

# World Heritage Essentials

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This part of the guidance is designed to introduce basic World Heritage concepts to a non-specialist audience. The implementation of the World Heritage Convention on the national level can be challenging for States Parties.

The following text explains the basics of [the Convention](#) to better understand its spirit and underlying principles. It further outlines good practices that assist complying with recommended international conservation standards to fully deploy the effectiveness of the Convention and to achieve its ultimate goals. The described indications aim to help readers understand the purpose of requirements described in the [Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention](#), and to act accordingly constructively and proactively.

## History and purpose of the Convention

The [Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage](#), usually referred to as the *World Heritage Convention*, was adopted in 1972 by the UNESCO General Conference. It is an international treaty that seeks to identify, protect, conserve, present and transmit heritage properties of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) to future generations. Places recognized as having an OUV are considered to be of such exceptional cultural and/or natural significance as to transcend national boundaries. Their common importance counts for all humanity and thus needs to be preserved for humankind as a whole. The international community recognizes the capacity of heritage as a source to promote mutual understanding and appreciation and a means to help build peace.

The *World Heritage Convention* is rooted in the recognition that World Heritage belongs to all the peoples of the world, it is passed over generations, and that it is irreplaceable and plays a crucial role in the wellbeing of humankind. Therefore, as stated in a preambular paragraphs of the *Convention* text, 'the deterioration or disappearance of any cultural or natural heritage constitutes a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of all the nations of the world'.

With 194 States Parties in 2023, the *World Heritage Convention* is today one of the most ratified international treaties in history and reflects the shared commitment of States Parties to protect all World Heritage properties included on the UNESCO World Heritage List for present and future generations.

## How does the Convention work?

By ratifying the *Convention*, each State Party pledges to participate in its implementation. This involves international cooperation and assistance to conserve World Heritage properties situated on a Member State's territory and concerns its responsibility to protect heritage in their territories. The *Convention* sets out the duties of States Parties 'to take the appropriate legal, scientific, technical, administrative, and financial measures necessary for the identification, protection, conservation, presentation, and rehabilitation of this heritage (*Article 5 of the Convention*). States Parties to the *Convention* are encouraged to integrate the protection of the cultural and natural heritage into regional planning programmes, set up staff and services at their World Heritage properties, undertake scientific and technical conservation research, and adopt measures that give this heritage a function in the day-to-day life of a community. This commitment extends to the context of new developments and constructions.

Therefore, each State Party to the *Convention* shall try to protect the OUV of World Heritage properties. Such protection needs to be upheld also when facing the need to transition to renewable energies in order to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.

## Decision-making and governing

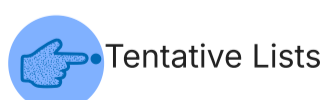
The decision-making and governing bodies of the *Convention* are [the General Assembly of States Parties](#) to the *World Heritage Convention* and [the World Heritage Committee](#). The latter decides among other issues, whether or not to inscribe a nominated site on the World Heritage List, and also examines the state of conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List. The Committee has developed and regularly updates the [Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention](#) (*OG*). This document provides the formal guidance and provisions on how to operationalize the *Convention* and how to fulfil its mission.

The work of the World Heritage Committee is supported by UNESCO's World Heritage Centre, which acts as the Secretariat of the *World Heritage Convention*, and by three Advisory Bodies – the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property ([ICCROM](#)), the International Council of Monuments and Sites ([ICOMOS](#)) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature ([IUCN](#)).

## The World Heritage List

The World Heritage List includes cultural, natural and mixed (cultural and natural) properties which have met at least one of ten criteria of **Outstanding Universal Value** and requirements for authenticity, integrity, as well as protection and management. Sites to be included on the World Heritage List are nominated by States Parties in whose territory the cultural or natural site is located. These nominations undergo an evaluation process and can only be inscribed on the List by the World Heritage Committee.

In addition, cultural landscapes are also recognized as a special category, which are inscribed on the World Heritage List as cultural properties and represent the 'combined works of nature and of man' in line with Article 1 of the *Convention* (*OG 47*).



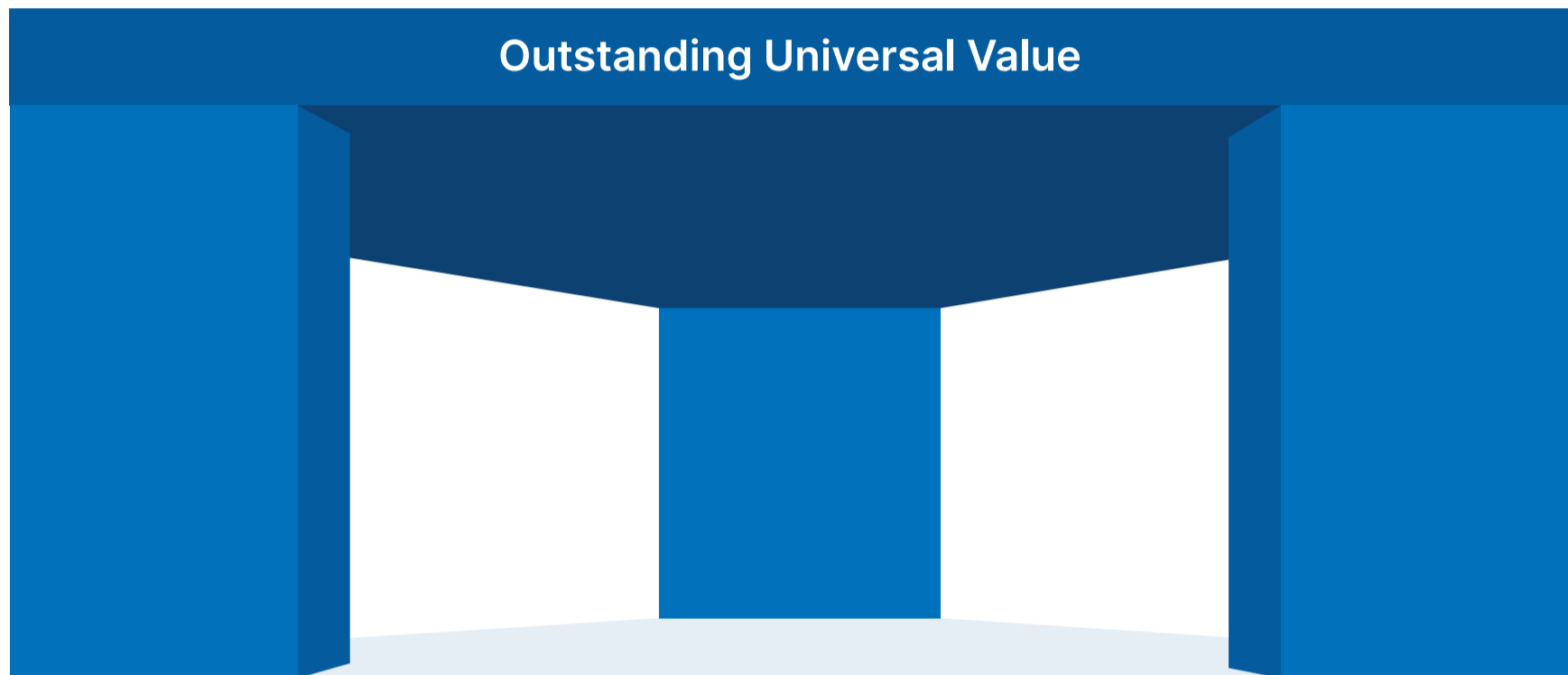
# Outstanding Universal Value

## World Heritage Convention

World Heritage properties are inscribed on the World Heritage List for their exceptional cultural and/or natural values for all humanity. This importance is expressed through the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of a site. The OUV is endorsed by the World Heritage Committee in the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV), usually at the time of inscription.



### Definition of Outstanding Universal Value



Property meets one or more World Heritage criteria

Property meets the conditions of integrity & authenticity (if this latter is relevant)\*

Property meets the requirements for protection & management

- Three-dimensional representation of the three pillars of Outstanding Universal Value within the World Heritage convention. All three must be in place for a property to be judged to have Outstanding Universal Value.  
\* only applies to cultural and mixed World Heritage properties

The three pillars of the Outstanding Universal Value (adapted from Managing Cultural World Heritage, UNESCO et al., 2013; 'Managing Natural World Heritage' UNESCO et al., 2011).

For most World Heritage properties, the physical condition of the attributes conveying the expressed values described in the OUV at the time of its inscription on the World Heritage List serves as the baseline for any monitoring activity henceforward; any benchmarking should be done in view of and against this baseline. The same baseline also accounts for impact assessments that concern World Heritage properties. Nevertheless, there are special cases when a site is inscribed on the World Heritage List in a vulnerable condition regarding its integrity, in which case management actions need to be undertaken to improve the vulnerable conditions prior to establishing baselines.

The **Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV)** is a short narrative text that describes the values and attributes of the World Heritage property at the time of inscription. It summarizes the reasons why a property is considered to be of Outstanding Universal Value, how it satisfies the relevant criteria, the conditions of integrity and (for cultural properties) authenticity, and how it meets the requirements for protection and management in order to sustain OUV and its attributes in the long term. It serves as a brief description of the totality of qualities and values, including the tangible and intangible attributes that express and convey the property's OUV (*OG paragraph 155*). The SOUV is an essential reference for the conservation and management of the World Heritage property and serves several purposes as it ideally

- guides the assessment of the state of conservation of a property;
- summarizes the baseline condition for the identification and protection of a property's attributes, which forms the basis for monitoring on the national level and for the Reactive Monitoring processes and Periodic Reporting;

- provides information for any decision-making concerning interventions that might have an impact on a World Heritage property.

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The **Statement of Outstanding Universal Value** of a World Heritage property is key for the assessment of possible impacts of development proposals, including infrastructural projects, changes in land-use and modifications to legal frameworks.



Examples for the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value



Why is the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value important for wind energy projects?

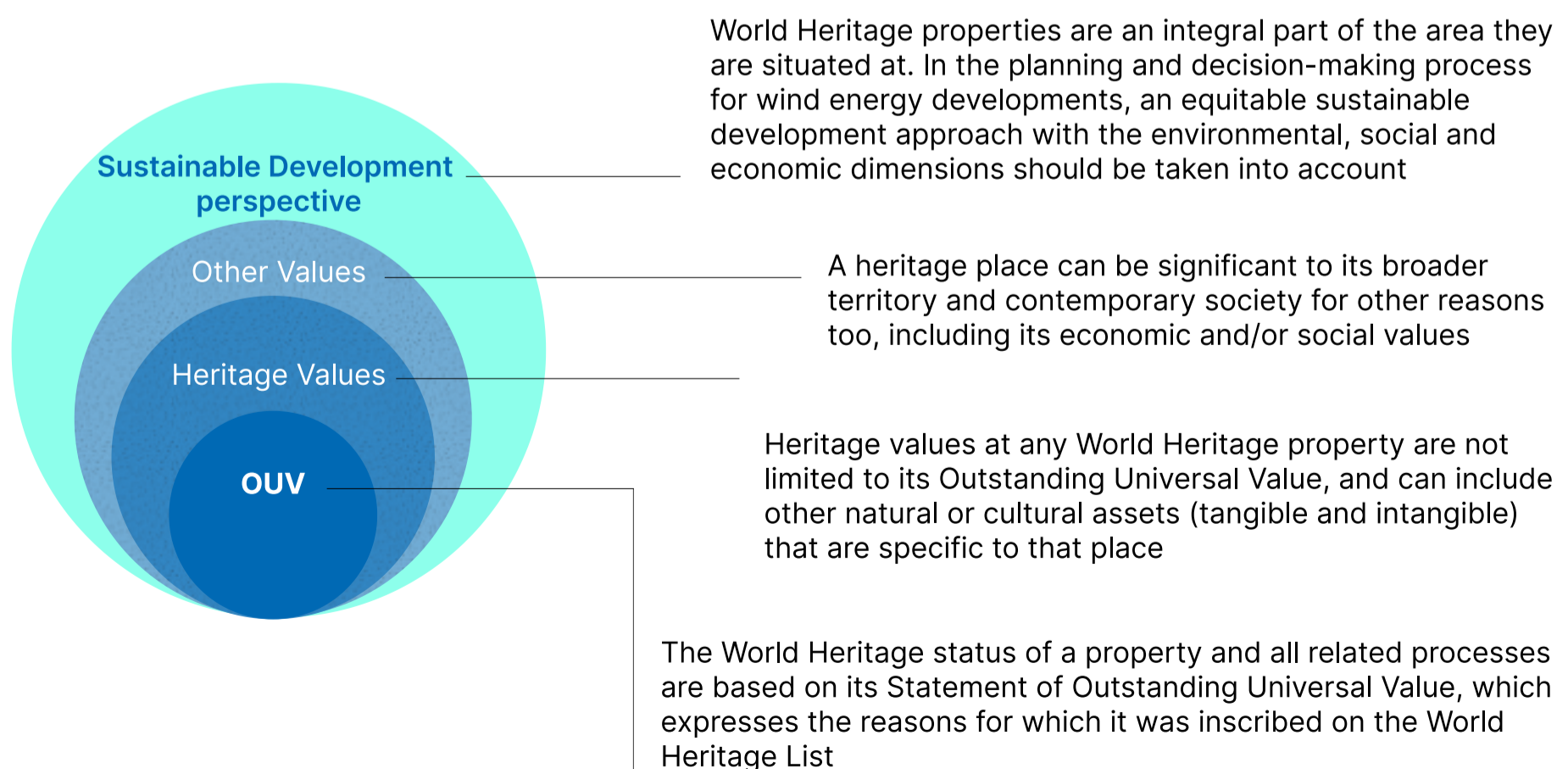


Why is the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value important for site managers?

## Other values

In addition to the OUV, World Heritage properties may also have other tangible and intangible values, which can be particularly important to rights-holders and other stakeholders (including indigenous peoples) at the national, regional and local levels. These could be formally designated or informally recognized. Nevertheless, they are vital for the effective planning and management of World Heritage properties and their wider setting. It is therefore important to have a comprehensive understanding of these values (including but not restricted to the ones relevant for heritage and conservation) to ensure that benefits of the protection and management are delivered for the wider society. National agencies should thus also identify those values that are not strictly linked to the OUV and share the information at local, regional and national levels as well as with the project proponents.

Further information about the importance of other values could be found in [impacts of Wind Energy projects and their assessment](#).



The multi-layered value characteristic of World Heritage properties should be taken into account during a value assessment as well as an impact assessment process. National and local values are also conveyed by attributes that may contribute to protect the conditions of authenticity and integrity of World Heritage properties. The relationship between attributes and values are often complex – one attribute might convey several values, and one value might be conveyed by multiple attributes. For this reason, both a value assessment or the identification of attributes that form the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and an impact assessment should recognize that the OUV, national and local values and attributes together form an interconnected system.

(Image adapted from the [Concept Note document](#) of a pilot regional course on Interpretive Planning at World Heritage properties completed its second module.

## Other values

World Heritage properties are inscribed on the World Heritage list under at least one of the ten criteria for inscription on the World Heritage List. The criteria justify why a place is worth being inscribed on the World Heritage List.

Criteria (i) to (vi) refer to the cultural values of properties whereas criteria (vii) to (x) apply to the natural values of properties. Mixed World Heritage properties must meet at least one cultural and one natural criterion.

### (i)

to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;

### (ii)

to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;

### (iii)

to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;

### (iv)

to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;

### (v)

to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;

### (vi)

to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);

### (vii)

to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;

### (viii)

to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;

### (ix)

to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;

### (x)

to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

## Qualifying conditions of integrity and authenticity

### Integrity

"Integrity is a measure of the wholeness and intactness of the natural and/or cultural heritage and its attributes."

— Operational Guidelines, Paragraph 88.

The [Operational Guidelines](#) further specify that the condition of integrity requires assessing the extent to which the property:

- 1 includes all elements necessary to express its Outstanding Universal Value;
- 2 is of adequate size to ensure the complete representation of the features and processes which convey the property's significance;
- 3 suffers from adverse effects of development and/or neglect.



'Integrity' in the *Operational Guidelines on the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*



Why is 'integrity' important for wind energy projects?



Examples for the description of 'integrity' in the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

### Authenticity

Authenticity requires that a property is a truthful and credible expression of its cultural values and that it cannot be represented by a copy or recreation. The condition for authenticity only applies to cultural and mixed World Heritage properties that are inscribed on the World Heritage List under criteria (i), (ii), (iii), (iv) or (vi). The concept of authenticity, however, is evolving and its application and understanding may vary in different cultural contexts of a World Heritage property. It may refer to a physical aspect of a site, but also to intangible aspects such as traditional knowledge or practices as well as religious or spiritual rituals related to physical attributes.

Such conditions may call for specific expertise and insights to fully grasp the implications they may have on potential development projects in the area and the impacts these may generate. Project proponents are therefore encouraged to seek expert advice at an early stage, to ensure due consideration of the aspects that need particular attention.

The authenticity of a property may refer to the attributes of the property and sources of information in which a cultural value can be expressed, including:

- form and design;
- materials and substance;
- use and function;

- traditions, techniques and management systems;

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- location and setting;
- language, and other forms of intangible heritage;
- spirit and feeling; and
- other internal and external factors.

(OG paragraph 82)

Impact assessments of development proposals thus need to evaluate the potential impacts on the attributes of a property's OUV to ensure that the authenticity remains intact.



Why is 'authenticity' important for wind energy projects?



Examples for the description of 'authenticity' in the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

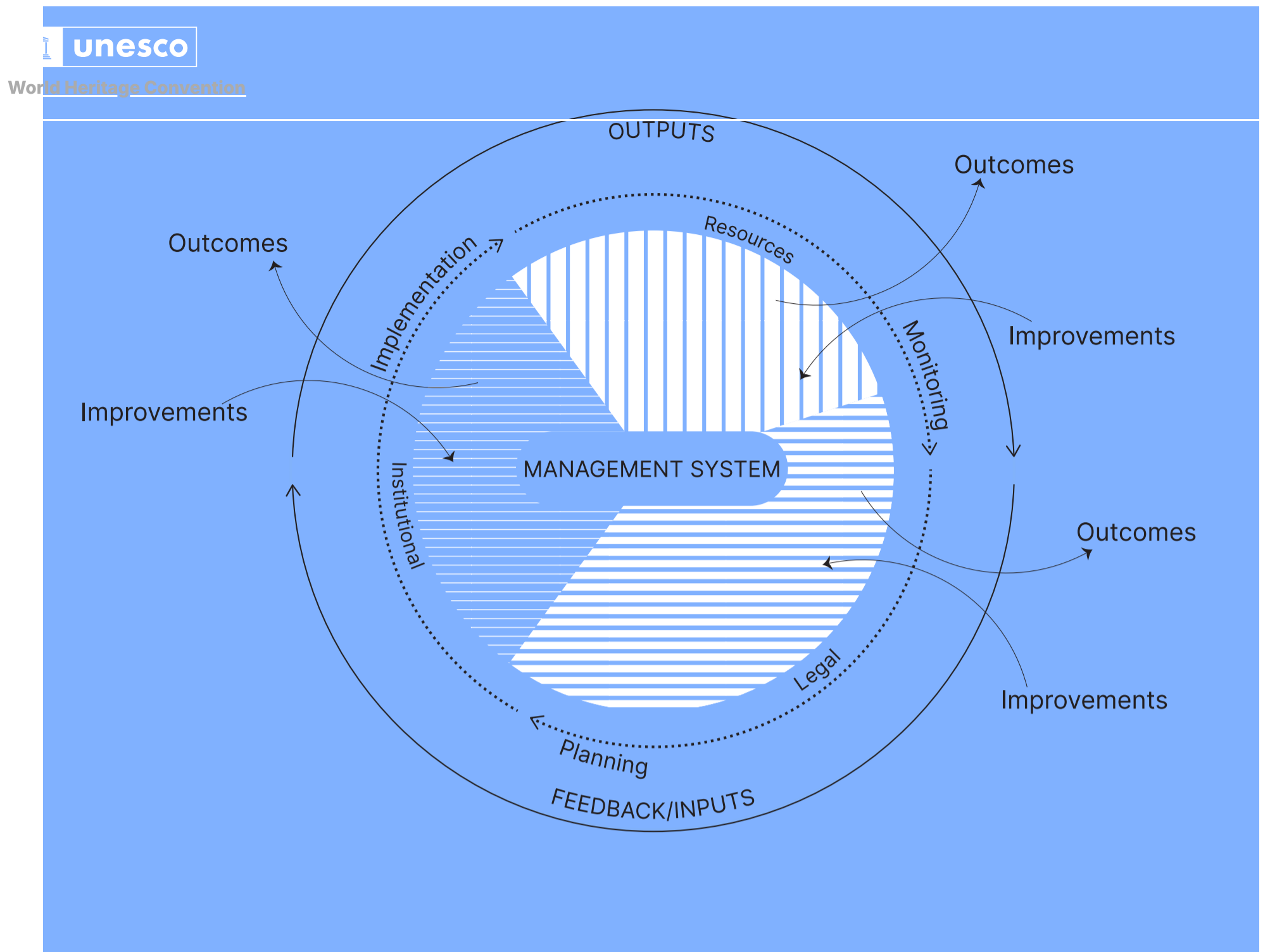
## Protection and management

In line with the provisions of the *World Heritage Convention*, all World Heritage properties need adequate long-term legislative, regulatory, institutional and/or customary protection and management to ensure their safeguarding. The most effective highest level of national protection should be provided for the property itself from a legal perspective. Wherever necessary for its appropriate protection, further protection could be put in place through the creation of a buffer zone or similar mechanisms that establish complementary legal and/or customary restrictions for development inside or nearby vulnerable areas.

Effective management plays a central role in ensuring the long-term protection of World Heritage properties, including their OUV and other heritage values. The States Parties to the *Convention* have also adopted various policy instruments to assist with the implementation of the *Convention*, including the [Policy for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention](#). This policy document stipulates that the management system of a site – be it natural, cultural, or mixed – should integrate sustainable development principles. Moreover, the management plan or system should cover buffer zones and the wider setting. ([See below in the 'Spatial areas of World Heritage properties and their importance for protection and management'](#))

The 2007 [Policy Document on the Impacts of Climate Change](#) on World Heritage Properties encourages States Parties to include aspects of the impacts of adaptation to and mitigation of climate change in a World Heritage property, and ensure that these are properly assessed, reported and managed.

World Heritage management plans (documenting the management system of World Heritage properties) are a good source of information for project proponents in general. Besides information about values and attributes, the document might provide mechanisms that support intersectoral dialogue and tools to facilitate early planning for example through the early detection of conflicting interests. Nevertheless, information relevant for project proponents might be included in other national data sources (inventories/databases, spatial planning tools, guidance documents, etc.)



Adequate management system for a World Heritage property (source: *Managing Cultural World Heritage*, UNESCO et al., 2013; *Managing Natural World Heritage*, UNESCO et al., 2011).



What is the relationship between a World Heritage management systems and wind energy projects?



Examples for the description of 'Protection and management requirements' in the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

## Attributes (conveying Outstanding Universal Value)

Attributes are tangible and intangible elements (cultural and natural), features and processes that express, convey, or reflect values. Attributes can be physical qualities, material fabric or other tangible features, but can also be processes, social arrangements, or cultural practices as well as intangible aspects such as associations and relationships. In the context of natural properties, attributes are often referred to as 'features'. Attributes help understand and link the values of a heritage place with its constituting tangible elements, processes, or intangible dimensions, and is a term that is used for the World Heritage properties to describe how its OUV is identified and conveyed.

The OUV of a property (with the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity and an adequate management system) encompasses one or more criteria under which the property has been inscribed on the World Heritage List and which justify why a place is worth being inscribed on this List (see also under the description of the ten criteria). The attributes that convey the OUV would relate to this or these criteria and overall, to the OUV of the property.



The identification of tangible and intangible attributes conveying the OUV of a World Heritage property and their systematic mapping (in the sense of collecting and arranging information) is a helpful tool for the property's long-term protection and management. Attributes often carry multiple values and thus all should be considered, including other heritage values that are not part of but may be supporting the OUV.

The identified set of attributes of a property is useful for:

- the establishment of an adequate management system or plan as it sets out the elements that need to be maintained in order to sustain the OUV;
- monitoring the state of conservation; and
- conducting any type of impact assessment, as it defines the thresholds against which potential impacts on the OUV can be assessed (including the assessment of the scale of positive or negative impacts and the proposal of potential mitigation measures).

The agreed set of attributes also facilitate their understanding for all stakeholders and enable a participatory governance approach for the protection and management of World Heritage properties. → [See Note 1 for identifying attributes](#)

For the evaluation of possible impacts from wind turbines, relevant attributes need to be examined on a case-by-case basis also with a consideration for the different phases of the wind project's life cycle:

- planning (siting) and commissioning;
- construction;
- operation and maintenance with potential lifetime extension and repowering;
- end-of-life, decommissioning with dismantling and removal.

Each of these phases may have different impacts on the built and natural environment, in particular habitats and species, and possible seasonal patterns such as the agricultural cycle.

Attributes are needed as indicators to assess the overall vulnerability of a World Heritage property with regard to wind energy developments or help to update an already existing 'sensitivity map'.

→ See ['wind energy lifecycle' in Wind Energy Essentials](#) and [Note 2](#)



Examples for the description of 'Protection and management requirements' in the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value



Examples of nomination files that describe attributes of Outstanding Universal Value

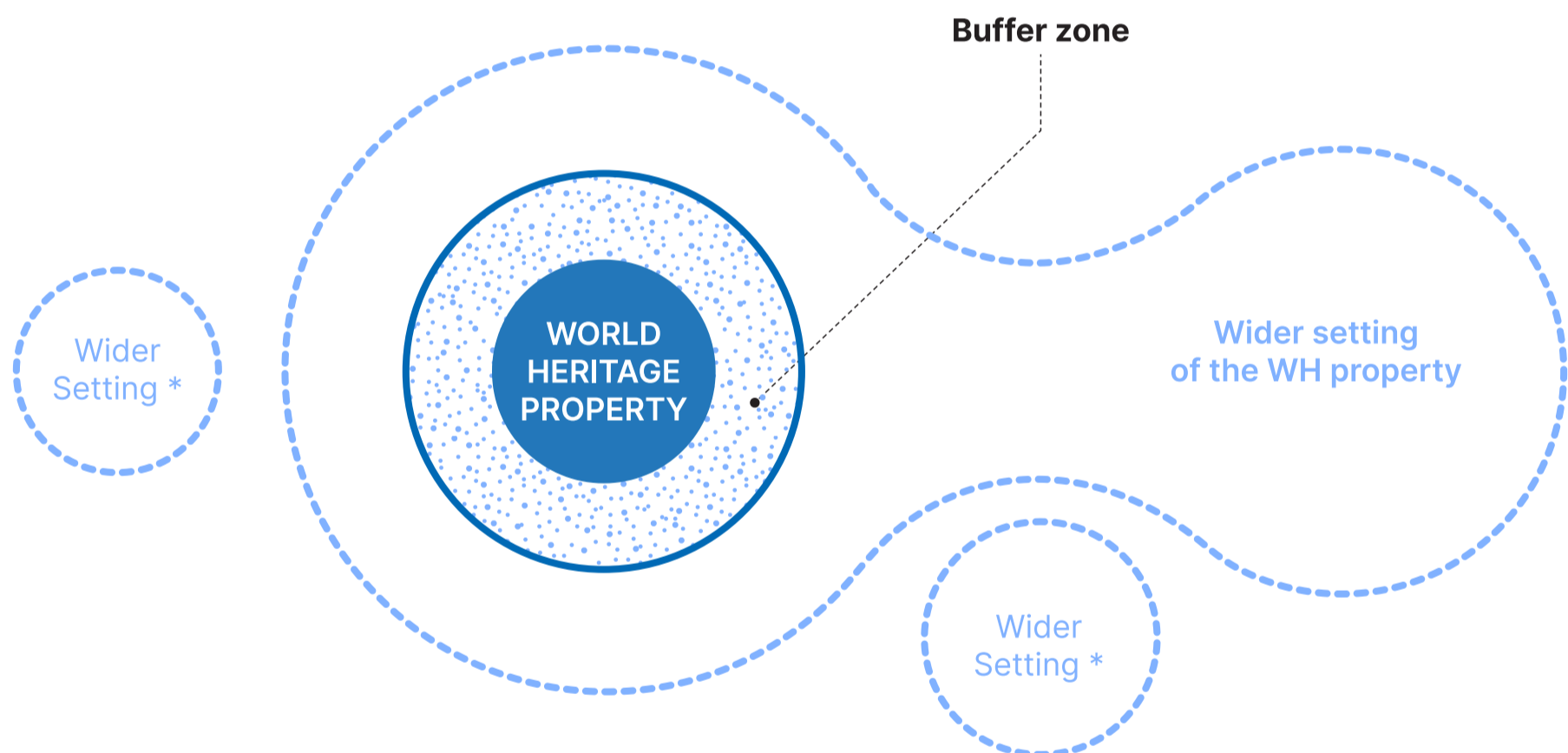
# Spatial boundaries of World Heritage properties and their importance for protection and management

World Heritage Convention

## Boundaries of World Heritage properties

Clearly defined boundaries are a requirement by the *Convention* and are key for the effective protection and management of a World Heritage property. For the definition of the property's physical delimitation, the OUV and its attributes are the key parameters. The area must have the most effective possible national protection from a legal perspective (usually a protection that falls under the regulation for cultural and/or natural heritage protection) and management must be aligned with the requirements set out in the *Operational Guidelines*.

A map of the boundaries of all World Heritage properties and their buffer zone (if there is one) is available on the UNESCO [World Heritage Centre website](#). Additionally, these are usually part of national, and in many cases GIS-based, databases for protected cultural and/or natural heritage areas and assets (archaeological sites, listed buildings, monuments, protected historic areas, nature habitats, nature parks, etc.). National, regional and local authorities should refer to these official sources of information when evaluating project applications. Likewise, the areas of World Heritage properties should be included in spatial planning documents and zoning maps. This ensures their consideration both by wind energy project proponents when choosing a location for their project and by the decision-making national, regional and local authorities in the evaluation of planning applications.



\*detached areas further away that have a functional relationship with the property's OUV

Schematic image concerning World Heritage properties' boundaries, buffer zones and the wider setting. Depending on the OUV of a World Heritage property, the wider setting in some cases could be a detached area from the property and its buffer zone, but still could have a functional relationship with the property's OUV and could play a supporting role for its protection and preservation. (The detached area of the wider setting could for example be a resting place for migratory birds that form part of the OUV.)



Serial, transboundary and transnational World Heritage properties

## Buffer zone(s)

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A buffer zone is an area officially defined to surround a World Heritage property, equipped with adequate legal and management functions that provide a layer of protection. This generally includes the immediate setting of a property and encompasses important views and other areas that are functionally important as a support to protect the property. Buffer zones should be integral part of the management system of a World Heritage property, with complementary legal and/or customary frames and management provisions to control development and land-use.

The legal protective measures in place in the buffer zone may differ from those in place for the World Heritage property. However, as part of spatial planning and zoning mechanisms buffer zones need to be taken into consideration during planning and decision-making processes. They could be areas protected at national level, in order to fulfil their supportive role for the World Heritage property. In this context, the potential of buffer zones should be fully harnessed. It needs to be understood not only as added layer of protection but also as a planning tool to enhance mutual benefits for local and other concerned communities and for the heritage itself.



Why are buffer zones important?



Examples for maps of World Heritage properties and their buffer zones

## Wider setting

While the buffer zone occupies the immediate setting of a site, the wider setting is the extended environment of a World Heritage property, and it is part of or contributes to the property's significance and distinctive character. While the boundaries of World Heritage properties and their buffer zones are clearly delineated areas, and usually form part of national inventories on protected cultural and natural heritage, it is important to note that World Heritage properties are not isolated zones. On the contrary, properties are strongly connected to their surrounding and beyond physical and visual connections, they form part of physical, economic, cultural, spiritual, and social processes and practices (customs, traditional knowledge, use or activities, spiritual practices, and other forms of intangible heritage aspects), ecosystems, communities and societies that exist beyond any borders. Hence their OUV is supported by these interdependencies and relationships.

The wider setting of a World Heritage property may include protected and unprotected areas, under different national/regional/local legislation. While it is rather rare to find proposals for wind energy projects inside a World Heritage property and its buffer zones, proposals for development further at a distance, in the so-called 'wider setting', are much more frequent. The terms refer to areas that count for the protection of a property although they are not officially part of the delineated area of a property nor of the buffer zone (if there is a buffer zone). Indeed, they often 'stage' a property in its landscape or alike. Accordingly, changes in these areas have the potential to impact directly or indirectly on OUV.

Although its identification is not a statutory obligation, the wider setting of a property may play an important role in supporting the protection of a property's OUV. This role should be considered in the management as much as in planning proposals and especially in the impact assessment processes. The [Operational Guidelines](#) underline the importance of '*an integrated approach to planning and management [...] to guide the evolution of properties over time and to ensure maintenance of all aspects of their Outstanding Universal Value.*' It also highlights that '*this approach goes beyond the property to include any buffer zone(s), as well as the broader setting*' (OG paragraph 112).

The wider setting of a World Heritage property is dependent on numerous factors including the nature of the attributes, boundaries of the property and its buffer zone, and the surrounding environment. Therefore, the concept and definition of the wider setting of a World Heritage property will vary from site-to-site, according to the characteristics of a property and the planned changes.

The [Operational Guidelines](#) (paragraph 112) refer to the setting as being potentially related to a property through its:

- Topography (like hills, mountains, rivers);

- Natural environment (like character and type of the surrounding landscape and/or seascape);

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- Built environment (like links between historic buildings and urban areas);
- Infrastructure;
- Land use patterns;
- Spatial organization;
- Visual relationships (between attributes and the setting);
- Social and cultural practices;
- Economic processes;
- Other intangible dimensions of heritage: perceptions, associations (like historical, artistic, literary, scenic).



How could the 'wider setting' be identified?

## The relationship between the wider setting and project planning

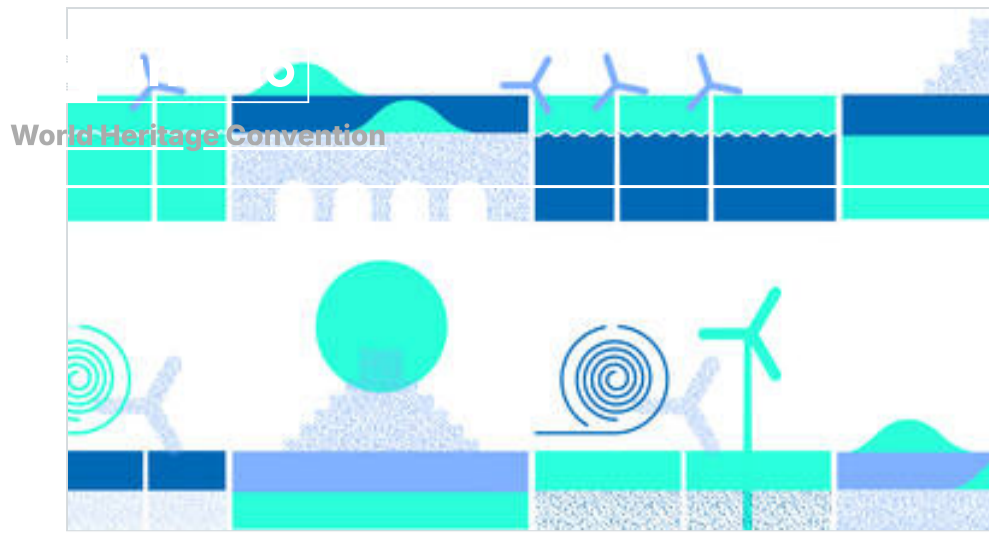
Spatial boundaries of World Heritage properties and their implications for protection and management have a high importance from the project planning perspective as well. As the OUV of a World Heritage property is closely linked with the property's boundaries, the impacts of planned and proposed changes or projects may fail to pay attention to potential impacts from outside these well-defined and mapped lines (that includes usually only the boundaries of the property and its buffer zone, if there is one). Nevertheless, proposed changes, developments/projects planned outside the boundaries and the buffer zone could have a strong influence on the property's OUV and the attributes conveying it. Therefore, impact assessments need to consider impacts also outside the defined boundaries and extend to the wider setting of a World Heritage property and pay attention to areas of influence.

States Parties should further recognise that, for many World Heritage properties, achieving sustainable development will require acting at a scale that is much larger than the property itself and that, in the process, some dimensions of sustainable development may prove to be of greater relevance than others. Thus, States Parties should integrate conservation and management approaches for World Heritage properties within their larger regional planning frameworks, giving consideration in particular to the integrity of socio-ecological systems.

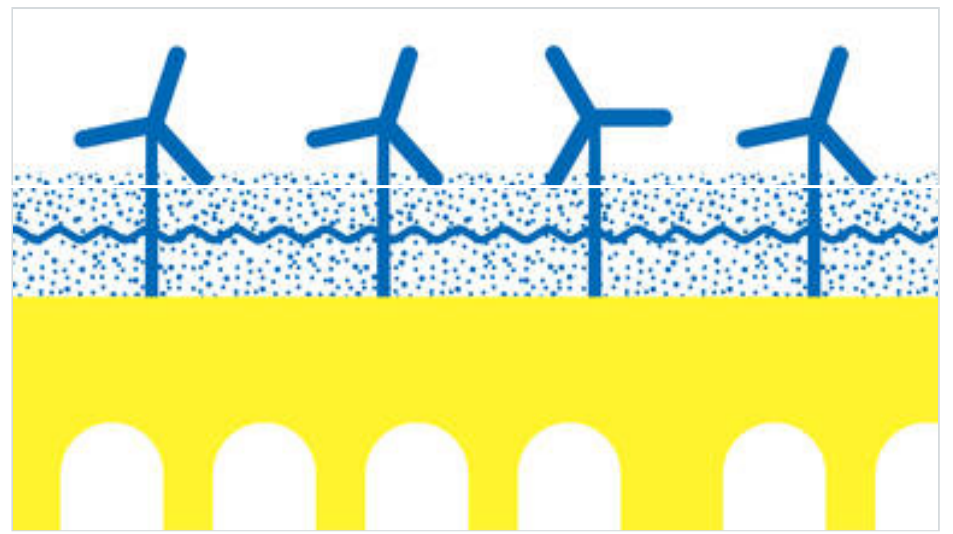


What needs to be considered for a wind energy project in relation to the spatial dimensions of World Heritage properties

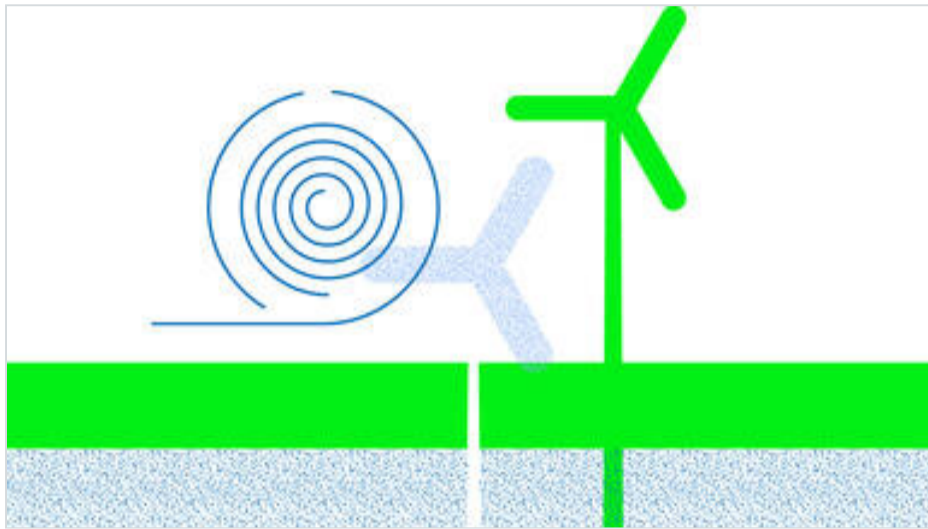
### Other activities <sup>4</sup>



Wind Energy.



Impacts of Wind Energy Projects and their Assessment



Wind Energy Essential



World Heritage and wind energy planning

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## Keywords <sup>②</sup>

[Wind](#)   [Wind energy](#)

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## Partners

[Government of the Netherlands](#)

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