

Framing Sustainable Conservation Through Site Management: A National Guideline Proposal for Türkiye's World Heritage

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Abstract: Since 2005, UNESCO has required all World Heritage sites to have a heritage management plan. This is a complex and dynamic process that involves many stakeholders and requires a well-defined system for time management and operational efficiency. Therefore, this study developed a comprehensive and systematic national guideline proposal for the sustainable management of World Heritage Sites in Türkiye, based on national legislation, existing approved management plans, international charters, declarations on the subject and national guidelines for management plans in other countries. Other processes included community involvement and expert participation, including a survey. Although there are approved national management plans in Türkiye, they lack a systematic approach. The study identified the main requirements and criteria for the preparation of a sustainable management plan, its content, the identification/participation process of stakeholders and a balanced and sustainable cultural heritage policy and emphasized that the management plans prepared are not the end product but should ensure that the monitoring and review processes are continuous. The management plan guideline developed with this study contributes to the understanding of the key factors/ criteria for sustainable cultural heritage management in Türkiye and can serve as a basis for the development of specific guidelines for other similar countries.

Keywords: Sustainable Heritage Management, Participatory Approaches, Site Management Guidelines, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Türkiye

1. Introduction

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines monuments of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) in terms of history, art and science as cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is an important part of the layers that make up a society's identity (Jokilehto & Cameron, 2008). Effective protection should be ensured to preserve these properties that allow people to connect to the place where they live, that give them a sense of belonging and that are tangible documents of the past, and to pass them on to future generations with minimal destruction. Therefore, the sustainability of heritage conservation is one of the most challenging factors in achieving this.

After the events of the 19th and 20th centuries, such as the Industrial Revolution and the World Wars, the concept of preservation, whose importance has rapidly increased, has taken on an international dimension. One of the most important tasks of UNESCO, which was founded to contribute to world peace through international cooperation in the fields of education, science and culture, is to compile a worldwide inventory of intangible and tangible cultural properties of Outstanding Universal Value and to ensure their preservation. In this context, the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural Heritage (CPWCH) was drawn up in 1972 and signed by the States Parties, including Türkiye (UNESCO, 1972). The CPWCH emphasizes that cultural and natural properties of Outstanding Universal Value must be protected not only by the state in which they are located, but also by humanity as a whole (Jokilehto, 2006). Articles 1 and 2 of the Convention precisely define this cultural and natural heritage, and Article 5 states that this cultural and natural heritage should be included in comprehensive planning programs (UNESCO, 1972). UNESCO has determined that each property included in the CPWCH should be protected through a sustainable and holistic conservation plan. To ensure this, the concept of area management was developed in 2000 with the Cairns Decisions (UNESCO, 2000). The importance of the concept of area management commissioned by UNESCO has

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grown over time and is increasingly well understood. In particular, "a balanced, transparent, participatory and circular system definition" is crucial in the management of sites in order to preserve their Outstanding Universal Value, authenticity and integrity. Sites that fulfil these criteria are inscribed on the World Heritage List (WHL) after approval by the World Heritage Committee (WHC). In accordance with the World Heritage (WH) Convention, the members of the WH Committee are elected every 6 years from 21 representatives of the States Parties. However, in order to increase the representativeness of the Committee, the States Parties are voluntarily elected as members of the Committee every four years (UNESCO, 2025a). According to Liuzza and Meskell (2021), the fact that the members of the Committee were selected mainly from archaeological disciplines when the first committees were established, and later from economics and politics, has led to criticism that the selection criteria have to be changed. The repressive attitude of the European states in the commissions leads to a monopolization of the UNESCO WHL (Liuzza & Meskell, 2021). Prior to this criticism of monopolization, an evaluation of the sites selected in this organization, which had aimed to protect World Heritage since 1975, was carried out in the mid-1980s (Ryan & Silvanto, 2009). These evaluations identified problems such as the number of properties in Europe and the greater representation of Christian artefacts. In response, UNESCO adopted the 'Global Strategy for a Balanced, Representative and Trustworthy World Heritage' in 1994 (UNESCO, 1994). These strategies emphasized concepts such as life, lived experience and human value to change the perception of cultural heritage as monumental structures, and the concepts of OUV were thus reshaped. UNESCO has organized studies with experts from different regions and thematic areas to increase diversity in the WHL. In addition to these arrangements, it was pointed out that the distribution between cultural, natural and mixed categories was quite unbalanced; therefore the Cairns Decisions were intended to establish a balance between these distributions (Labadi, 2005). However, when looking at the proportion of WHL at the regional level, it can be seen that Europe and North America continue to dominate with a rate of 46.47 per cent (UNESCO, 2025b). Countries in Europe and North America with numerous World Heritage Sites, such as England, Scotland, Germany and the USA, have adopted the concept of site management to ensure the sustainability of protection and regular monitoring, and have established specific guidelines for the heritage assets within their boundaries (Ringbeck, 2018; Historic Environment Scotland, 2016; EU, 2012; Parks Canada, 2008; National Park Services, 2010; English Towns Forum, 1998). The prestige that heritage sites gain with their inclusion in the WHL increases the importance of their protection through a balanced conservation policy. Therefore, urbanization activities, tourism and the preservation of identity should be at the center of national and local policy (Logan & Smith, 2015).

In Türkiye, the first efforts in area management were made through the Pamukkale Area Management and Presentation Plan in 2002 and the Çatalhöyük Management Plan in 2004, both of which preceded the current legal framework (Ulusan, 2016). However, these early plans were not put into practice. UNESCO's 2004 warning to include Istanbul's historic zones on the List of World Heritage in Danger - due to unregulated urban growth and the lack of a disaster-prepared conservation plan - led to a rapid acceleration of legal action in Türkiye (UNESCO, 2004). As a result, Law No. 5226 on the Management of Sites, which clarified definitions, draft laws and functions and regulated the existing Law No. 2863 on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, came into force in 2004 (Official Gazette, 2004). In 2005, the Regulation on the Procedures and Principles for the Establishment and Duties of Site Management Authorities and the Designation of Management Areas was issued, marking the beginning of practical implementation efforts on area management studies (Official Gazette, 2005). Based on 2025 data, Türkiye has 22 entries in the UNESCO WHL and has approved 33 site management plans since the implementation of the legal framework in 2005 (UNESCO, 2025c; MoCT, 2025).

In Türkiye, 79 sites have been nominated for the UNESCO Tentative List in 2025 (UNESCO, 2025c), and the issue of area management is becoming increasingly important there. Although international

guidelines provide useful templates for site management planning, their lack of integration into Türkiye's national laws, regulations and administrative procedures, and their lack of harmonization with the existing cultural heritage inventory and bureaucratic structures, has led to various implementation challenges. Analysing the 33 approved management plans prepared in Türkiye, five basic processes were identified that should be included in the management plans in accordance with the Regulation on the Management of Sites: Stakeholder Participation Strategies, Analysis and Definition, Assessment of the General Situation, Determination of the General Approach and Monitoring and Review Strategies (Official Gazette, 2005). However, when analysing the sections of the process and the management plans (MP), several problems are encountered. One of them is the lack of standardization in the plans, with some even lacking basic contents. In addition, the preparation of the plans has taken quite a long time due to the delays caused by the bureaucratic approval and preparation system.

A review of international practice and analysis of studies on site management shows that effective and sustainable management of cultural heritage sites relies on a cyclical, participatory and balanced approaches to planning and are to be compatible with the bureaucratic processes of countries (Orbasli & Cesaro, 2020; Albert et. al, 2007; Operational Guidelines, 2025). In recent years, countries have therefore begun to draw up their own guidelines for management plans that comply with both their national laws/regulations and international documents. Against this background, the proposed guideline is important as it integrates these principles into a structure that is consistent with national legislation and conservation policy and provides a coherent and adaptable model for the management of cultural heritage sites in Türkiye with the above objectives.

The main contribution of this study is therefore, the development of a national guideline for the management of cultural heritage sites in Türkiye, which is based on international standards for sustainable conservation. Studies on the management of cultural heritage sites in Türkiye have mostly remained at the level of theses/dissertations or at the level of management of a specific area, and no systematic or general guideline have yet been developed (Şevik, 2022; Öncüer, 2021; Ordu Güner, 2021; Aksoyak, 2019; Ünal Ayas, 2019; Bogenç, 2016; Ayrancı, 2007; Kilit & Dişli, 2023; Kaynaş & Dişli, 2022; Parlak & Dişli, 2021; Özyurt & Dişli 2021; Bülbül Bahtiyar & Dişli, 2020). The proposed guideline fills this gap by describing the individual stages of the complex planning process in order to improve efficiency and consistency. For sites nominated for UNESCO World Heritage status, complete and accurate management plans are essential, especially given the increasing documentation requirements. This study thus contributes not only to national planning practice, but also to Türkiye's international representation.

In addition, the lack of inter-institutional coordination following the approval of the plan and the inadequate authority and job description of the site manager hinder implementation. Existing management plans in Türkiye are finalized between 1-7 years. This long preparation time reflects the lack of a systematic process and bureaucratic delays. However, a management plan is a cyclical process that builds on actions, strategy, monitoring and evaluation, all of which need to be clearly defined. Given these challenges, this study aims to develop a specific guideline for area management plans in Türkiye ensuring:

- To create a smooth process,
- To shorten the preparations,
- To ensure the formal coherence of the prepared plans,
- To comply with the existing legislation in Türkiye,
- To support the preparation of clear, understandable, and complete plans,
- To prepare a balanced, transparent, participatory, and circular guideline as a reference for the technical part of the work for all responsible institutions.

2. Methodology

This study uses a combination of analyses of the current national status and inter-national priorities to identify the key stages in developing a management plan/guideline for the sustainable management of cultural heritage sites specifically for Türkiye. It includes the analysis of national legislation and approved management plans for World Heritage Sites in Türkiye, as well as an analysis of related research priorities and international legislation and management plans for heritage sites. Based on this framework, a hierarchical proposal for sustainable management guideline in Türkiye was prepared. The process of preparing the guideline consists of 4 stages that include international declarations and organizations, intercontinental comparisons, national guidelines of the countries and the laws and management plans prepared in Türkiye (Table 1). In addition, expert interviews were conducted during the preparation phase of the guideline. The most important participants were experts from the Ministry of Culture, municipalities and academia. Therefore, the decision of Necmettin Erbakan University of Science and Technology Ethics Committee dated 09.02.2023 with the number 2023/02 was applied and approved for this study to conduct interviews with the relevant bodies of the relevant institutions during the preparation period of the guideline proposal for the Sustainable Management Plan in Türkiye.

Table 1

Stages in the Development of a Guideline for Site Management in Türkiye (Prepared by the Authors)

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
1.INTERNATIONAL BASES	1.INTERNATIONAL STUDIES	1.NATIONAL MANAGEMENT PLANS	1. GUIDELINE PROPOSAL
2. LEGAL BASES			2. FIELD WORK
3.INTERNATIONAL GUIDLINES	2. REGIONAL STUDIES	3. NATIONAL GUIDLINES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated Protection • Interdisciplinary Study • Sustainable Conservation • International Requirements • UNESCO WHC • Protection Law in Türkiye 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circular • Monitorable • Can be improved • Detailed Analysis Process • Balanced • Participant • Clear • Aligned with national safeguarding legislation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Titles from the Regulation • Titles from international studies • Titles from the analyses of Türkiye Management Plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of the guideline with all headings and subheadings in the context of the determined criteria and legal framework • Explanation of each title in detail • Testing the prepared guide in the selected area

Stage 1: In this stage, the existing laws on the site management, the declarations and recommendations of international organizations, the national and international guidelines and regulations on site management are examined (Table 2).

Table 2

Nationally and Internationally Reviewed Studies (Guidelines, Regulations, Charters, Laws) for the Creation of a National Guideline for Türkiye (Prepared by the Authors)

1. INTERNATIONAL BASES	2. LEGAL BASES	3. INTERNATIONAL GUIDELINES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Venice Charter (1964), • Amsterdam Declaration (1975) • Recommendations on the Protection and Contemporary Role of Historic Sites / Nairobi (1976) • Washington Regulations (1987), the Regulations on the Protection and Management of Archeological Heritage (1990) • Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (2023) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The legal framework in Türkiye. It is the Law No. 2863 on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage (1983), Procedures and Principles for the Establishment • Duties of the Site Management Protection Authority and the Determination of Management Sites (2015) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidelines from international organizations. These include the Management Guidelines for World Heritage Sites (ICCROM) • Guidelines for Management Planning of Protected Areas (IUCN)

Stage 2: In this stage, for the detailed examination of the content and systematics of site management, two sample countries, England and Germany, which have their own approved national guidelines were identified, which can serve as an example for Türkiye. The following points were taken into account when determining these countries;

- Countries that contribute to the conceptual dimension and implementation of the concept of conservation,
- Türkiye's understanding of conservation in terms of legal regulations is in line with European countries,
- Both countries regularly include WHS in the UNESCO WHL,
- The countries have established guidelines for site management at national level,
- The accessibility of the prepared guidelines has been defined as a criterion.

The systematic institutions and policies of Germany and England were analyzed on the basis of their policies (Ringbeck, 2018; Historic Environment Scotland, 2016; English Towns Forum, 1998). As a result of these analyzes, suggestions were made for the meaning, process, and development of site management planning.

In addition, international studies on site management planning have been analyzed in detail. The bibliography published by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 2010 (UNESCO-ICOMOS Documentation Centre, 2010) and more recent studies were consulted. The international studies were separated according to their themes and the studies dealing with national themes were analyzed as they appear in the bibliography, with a comparison then being made between continents. These sections are: African Continent, Arabian Peninsula, Asia and Pacific Region, Europe and North America and Latin America and the Caribbean. Among these international studies, 24 studies that have developed a specific methodology/standard for management plans were analyzed in detail to take the case of Türkiye as an example (UNESCO-ICOMOS Documentation Centre, 2010).

Stage 3: At this stage of the study, the legal procedures and national regulations applied in Türkiye, as well as the main structure of nationally approved site management plans, were analysed in detail. Türkiye's Regulation on the Content and Procedures for the Establishment and Tasks of the Cultural Heritage Management Council and the Identification of Management Sites (2005) (hereinafter referred to as Türkiye Regulation on the Management of Cultural Heritage Sites), which applies to the planning

of cultural heritage management in Türkiye, was analyzed in terms of the identification of sites, the determination of responsible institutions and individuals, the formation of the necessary commissions, the distribution of tasks and the content of the management plan.

Stage 4: At this stage, introduction and explanation of the national guideline for Türkiye is determined/proposed in accordance with the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, the recommendations on Site Management Plans (SMPs) in international guidelines, the content of the site management guidelines in the England and German examples, the regulations applied in Türkiye and the data from the approved SMPs. The guide is divided into five main sections, each providing brief explanations of the information to be included under each heading. This ensures that the fundamental processes are fully incorporated into each management plan. The analysis section, which allows for customisation for each area, is highlighted as particularly important, and the need to identify local stakeholders is explained. To support the coordination and continuity of interdisciplinary work – an important aspect of area management planning – the guide provides necessary explanations on task distribution, clear definition of authority and responsibilities, and the scheduling of meetings at appropriate intervals to bring together relevant stakeholders. To ensure the smooth operation of the cyclical management plan model, sections on review and revision are included, with recommendations for appropriate arrangements and the preparation of forms and minutes to monitor these processes. This clarifies each step of the management plan preparation and implementation processes, which can easily become complex, making the planning process understandable and practical.

3. Results

3.1. Results obtained from stage 1

As a result of the analyses in Stage 1 explained in Methodology Section 2, the following findings can be stated:

- The guidelines drawn up by UNESCO and ICOMOS have been recognized and implemented worldwide. In terms of site management planning, which is a dynamic process with many influences, the guidelines for the implementation of individual World Heritage Sites (WHS) are not yet sufficient.
- The protected sites included in the UNESCO World Heritage List attract many tourists thanks to their good reputation. For this reason, studies have been carried out to keep tourism in balance.
- New methods proposed for site management planning include collecting and tracking data in a shared system, moving towards greater stakeholder involvement and participatory policies.
- Studies conducted on sustainable site management have emphasized the value and importance of the living culture of local people in conservation planning (Landorf, 2009). They explain that it is impossible to apply the strict and restrictive conservation recommendations of international guidelines in the same way in every protected area (Smith, 2006).
- The stakeholder participation studies emphasize the importance of giving stakeholders the opportunity to express themselves and to develop a communication-oriented management plan for the site. It is assumed that the head of site management should be someone with high communication and management skills who can deal with conflicting interests in order for the process to work properly.

3.2. Results obtained from stage 2

The policies of the two example countries, Germany and England, which have much experience with site management plans, are analyzed in Table 3 under the headings Site Management Plan Content and Site Management Plan Development in order to develop a proposal for a sustainable site management

guideline for Türkiye (Figure 1, Table 3). The Site Management Plan Content heading indicates the existing content of the plan for each country, and the Site Management Plan Development heading includes the interpretations of these existing contents and possible transfer knowledge values for developing a proposal for a sustainable site management guideline for Türkiye.

Figure 1

Table of the Change in the Number of WHL Countries by year Germany, England, Türkiye (Prepared by the Author According to UNESCO 2025e Data)

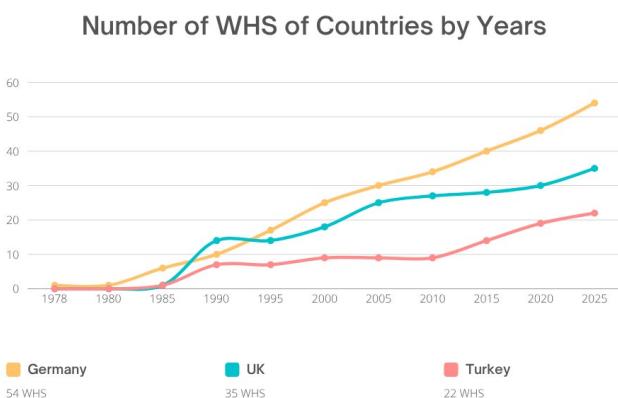


Table 3

The Content of the SMP England - Germany and Recommendations for Developments (Prepared by the Authors from Ringbeck, 2018; Historic Environment Scotland, 2016; English Towns Forum, 1998)

	Content of Management Plan	Development of Management Plan
England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The SMP should have a cyclical structure. A comprehensive definition of the site should be made. The site should be evaluated through analysis and implementation should only begin after the analysis has been completed. The measures and strategies to be implemented after the analysis should be clearly defined. The elements that threaten the site should be clearly identified. It is important to hold consultation meetings when decisions and measures are taken. Decisions, measures, and their implementation should be explained step by step. Plans should include checklists at the end of each section. A reporting system should be established under existing protection laws to identify problems immediately. A transparent SMP should be established 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The draft management plan for the site should be prepared with the participation of all stakeholders. It is important that the main stakeholders accept the decisions made. Communication between stakeholders in site management planning must be ensured. Public interest and support are important for a successful SMP. The conservation plan should be explained to the inhabitants of the protected site. The implementation and effectiveness of the plan should be monitored.

Table 3 (Continued)

Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and administrative measures should be taken to develop an effective AMP. • For the SMP to be successful, the boundaries and buffer zones should be clearly defined. • The management system should be explained and the responsible institutions and bodies providing technical expertise should be listed. • Organizations and individuals responsible for the SMP, procedures, and responsibilities should be defined. • Accurate survey results and visual analysis should be documented to enable the responsible authorities to make effective conservation decisions for the site. • The risk management and regular reporting sections are important. • Short-term (2-5 years) and long-term (5-30 years) projects should be defined. • Monitoring and quality control are important indicators for measuring and assessing conservation status. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a political concept of the 21st century, sustainability should be implemented in the AMP. • A coordination office or coordination unit for major projects should be established. • Modularized maintenance plans should always be ensured for a more comprehensive and complete conservation. • The maintenance module should keep the owner and the conservation specialist in contact with each other for long-term maintenance planning. • The development and evaluation of appropriate structures and procedures for carrying out interventions at regular intervals plays a key role.
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An examination of the ICOMOS bibliography has been done and the results on the Intercontinental comparison of site management procedures show that a number of topics and conflicts have region-specific focus (UNESCO-ICOMOS Documentation Centre, 2010).

The distinction in the bibliography was used as a basis for intercontinental comparative studies and analyzed under 5 headings: Africa, Arabian Peninsula, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) (Table 4).

Table 4

Intercontinental Comparison of site Management Procedures (Prepared by the Authors on the Basis of Research UNESCO-ICOMOS Documentation Centre, 2010)

African Continent

The African continent illustrates the problems that arise from the application of strict European conservation measures in this rich geography. Sites are objectified through protection decisions that remove human actions that are part of the beliefs from the site (Meskell, 2018). Communication with the local community is also criticized for being too weak in the context of stakeholder participation in site management planning.

Arabian Peninsula

The studies on the Arabian Peninsula identified shortcomings in the planning and implementation of site management on the Arabian Peninsula and made recommendations. Educational policy measures were proposed to increase public participation, which is one of the most important prerequisites for participatory planning. As part of this planning, it was proposed to provide training at primary school level to increase public interest and awareness of cultural heritage. In 2018, the Integrated Management Plan model was published, which was created in collaboration with UNESCO. This plan aims to involve the public more in the conservation process. This plan was implemented at the Petra heritage site (Orbasli & Cesaro, 2020).

Asia and Pacific Region

In the Asia and Pacific region, the economic and cultural threats posed by tourism to heritage sites are highlighted, with field studies emphasizing the need for circular and balanced site management policies and the MUMA project to train qualified staff was suggested (Albert et. al., 2007).

Table 4 (Continued)**Europe and North America**

In Europe and North America, with the exception of the evaluation studies, some specific issues have been addressed. These include the measures taken for Aboriginal peoples in Canada to play a more effective role in their WHS, a proposal for an education plan for young people in Germany and the importance of the buffer zone in Scotland.

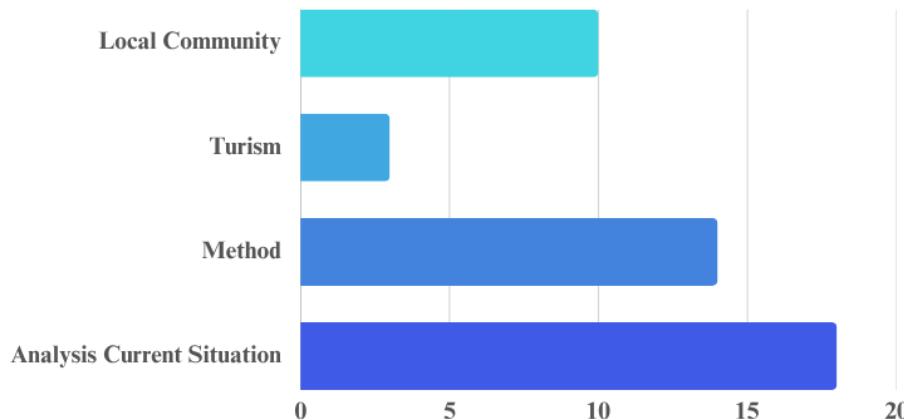
Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

The analysis of the LAC studies shows that they mention the development and implementation of a management plan with the support of UNESCO in an endangered WHS, the explanation of the tourism planning process in the WHS and the contribution of the local population to the planning process in planning the management of the site.

According to the data obtained from the intercontinental comparison table, three points come to the fore when analyzing the criteria to be considered for a successful outcome in site management planning (Figure 2). These are tourism planning, the involvement of the local population in the process, and the planning method. Therefore, to ensure successful management of these sites, a participatory, transparent, balanced, and circular site management policy should be created.

Figure 2

Inter-Continental SMP Content Comparison (Prepared by the Authors)

**3.3. Results obtained from stage 3**

According to the main regulation of Türkiye on the area management planning, which has a total of 3 pages, the content of a site management plan (SMP) consists of 5 basic headings. These headings are;

- Assessment of the current situation
- Analyzing the territory
- Definition of the vision for the territory and definition of the main strategies
- Defining the work program, timetable and projects
- Defining monitoring, evaluation and training processes (Official Gazette, 2005).

The 33 site management plans prepared and approved in Türkiye were analyzed based on these 5 headings and their contents (MoCT, 2025). The content of the SMPs in Türkiye is open to interpretation by the team preparing the plan, which is why there are differences in the published/approved management plans. The absence of one of the 5 basic processes in the prepared management plans makes this plan incomplete. In this context, 5 of the approved management plans

can be characterized as incomplete. Each of the approved management plans prepared has defined its own methods and interpreted the processes differently. As the lack of uniformity of language on this issue makes it difficult to review the plans produced and leads to deficiencies being overlooked, standardization on this issue is therefore extremely important. Therefore, there is a need for a reference work on local management planning in Türkiye that:

- takes account of international recognition,
- is designed under the existing legal regulations,
- defines responsibilities and tasks,
- defines the management, planning, implementation, and monitoring of processes,
- contains the necessary information for the creation of comprehensible and measurable action plans,
- ensures that the plans to be drawn up are based on objective scientific data,
- describes the phases of the technical work to be carried out,
- offers flexibility in the sites required,
- is drawn up with a circular, participatory, balanced, and transparent policy,
- defines the data to be obtained for each phase and the results to be expected from this data.

3.4. Results obtained from stage 4: Proposed guideline and its explanation

Based on the above Stages, the sustainable site management guideline proposed in this study consists of four sections and references that provide general information on site management planning, detailed explanations of the process, stakeholders and their roles, the analysis process, the development of measures and strategies, and the monitoring and review process. These sections are included under the following headings as Mandatory-Additional-to-Specialisation sub-groups (see Table 7):

1. Introduction
2. Site management Plan Preparation Stages
3. Site management Plan Module
4. Explanation of the Site management Plan Administration Module
5. References

The topics covered in these sections are listed in subheadings and have been developed based on the UNESCO criteria, the Protection Law No. 2863 and the legal basis together with the Türkiye Regulation on the Management of Protected Sites.

1. Introduction: The introduction to the guideline sets out the objectives of developing a site management plan. This section explains the answer to the question of why a management plan should be based on the legal background and the requirements of UNESCO. In addition, the definitions for the terms management site and management plan in Law No. 5226, which supplements the Protection Law No. 2863, are provided. The criteria for cultural heritage sites of Outstanding Universal Value in the UNESCO Implementation Guide are explained.

2. Site management Plan Preparation Stages: This section contains general information on the preparation of upper-level management plans. The institutions responsible for the preparation of the management plan according to the Turkish Regulation on the Management of Sites are mentioned. The stages of preparing the management plan are mentioned step by step and the importance of communication in this process is emphasized. It is emphasized that a successful management plan must be transparent, cyclical, participatory and balanced. The main strategies and action plans are explained and information is given on the headings of the strategies to be drawn up.

3. Site management Plan Module: The Management Plan module is listed in this section. The module devotes a separate section to this module in order to ensure standardization of the

management plans to be drawn up and to avoid confusion. Detailed explanations of the headings are provided in Table 5.

Table 5

Proposed Management Module for Türkiye (Prepared by the Authors)

Management Plan Module	<u>4. Definition of the Vision of the Site and Formulation of the Main Policies</u>
<u>1. Introduction</u>	
1.1. Legal Basis	4.1. Vision
1.2. Institutional Stakeholders (district governor, municipalities and companies)	4.2. Structure of the management plan and stakeholder analysis
1.3. Purpose, method, and scope of the management plan	4.3. Strategies of the management plan 4.3.1 Definition of education strategies 4.3.2 Definition of tourism strategies 4.3.3 Transparent strategies for the management plan 4.3.4 Balanced strategies for the site management plan 4.3.5 Conservation strategies for the site 4.3.6 Budget and fundraising strategies 4.3.7 Capacity building strategies 4.3.8 Monitoring and review strategies 4.3.9 Strategies for the site management plan preparation team 4.3.10. Strategies for Local Stakeholders
<u>2. Determination of the Current Status</u>	
2.1. General information about the site	
2.1.1 Location and geographical structure	
2.1.2 Determination of the physical condition	
2.1.3 Current conservation policies	
2.2. Survey of local population structure and public awareness of the site	
2.3. National, provincial and local stakeholder surveys	
2.4. Activities for the conservation and urbanization of the site	
2.5. Site Value	
2.5.1 Architectural value	5.1. Action Plans
2.5.2 Archaeological value	5.1.1 Education plans
2.5.3 Natural value	5.1.2 Conservation plans
2.6. (Name of the site) as a UNESCO World Heritage Site	5.1.3 Plans for tourism management, operations and promotion
2.6.1 Outstanding Universal Value	5.1.4 Risk and disaster management plans
2.6.2 Value of integrity and authenticity	5.1.5. Transportation - access plans
	5.1.6 Visitor plans
	5.1.7 Participatory management plan policy for local communities
	5.1.8 Budget plans
<u>3. Site Analysis and Assessment</u>	
3.1. Site studies	
3.1.1 Analysis and evaluation of the physical condition of the site	
3.1.2 Analysis of survey studies and assessments	
3.1.3 SWOT analysis	
3.2. Boundary of the conservation site	
3.3. Boundaries of the buffer zone	
	<u>6. Definition of Monitoring, Evaluation and Education Processes</u>
	6.1. Regular monitoring and reporting
	6.2. Review and revision

4. Explanation of the Management Plan Module: This section explains in detail all the headings of the module together with the definitions, the procedure, and the mode of operation, the recommendations, and the legal bases (Table 6).

Table 6

Explanations of Main Sections in the Proposed Management Plan (Prepared by the Authors)

1. Introduction

In this section it is first recommended to include brief information about UNESCO categories and the OUV of the site.

1.1. Legal basis: This section includes suggestions such as references to the relevant UNESCO institutions, international conventions and statutes, as well as underpinning the reasons for protection with the relevant sites and protection decisions that define the legal boundaries of the reasons for protection of the site.

1.2. Institutional stakeholders: In identifying the stakeholders, this section defines the institutions responsible for developing and implementing the plan. In this section, the institutional stakeholders are divided into national stakeholders, regional stakeholders, provincial stakeholders, local stakeholders, universities, non-governmental organizations, and associations.

1.3. Purpose, method and scope of the management plan: This section is divided into three groups: Purpose, Method and Scope. The Purpose sub-section explains the system of a balanced, participatory management plan designed to ensure the sustainable conservation of the protected site. The Method sub-section explains activities such as surveys and field studies as well as stakeholder meetings that are used as methods to create a participatory, balanced, and cyclical management plan. The Scope subsection covers the specifications of the site covered by the management plan and the actions and strategic plans included in the management plan under the main heading.

2. Determining the current status:

This section contains the previous and ongoing studies carried out to determine the current condition of the site. The condition assessment is described in detail under the headings such as physical condition, conservation measures, and population structure.

2.1. General information about the site

2.1.1 Location and geographical structure

2.1.2 Determination of the physical condition

2.1.3 Current conservation measures

2.2. Local population and public awareness survey: In this section, a survey study with the locals in sample case study site is proposed to obtain data on topics such as local people's knowledge of the site, sense of belonging, and willingness to participate in the management plan process.

2.3. National, provincial and local stakeholder surveys: This section includes the surveys conducted with stakeholders in the institutions on responsibilities and accountabilities to measure knowledge of the management plan process and ensure complete planning. Sample questionnaires for the institutions are to be prepared along with the questions.

2.4. Site conservation and urbanization activities: This section is reserved for listing and tracking activities such as maintenance, repairs, restorations, and urbanizations that were carried out at the site. This study recommends compiling the activities in this section in a table with examples to facilitate tracking.

2.5. Value of the site: In this section, the values of the site are described and possible protective measures are outlined. It is emphasized that this section is not a literature review, but an assessment of the current situation.

2.5.1 Archaeological sites

2.5.2 Architectural structures/buildings

2.6 (Site name) as a UNESCO World Heritage Site: This section emphasizes the importance of the definitions to be made. This section contains statements that form the basis for the UNESCO World Heritage nomination. The definitions should be consistent with the UNESCO WHS definitions and terms.

2.6.1 Outstanding Universal Value: This section lists the criteria (Ranges 1-6) identified for the site or heritage asset in the WHL. The reasons for the selection of these criteria should be clearly explained. This section should include an example table for a correct and detailed presentation.

2.6.2 Value of integrity and authenticity: The value of authenticity and integrity, which is one of the most important statements for the UNESCO Committee, should be explained transparently in this section.

Table 6 (Continued)

3. Site Analysis and Assessment

In this section, assessments are made on the basis of the data obtained in the previous section. As a result of these assessments, strategies are defined and action plans are drawn up.

3.1. Field studies: This section is divided into sub-sections, such as the identification of the physical site, the evaluation of the survey studies and the SWOT analysis.

3.1.1 Analysis and evaluation of the physical condition of the site: This section includes findings on topics such as transportation, preservation decisions, preservation issues, threats and risks associated with the site, and promotional activities.

3.1.2 Analysis of survey studies and assessments

3.1.3 SWOT analysis: This section aims to provide detailed data for the strategies to be developed by dividing the analyses in the table into sub-items such as conservation-urban development, promotion and presentation activities, education and awareness.

3.2. Determination of the boundaries of the conservation site

3.3. Determination of the boundaries of the buffer zone

4. Definition of the site's vision and formulation of key actions

4.1 Vision: This is the definition of the vision for the state of the site in the next 15-20 years.

4.2. Structure of the management plan and stakeholder analysis: This section contains comprehensive explanations and groupings of stakeholders. Stakeholders are categorized from the top level into 3 groups (i.e. management, management plan preparation team and local stakeholders) and the authority and responsibilities of each group are defined. A separate table are to be created for these groups with the possible reasons for disagreements and proposed solutions that may arise during the process. To improve communication between stakeholders, a meeting model is to be defined beforehand and explained visually and in writing.

4.3. Strategies/action plans of the management plan: The strategies are grouped under 10 headings, such as education, tourism, transparent site management, balanced site management and nature conservation, and explained with sub-headings. A strategy table has been created for each heading, consisting of objectives, action plans and monitoring indicators. These tables contain the necessary explanations of the objectives, action plans and monitoring indicators for each heading.

5. Definition of work plans and projects:

To ensure that the action plans drawn up for the site function smoothly, a timetable and a project plan are proposed and defined for each action.

6. Definition of monitoring, evaluation and training processes

6.1. Regular monitoring and reporting: Regular monitoring and reporting is proposed on the basis of the monitoring indicators set out in the strategic plans and the timetable set out in the work plan.

6.2. Review and revision: In this section, the action plans are reviewed by observing their impact after the monitoring process. This section contains a table that facilitates revision decisions by measuring the positive and negative impacts of each action plan for the monitoring process.

5. References: This section contains the written literature studies, legislative articles, regulations, contracts and online data used in the development of the management plan.

This proposed guideline contains many suggestions and recommendations that go beyond the requirements of Law No. 2863 on the Conservation of Cultural Property, the Regulation on the Management of Sites and the UNESCO Implementation Guide. In fact, in addition to the suggestions and recommendations for a guideline for sustainable management planning in Türkiye, a management model/system has been defined and explained in detail with this study.

4. Discussion

International studies have emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary work, ensuring sustainable conservation, the need for communication between experts and the local population in the conservation process and the importance of balanced conservation policies (Gültekin & Uysal, 2018). When analyzing the policies prepared by international organizations, Site Management Plans (SMPs) are intended for a process rather than an outcome, they should provide a complete and accurate

description of the cycle of the system and they should be clear and understandable plans (Feilden & Jokilehto, 1998). SMPs provide the necessary opportunity for stakeholders to express themselves by holding participatory meetings to analyze threats and opportunities. According to the Operational Guidelines for World Heritage Sites, site management plans should include strategies for stakeholder participation, planning, implementation, monitoring and review. The international guidelines that have been developed have subdivided or combined these basic headings into subheadings. Following this review, the basic content that should be included in the SMP was identified as stakeholder identification, planning, implementation, monitoring and review.

When analyzing the guidelines produced by international organizations, the following common points stand out (Feilden & Jokilehto, 1998; English Historic Towns Forum, 1998; European Union, 2012):

- Site management Plans (SMPs) are plans for a process, not for the outcome of products,
- SMPs provide a complete and accurate description of the cycle of the system,
- SMPs provide stakeholders with the necessary information about a site and the associated process,
- SMPs include the creation of clear and understandable plans,
- SMPs include the creation of plans with standards,
- Experts should prepare the analysis part in order to make the right decisions in the planning phase,
- SMPs provide the necessary opportunity for stakeholders to express them-selves by holding participatory meetings to analyze threats and opportunities.

This study, similarly, uses a four-stage methodology described in detail in the Methodology section to develop a site management guideline proposal for Türkiye. The proposed guideline has been prepared with the aim of ensuring the sustainable protection of World Heritage Sites in Türkiye and consists of 6 headings (Table 6) and 5 sections. Each section is explained based on data from the Turkish Republic Heritage Protection Law No. 2863, the Regulation on the Management of World Heritage Sites in Türkiye, studies in international and local literature, and the analysis of national management plans prepared in Türkiye. The guideline provides detailed explanations of the process of managing sites, stakeholders, distribution of responsibilities, and studies on the sites.

According to the four-stage methodology proposed in this study and the Operational Guidelines for World Heritage Sites (UNESCO, 2025), site management plans should include strategies for stakeholder involvement, planning, implementation, monitoring and review. The international guidelines that have been developed have subdivided or combined these basic headings into subheadings. Following this review, the basic content that should be included in the proposed management guideline for Türkiye was identified as stakeholder identification, planning, implementation, monitoring and review (Table 7).

As shown in Table 7, additional subheadings and content should be included to provide a reasonable and legally compliant site management plan structure recommended for Türkiye. Türkiye's current legal procedures, the guides reviewed, and literature research indicate that subheadings are necessary for the principal decision on area management. It is recommended that the main headings specified in the principal decision remain unchanged, and that headings requiring customisation according to the field be added. The contents are listed under the headings "Mandatory-Additional-to-Specialization".

- Mandatory headings mean that, they have to be included in all management plans. They have been determined based on the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, the International SMPs, Operational Guidelines, and the Site Management Regulation of Türkiye.
- Additional headings mean that they may or may not be included in the content of the management plan, depending on the needs of the site. The criteria for the additional heading were created based on data from intercontinental comparisons, data from the examples in England and Germany and data from the approved site management plans in Türkiye.
- Specialization requirements Headings mean that additional content and analyses should be added depending on the specific conditions of the site for which the area management plan is being prepared. The criteria for the specialization needs heading were determined as the data that should be specialized considering the legal, administrative and cultural factors in Türkiye in accordance with the data from the international and national literature on area management planning implementation.

The main headings and recommendations of the proposal for area management planning in Türkiye were determined based on the four-step methodology explained in detail in the section 2 and the suggestions of experts from related institutions. Then, the proposed guideline was implemented at a World Heritage Site included in the Tentative List in 2017, namely Ivrit Cultural Landscape (Author, 2023). It was found that the proposed guideline can be easily applied and that the content is relevant and fits the regulations of Türkiye. Since the main objective of this study is to explain the development of the sustainable site management proposal in detail, the detailed results of its application to Ivrit are not given here.

As part of the preliminary study for the management plan, meetings were held with the institutions responsible for the area management. During this process, the following factors were identified as challenges in the planning of the site management: unclear definition of tasks and responsibilities, unclear timelines in the planning and review processes and reflection of communication deficits between the institutions about the process. In the discussions with the local population in Ivrit Cultural Landscape, the following issues came to the fore: problems in communicating demands to the institutions, the inability to participate in decision-making processes affecting the area and concerns about a negative impact on local culture. Based on the results of this study, it became clear that clarity is needed about the duties and responsibilities of each institution or person involved, the importance of participatory measures during planning and implementation, and the practices for informing the local community and ensuring their involvement and participation in the process. The guideline proposes solutions for these processes through participatory measures in the preparation of plans, in the implementation of management plan templates and in the organization of information meetings.

Table 7

Main Headings and Recommendations of the Area Management Planning Proposal for Türkiye (Prepared by the Authors)

MP Content according to Operational and International Guidelines- Main Content	MP Content according to Operational and International Guidelines- Sub-content	MP Content according to Operational and International Guidelines- Detailed Content
Identifying Stakeholders	<p>1. Assessment of the current situation</p> <p><i>Determine the management, function and protection needs of the site; contact the relevant institutions and organizations</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify interest groups Determine the legal and administrative status Identify stakeholders and responsibilities
Planning Process	<p>2. Analysis of the site</p> <p><i>Identify the importance of the site, the problems and the viability of the site; carry out functional and management analyzes</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine the importance of the site, determine the problems, determine the viability of the site; functional and economic analysis Deepen the analyses on site through surveying studies Determine the site boundary (WHS boundary, buffer zone) AMP flowchart (planning phases - identification of responsible organisations and individuals) Stakeholder analyses Measure stakeholders' knowledge of the area management process Clearly define authorities and responsibilities
Implementation	<p>3. Define the vision for the site and formulate key policies</p> <p><i>Define the management plan, conservation, utilization, presentation and promotion measures, visitor policies and strategies that determine the future vision of the site; incorporate business, management, administrative and financial models; ensure the presentation and promotion of the site on national and international platforms</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vision Business, management, administrative and financial models Focus group meetings Round tables (participation of the local population) Management, conservation, utilization, presentation and promotion, visitor policies and strategies Define the tourism policy Sustainable management policy Policies for the local communities
	<p>4. Define the work program, schedule and projects</p> <p><i>- Define the tasks of the institutions and people who will be involved in the management of the site; prepare work programs, budget analysis and financial resources for their implementation; prepare an action plan for the work to be carried out in the short, medium and long term and define the projects</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare job descriptions for the institutions and people who will be involved in local governance Create work programmes and budget analyses; determine financial resources Draw up an action plan for the work to be carried out in the short, medium and long term and define projects Recommend the protection module Plan risk management Stages and summary of the action plan Local public education policy

Table 7 (Continued)

Monitoring and review	5. Define the monitoring, evaluation and training processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the management plan and prepare training programs for stakeholders • Reporting format • Identify the responsible persons and the procedure for reporting • Format for Monitoring and evaluation • Identify the persons and procedures responsible for monitoring and evaluation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the management plan; develop training programs for the people involved in this process. 	

■ Mandatory headings and contents ■ Additional Headings and contents. ■ Titles to be Specialized

5. Conclusions

The World Heritage List is the result of an inventory initiated by UNESCO to recognize and protect cultural and natural heritage sites of OUV as the common heritage of mankind. In addition to technical and financial support for the sites on this list, studies have been carried out to ensure the preservation of the sites. As a result of these studies, guidelines for management plans have been drawn up to ensure the sustainable protection of the sites. This study has shown that a cyclical system should be established for the sustainable conservation of cultural properties and protected sites for the benefit of the surrounding sites and local people.

When developing the management plan for protected sites, the concept of conservation is considered in a multidimensional way. It ensures that the right steps are taken and the process is followed up on many issues, such as integrated protection of sites, interdisciplinary work, balanced protection policy, correct determination of the values of the site (Rodwell, 2002). The international guidelines that have been produced on this topic have been criticized for remaining within the confines of the European perspective, while offering proposals that are appropriate from a high scale for the world as a whole (Brown et al., 2019; Labadi, 2013). As part of a systematic and sustainable conservation approach, national conservation measures should be taken to keep the sites in balance within the living culture without isolating the sites. Monumental structures, textures and sites that are part of the living culture should be protected without separating them from the habits of the local population to ensure continuity of conservation (Waterton & Smith, 2010). Public participation in this systematic conservation is possible through information sessions and training, as well as by ensuring active participation in the process and its transparent implementation. For a systematic site management plan to function smoothly, it should have a cyclical, transparent and participatory structure developed in accordance with the applicable conservation laws, regulations, institutions and practices of the country in which it is prepared (Messenger & Smith, 2010).

In Türkiye's current legal procedures, the steps for preparing a site management plan are not sufficiently detailed, leading to uncertainties in implementation. The process involves a wide range of stakeholders – technical experts, administrative authorities, universities, local actors, and community members – requiring a clear and interdisciplinary working structure. In order to ensure the effective progress of such a complex system, responsibilities, communication lines, and procedural steps must be explicitly defined. A site management plan should not be regarded as a static final product but as a dynamic and cyclical planning process. Therefore, establishing review and revision mechanisms is crucial. Moreover, conservation should be at the forefront of any management effort, supported by balanced strategies grounded in thorough site analysis. Local communities must be actively involved in this process, informed at regular intervals, and included in the formation of goals and strategies. To maintain transparency, these participatory steps should be documented and their outcomes evaluated. Standardising such practices across all heritage sites will ensure each is managed under a

participatory, cyclical, and balanced framework. The proposed guideline in this study seeks to establish precisely such a systematic and unified approach.

When analyzing the management plans prepared for cultural heritage sites in Türkiye, it is seen that some management plans have different systematics, differ in content and do not contain the 5 basic points of site management plan as advised in national regulations. Thanks to the data obtained from international studies and intercontinental comparisons, the study has identified the requirements for site management plan process, the contents for a guide, the identification of stakeholders and the criteria for field studies. The guideline, which was developed based on research, analysis and literature review, aims to avoid confusion by staging the planning process. It aims to comprehensively define heritage conservation, stakeholder involvement and a balanced and sustainable heritage conservation policy, and emphasizes that the plans produced are not the end product. It ensures that the monitoring and review processes that make the process circular are clearly defined. The guideline also ensures that stakeholder organizations are clearly identified, tasks and duties assigned and monitored.

A major limitation of this study is the exclusion of fieldwork from the scope of this article. Although primary data collection and stakeholder analyses were conducted as part of the broader research process, they were not included here as the main focus of this study is on the conceptual and regulatory framework of the proposed guideline (Author, 2023). However, it should be noted that the guideline was already tested during fieldworks at an archaeological site on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List, the İvriz Cultural Landscape, to demonstrate its practical applicability.

Within the framework of this study, a guideline for the sustainable management of heritage conservation areas in Türkiye was proposed to help achieve international standards in all areas in terms of the legal, administrative and practical aspects of conservation. The need for this study has been emphasized by the guidelines for management plans of other countries that are leading the world with their conservation studies and by the recommendations for special management plans reflected in the indicators from international studies. Furthermore, it is believed that this study can form a basis for the development of specific guidelines for other similar countries.

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