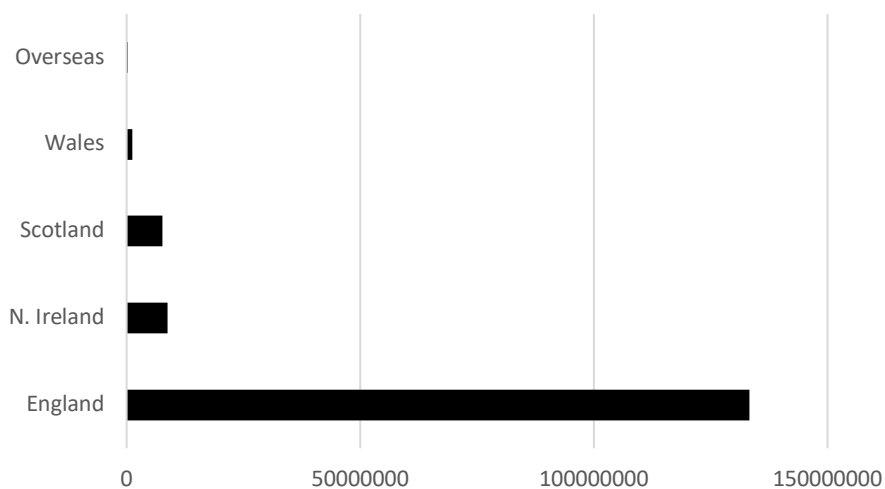


Figure 3: Generated income distribution by UNESCO designations in the UK per country between 2018 and 2019.

One reason that explains the variability is the that the population of England-based designations is significantly bigger compared to the corresponding populations of the other countries. It also highlights the impact the government has, as the main source of funding for designations, on the distribution of income (Figure 3). However, even within countries variability of generated income can be equally high. For instance, in England, London and the South West of the Country generated most of the income between 2018 and 2019. The UK government was the most significant source of income for the all UK designations. It was the source of 29% of the generated income followed by tourism-based (25%). Private legacies are also an important source of income (16%) as well as the National Lottery Heritage Fund (15%).

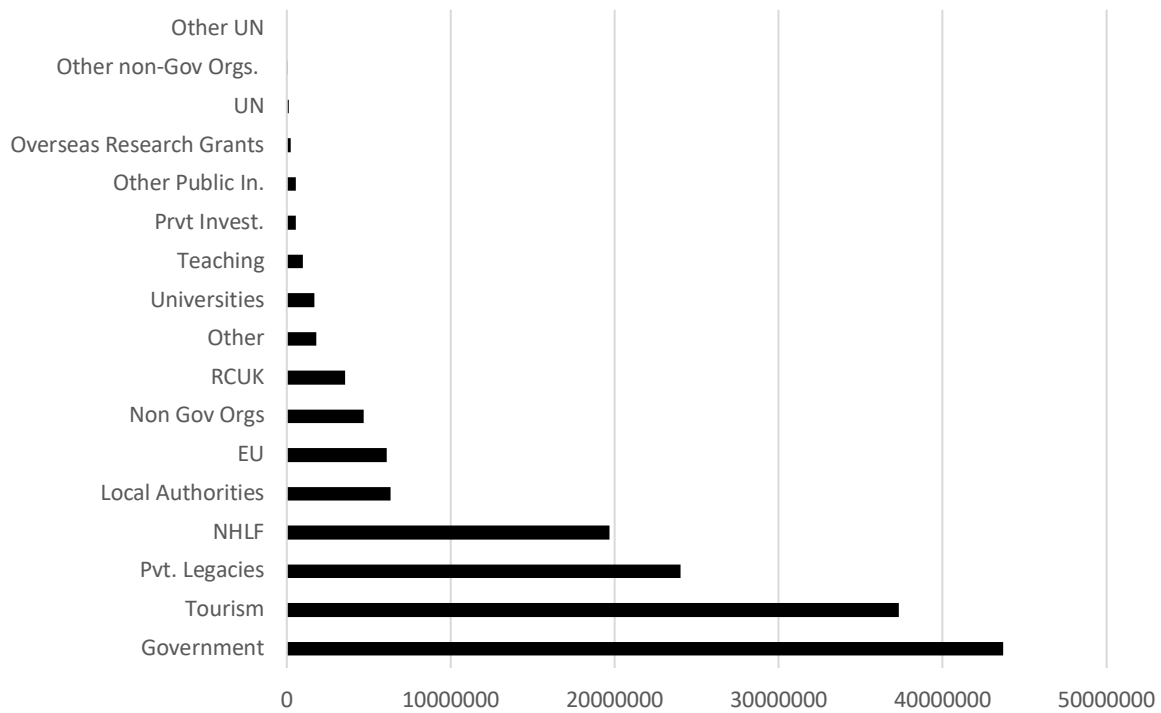


Figure 4: Sources of income for the UNESCO designations in the UK between 2018 and 2019.

#### 4.1 Five value generated processes

Following the discussing vis-à-vis the exchange value generated by the UNESCO designation in the UK, we move to the use value generated which refers to the content and process of value creation (Lepak et al., 2007). We identified 5 main value generating processes: Preservation, Research and knowledge generation, Education, Capacity Building, and Planning. Preservation forms one of the fundamental activities of UNESCO designations. Either in the form of protection of cultural and archaeological sites, protection of intangible cultural heritage and traditions, environment, communities etc. The most prominent designation types related to preservation are world heritage sites, biosphere reserves, geoparks and memory of the world programmes.

On the other hand, new knowledge generation and understanding is integral to UNESCO and the corresponding designations. Article 5 of the World Heritage Convention, encourages State Parties to to develop scientific and technical studies and research to protect the sites from cultural and natural threats (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2005). As one of the respondents (World Heritage Site 1) mentioned:

“It [UNESCO] really helps us get the funding, get that support that we need to maintain and continue our activities [...]”

Chairs and memory of the world programmes also play an important role in research-based value generation process due to the increased capacity to generate research income. Significant research activity is performed by Geoparks and biospheres related to environmental challenges and problems related to the corresponding sites and ecosystems. International Oceanographic Committee and Hydrology Programmes perform significant research-based value generating processes, but the population of these designations is low compared to the corresponding world heritage sites, chairs and memory of the world programmes.

Education-based value generation process responds to UNESCO's mission to build peace, eradicate poverty and build sustainable development (UNESCO, 2019). This process relates to, but is not limited, to increase awareness among students and the younger generation related to environmental and cultural issues and promote scientific knowledge and study. Particularly the Geoparks, Biospheres and World Heritage Sites promote better understanding between the local population and the landscape in order to preserve and safeguard those against threats. Chairs also play an important role in education as one of the most closely related designation to the educational system organising student exchange programmes and generating teaching related income (Figure 4):

“Formal education is a key aspect of this programme [N. Ireland: Marble Arch Caves Geopark] and one of its most popular events in this field is Science Week. This four-day event is packed with interactive and earth science-linked workshops to engage primary, secondary and tertiary schoolchildren in shared learning about our earth to learn about their shared heritage, their shared geological landscapes. [...] School children on the island of Ireland can come together from both sides of the border”.

Capacity building value generating process, on the other hand, refers to the relationship between the designation and the local, national or international audience involved with the corresponding designation in one way or another. The goal is to develop an ongoing relationship to support local population and empower people to support, preserve and become active member of the community. The capacity building process is crucial because in many cases there can be conflicts between the local populations and the designation while the latter peruses another value generating process (Begashaw, 2017). Partnering with the local population and empowering cultural transformation for the benefit of the population and the designation can be the key to success:

“Bringing people and the environment together in order to build sustainable communities, both locally and globally, lies at the heart of what the Isle of Man UNESCO Biosphere does. In cooperation with Beach Buddies, the biosphere organises regular community clean ups to preserve the island's spectacular beaches, cliffs, glens and forests — all of which provide important habitats for nature, marine, and bird life in the UK”.

Management and planning value generating process refers to the collective activities of the designation related to organisation, structure, and management of the corresponding designations. UNESCO contributes towards that direction by imposing certain criteria, processes and policies required by the designation to maintain their affiliation with UNESCO. Deviating significantly from the criteria risks being stripped of the designation status and the UNESCO's SDGs (Begashaw, 2017):

“[the Jurassic Coast management plan] ... outlines a clear set of responsible, inclusive and sustainable goals and objectives particularly influenced by Articles 4, 5 and 27 of the World Heritage Convention. [...] What we're really proud of, and we do this a lot, we are constantly talking about our global position in this World Heritage family because I think that's one of the key inspirational aspects of the work that we do.”

## 4.2 Value generating processes towards Agenda 2030

Contributing towards the Agenda 2030 is important for all SDGs. This section presents a visualised representation of the contribution of the UNESCO designations in the UK towards the 17 SDGs of the Agenda 2030 (Figure 5). Sankey diagram is used to visualise the activities of the designations, the contribution of the designations towards the SDGs, and through which processes do the designations achieve that contribution. Our aim is to identify a) the central contributors on a designation level, b) the central SDGs on a national level that the UK contributes towards the most, and c) the key value generating processes that are used to achieve that contribution.

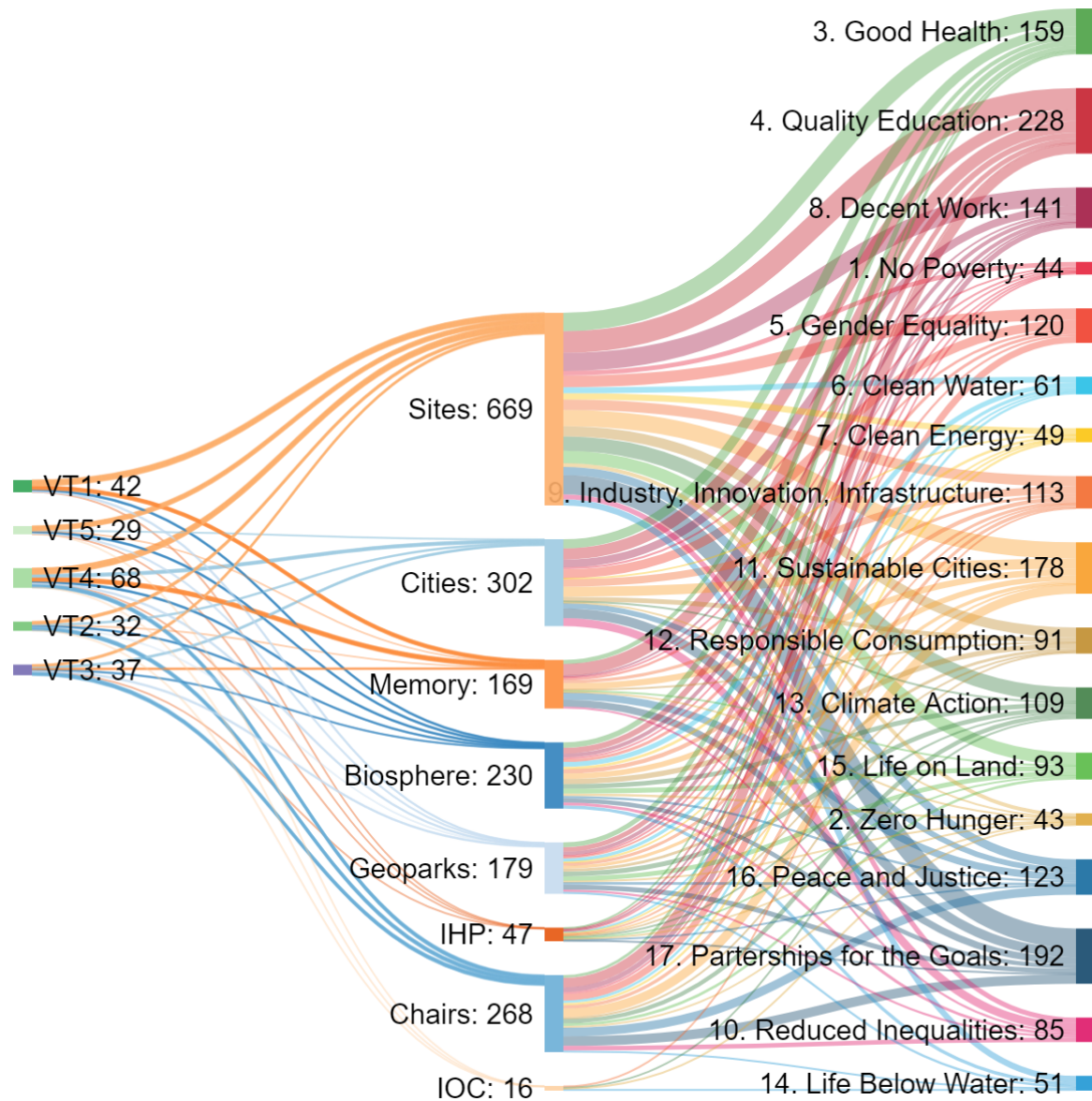


Figure 5: Sankey diagram depicting the relative contribution of the designations to SDGs via the identified value creation processes. VTs on the left side of the diagram stand for the value generation processes: VT1: Preservation, VT2: Research, VT3: Education, VT4: Capacity Building, VT5: Planning & Management.

The diagram (Figure 5) consists of three tiers. The first (middle) tier consists of the designation types. The second tier (right side) consists of the 17 SDGs. Finally, the third tier (left side) consists of the identified five value generating processes. The width of the flows is used to proportionate the flow relative to the designation's contribution. The flow between the designation types and the SDGs is determined by the responses to the questionnaire while the flow between the designation types and the value generation processes by the number of designations that focus on the corresponding process. The analysis takes place on the aggregate level of designation type as opposed to the individual designation for clarity purposes.

On a national level, the UK, in terms of UNESCO designations, has a significant contribution towards Quality Education (SDG 4). This is not unexpected given the reputation of the UK world-wide of the education system. The second biggest contribution of the UK designations (collectively) is directed towards SDG 17 (Partnerships for Goals). The UK designations, given the organisational limitations they face on both structural and resource level, prioritise partnerships to be able to meet their operational goals. Following that, significant contributions are directed towards SDGs 3 (Good Health), 8 (Decent Work) and 16 (Peace and Justice). On the other hand, the lowest contribution is observed towards SDGs 4 (No Poverty), 2 (Zero Hunger), 7 (Clean Energy) and 14 (Life below water). It is expected for an advanced economy such as the UK one to have limited contribution towards SDGs related to hunger (SDG 2). However, it is interesting to perform an in-depth analysis on why the contribution to certain SDGs is lower rather than higher. For instance: SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities). This analysis goes beyond the scope of this paper.

The framework also permits to delve deeper into the value generating process. It is expected for world heritage sites, as the most successful UNESCO programme, to be the biggest contributor towards the SDGs. However, it is interesting to explore how the sites generate value. Figure 5 shows that the primary value generation processes employed by world heritage sites is through a) preservation, b) capacity building and c) management and planning. The viewpoint can be also reversed using the diagram. We can argue that world heritage sites, as the biggest contributors towards SDG 4 (Quality Education), they achieve that via the three value generating procedures mentioned above. This can be used to compare and assess the designations' contribution relative to other types, such as Chairs for example, which are significant contributors towards SDG 4 but in that case mainly through a) research, b) preservation and c) education. As a result, the framework can be used to identify complementarities and substitution effects among designations. This can be very useful for planning and creating network effects and synergies among the designation increasing their efficiency as contributors towards Agenda 2030.

## **5. Conclusions**

UNESCO is a very complex, global, organisation which consists of different types of entities and experiences different levels of agency in terms of policy implementation. One of the most important elements of UNESCO are the designations which are called to support the UNESCO's goals in close collaboration with the states that host these designations. As a new framework emerged in 2005 by UNESCO, namely Agenda 2030 consisting of 17 Development Goals, the role of the designations has become even more prominent as vehicles of the states' contribution towards the Agenda 2030. However, it is not clear how this can be achieved, and research has been very limited. This paper aims to remedy this gap in the literature by presenting a unifying framework to assess the value generated by the UNESCO designations based in the UK. More specifically, based on a sample of 74 designations (out of 93) the framework aims to a) assess the exchange (economic value) of UNESCO contribution in the UK, b) identify the main value generating processes to achieve that, and c) how the designations contribute towards Agenda 2030. Our research estimated the UNESCO economic contribution of the UK-based designations to £151m. This number may underestimate the contribution as it does not

include all designations. Moreover, we identified 5 main value generating processes. Namely: 1) preservation, 2) research, 3) education, 4) capacity building, and 5) planning and management. Moreover, we ranked the contribution of the different designation types to the 17 SDGs. The framework can be used not only to assess the contribution of the designation towards Agenda 2030 but also identify synergies and complementarities among designation tuning and refining their activities facilitating more management and planning efficiency. However, there is a couple of bias sources that need to be taken into account: first, the framework does not take into consideration the entire population of designations and all designation types. For instance, it omitted the L'OREAL awards from the analysis which may explain the limited contribution of the UK designations to certain SDGs. Second, the evaluation of the contribution towards SDGs is based on the personal assessment of the respondents and may vary. For future research purposes, attempting an in-depth analysis of the why certain designation contribute towards certain SDGs can help understand better the process and offer better insights towards building a more efficient network.

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