



A stakeholders' perspective on some of the factors influencing the relationship between UNESCO Biosphere status and the Isle of Man's place brand.

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Background on UNESCO Biosphere (UB)

Research on UNESCO biospheres and place branding

What did the stakeholders think and what does it mean for the Biosphere programme and the Isle of Man brand

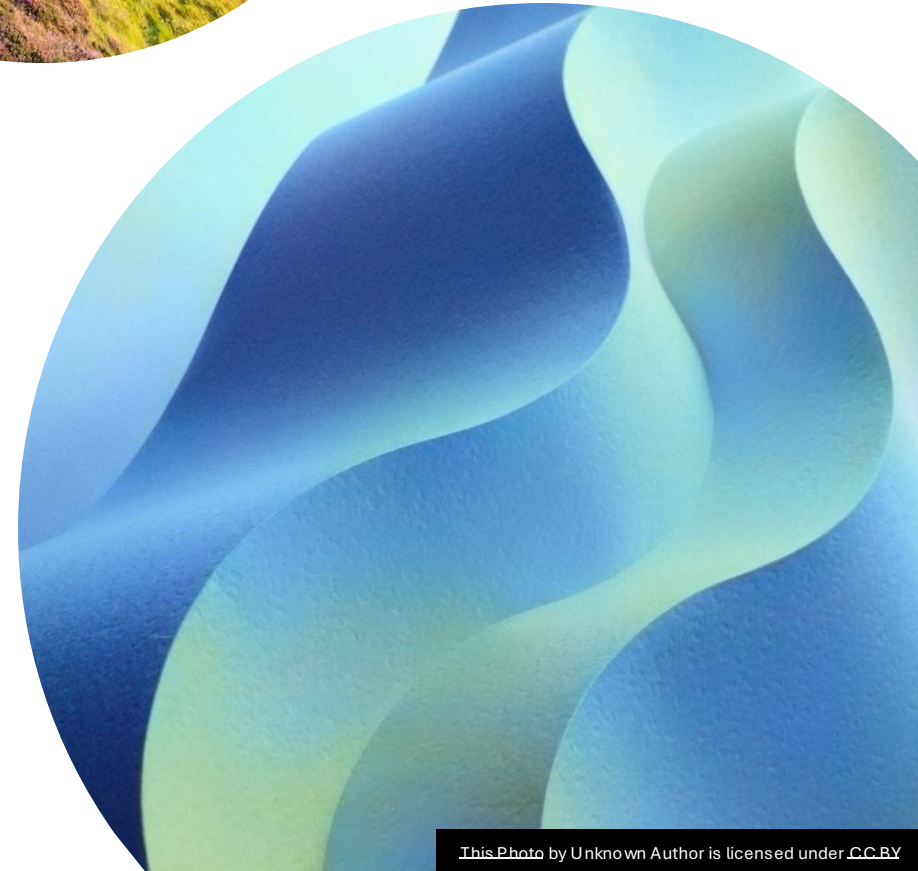
Conclusions



What is a UNESCO Biosphere?

According to UNESCO (2022) “Biosphere Reserves focus on **balancing** nature conservation with sustainable development for and with communities.”

UBs serve as models of sustainable development (Oasis Insight 2017) and contribute to the achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals



Some data

5% of the planet now is a UB (UNESCO, Sep 2025)

Only 3.7% of the world population live in a UB (300 million out of 8.142 billion)

In Spain only 10.9% of the territory is a UB (Castaño-Quintero et al. 2020)

UK UB size in the picture

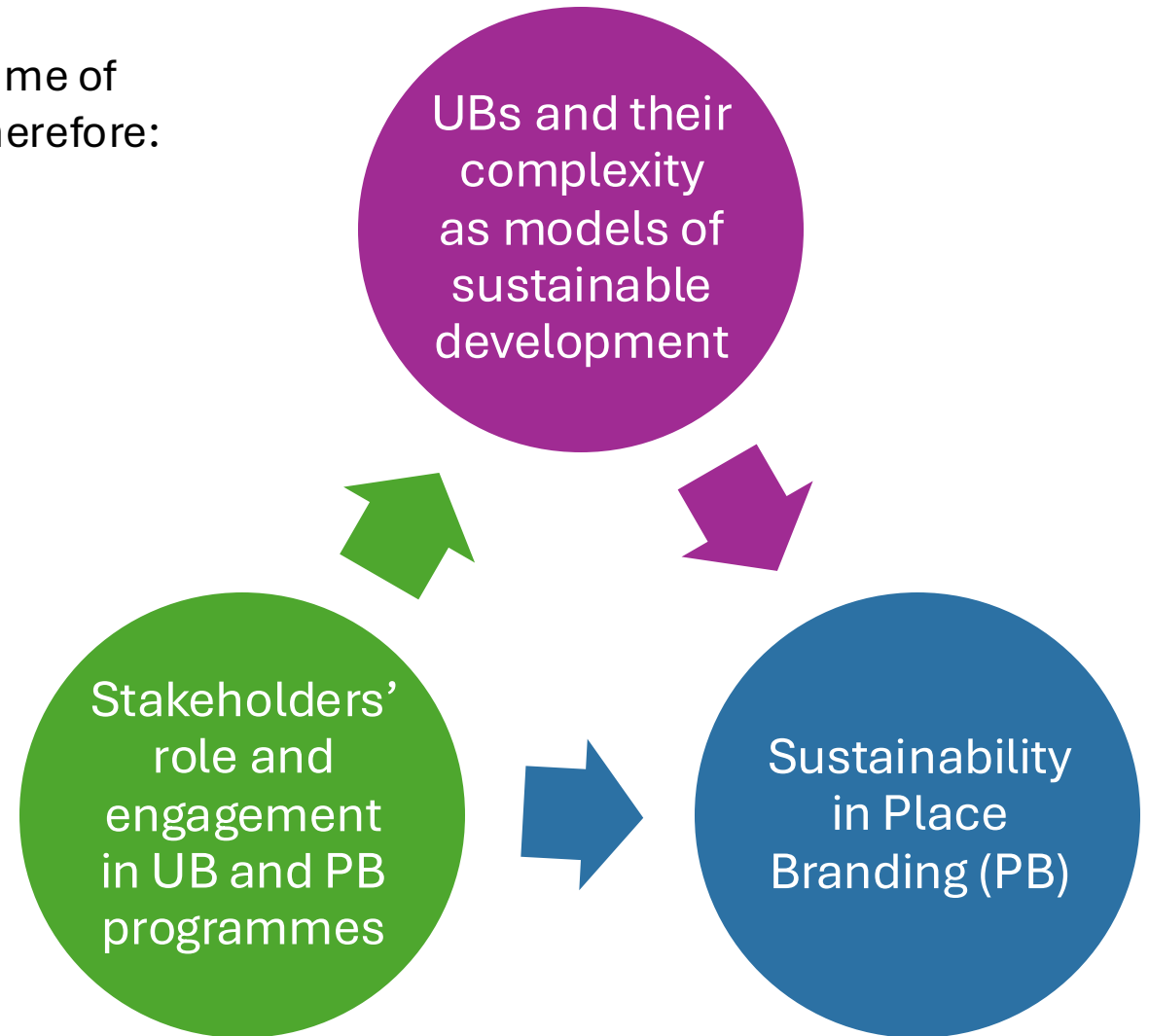
The World Network of Biosphere Reserves now includes 784 sites in 142 countries

The Isle of Man – from Sep'25 not any more the only whole nation UB. São Tomé and Príncipe is the other whole nation/state UB.



Research on UNESCO biospheres and place branding

No research at the time of
writing this paper, therefore:





Research on UNESCO biospheres and place branding

UBs -complex models of sustainable development

UB concept still appears to be esoteric and nebulous for everyone

Dissonance on the conceptualisation of sustainability by the elites
and its manifestation on the ground

Perceptions about UB: “talking shops” & “bureaucratic label” to
cover unsustainable practices

However: Places gain and lose UB status – consequences for no
action

Crux: Stakeholder engagement

Place Branding and Sustainability

Place brands are a representation selective place identities and are materialised through place-embedded assets (in the form of culture, heritage, environment, socio-economic, political relationships and strategic visions of the future)

(Maheshwari, Vandewalle, and Bamber 2011) .

Place Branding as a process aims to manage place reputation, as a “public good” which contributes “to society, humanity and a sustainable planet” (IPBA manifesto)

When SDGs are at the core of place values, they have great positive impact in place reputation and its brand

Crux: Stakeholder engagement

Research on
UNESCO biospheres
and place branding



Research on UNESCO biospheres and place branding

Stakeholders' role and engagement in UB and PB

- **Legitimate** the brand through their citizenship and political will
- **Imbue** the brand with their values and characteristics
- **Present and communicate** the brand wherever they go as brand ambassadors

UB's success is reliant on 11 factors where one of the most important is stakeholder engagement – which is enabled by stakeholders' collaboration and education therefore a priority for UBs

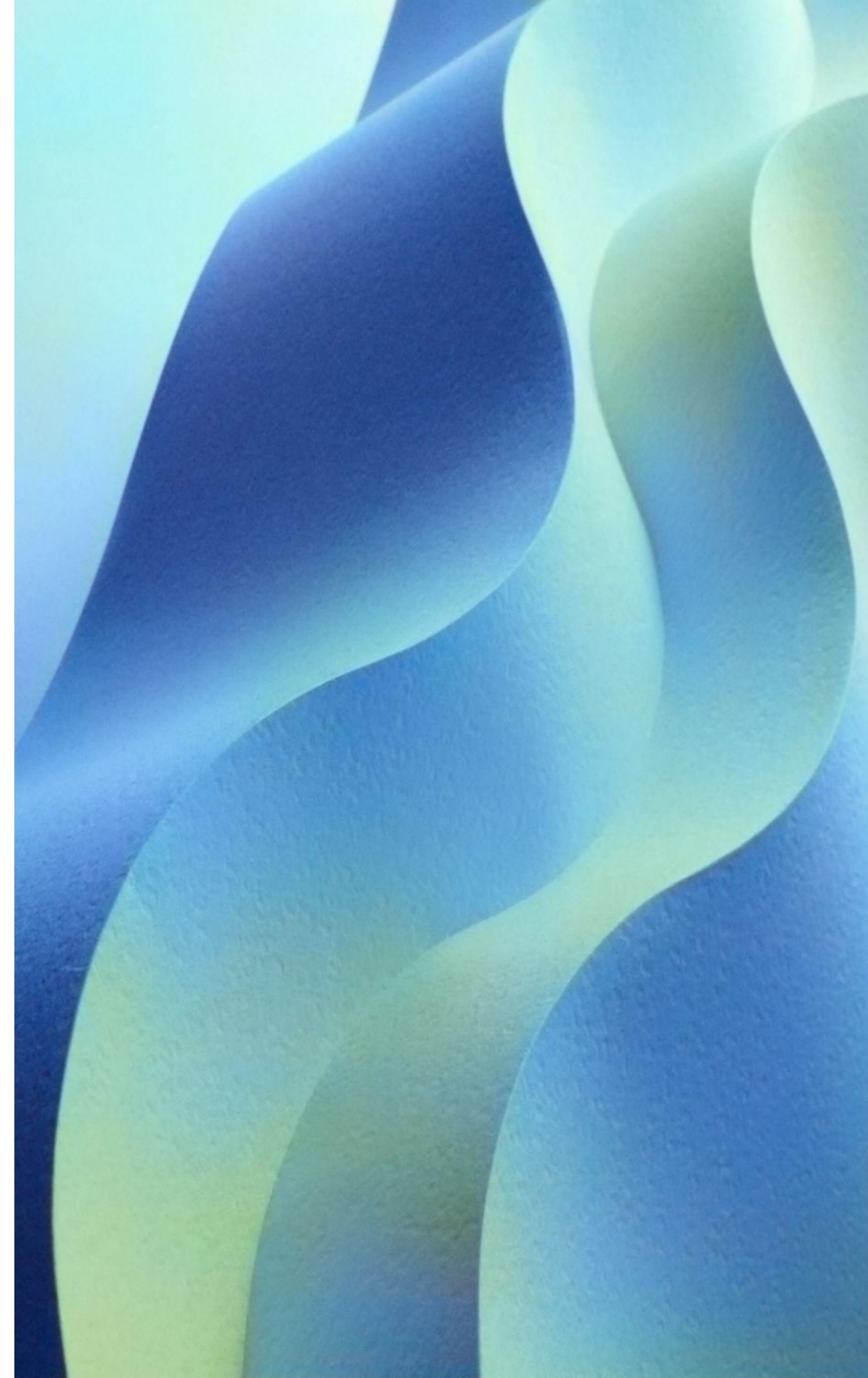
Stakeholder engagement is driven by altruism and self-interest and is dependent on the benefits gained from the collective actions (in the form of policy decisions or network building) in exchange for the time invested

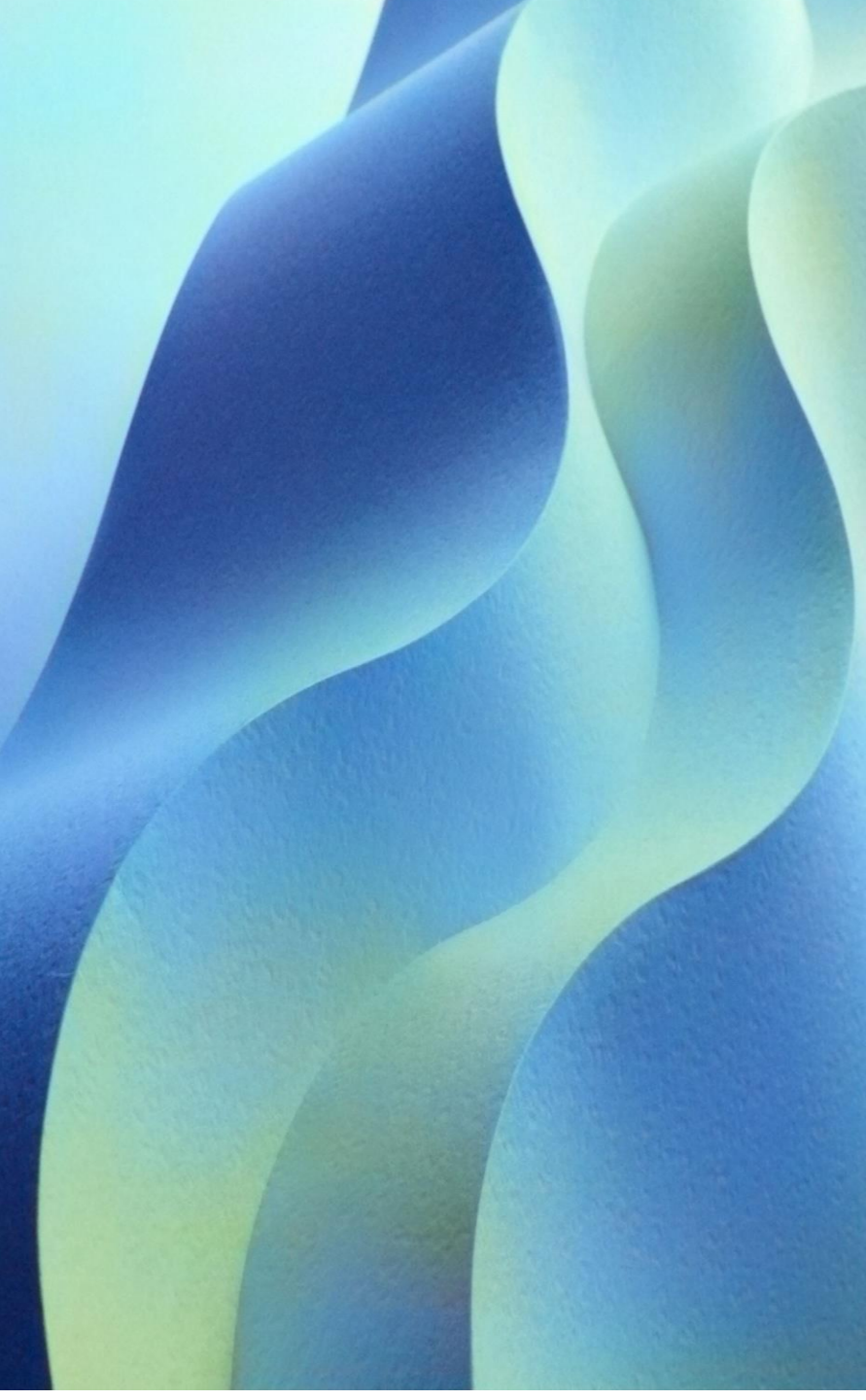
Stakeholder engagement

is defined as:

“participation in dialogs,
collaboration, communication,
conflict resolution, joint decision
making and collective actions in
order to solve collective problems
and serve as accountability
mechanism”

(Lubell, 2013; Kujala et al., 2022; Leopizzi, 2023)





Stakeholder interviews

11 in-depth interviews with some of the stakeholders listed in the UBloM website between January and April 2023

What do stakeholders think?

Some quotes:

“there is quite a lot of talk about strategy in so many levels, but the execution is very slow”

“it has never been our role is.”

“another said

“there is not much happening to feel like a *modus vivendi*”

“the IoM is shaped by centuries of history, culture, way of living, not by a UNESCO label”

“the rewards from UB brand are distributed disproportionately, especially the recognition”

“communication and education programmes have missed an important point”

“it's been more focus on the kind of telling the story, rather than actually doing more of the stuff to contribute to the story”

“the platform is being used for progressing particular agendas”

“an important tool in marketing and promotion toolbox for hosts and talent selection”

“buried down in level of EFA”

Just another environmental project

“I'll just take financial institutions first, they definitely not what to do with the UB brand)”

“culture are struggling to despite Manx doing so many no benefits

What do stakeholders think?

UB as brand identity and image - Others think we are, so we must be or become?

Lack of knowledge on UB as barrier of place brand awareness

Lack of clear governance as barrier of stakeholder engagement

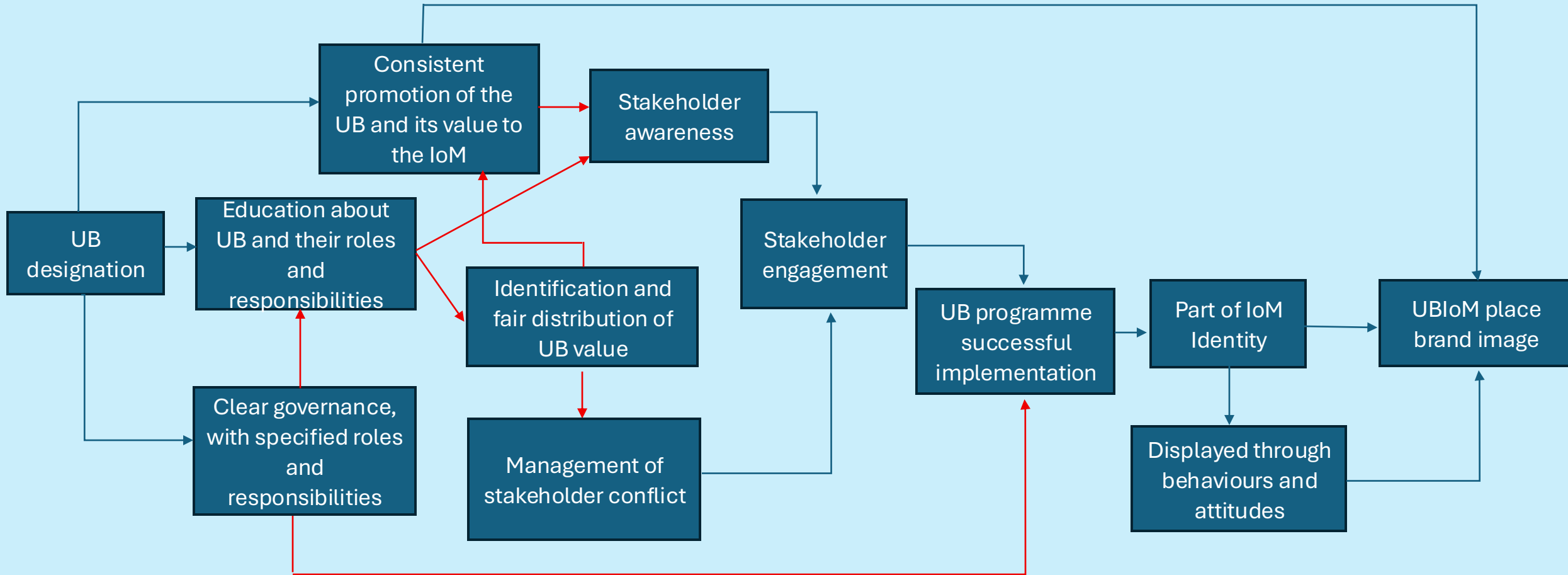
The difficult symbiosis between IoM place brand and UB status

UB programme as PB tool

Appreciating and communicating the UB value

The UB value distribution

What does this all mean?



Conclusions

Stakeholders' engagement in the UB programme is fundamental on the UBloM place brand



Clear governance with consistent communications and learning are a prerequisite



Relationships between the stakeholders need to be taken care of, to minimise conflict through satisfactory solutions for all. One of the ways this can be achieved is through identification and fair distribution of the UB brand value



All these three elements are closely interwoven and positively influence on the stakeholders' perceptions for the UB programme and have a significant impact on the relationship of the UB status with the place brand. The clarity they bring on the process facilitates fulfilment of the stakeholders' roles and responsibilities in the UBloM branding.

A scenic landscape photograph of a coastal hill. In the foreground, a steep slope is covered in vibrant purple heather and green grass. A stone tower stands prominently on the left side of the hill. The sea is visible on the right, and the sky is filled with dramatic, colorful clouds. The text "Thank You" is written in a purple script font on the right side of the image.

Thank You

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