



The Aanaar / Inari Statement on the diversity of sacred natural sites in Europe

The 30 participants from 13 countries (Estonia, Finland, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and United Kingdom) in the Third Workshop of the Delos Initiative¹, held in Aanaar / Inari, Finland on 1-3 July 2010, arrived at the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. The indigenous Sámi peoples and their traditions –as well as the traditions of most indigenous religions– are of great importance in the context of the cultural, spiritual and natural heritage of Europe. In particular, their views emphasising the interconnectedness of human beings and nature, and deep respect to nature, can provide invaluable lessons of global significance and ensure the well-being of indigenous communities and the viability of their cultures.
2. In various countries of Europe, natural sites considered sacred since prehistoric times, often located in areas of high natural heritage value, are being recognised and inventoried, such as the Estonia National Conservation Plan for Sacred Natural Sites. Several case studies from the Baltic countries and Carpathian Mountains showed that these sites still have significance for current societies (identity, iconic, symbolic, etc.), which may encourage conservation measures. However, many of these ancient sacred sites need protection with an appropriate legal status and management measures.
3. Some Protected Areas of Europe include a high diversity of sacred natural sites from consecutive civilizations, as the Majella National Park in Italy exemplifies. Many of these sacred sites are still highly relevant for the local population and provide powerful incentives for respect and conservation.
4. Christian, Islamic and Buddhist organisations involved in land management in Europe are gradually adopting attitudes and practices of increased respect for the natural environment. Such positive developments must be made known widely to encourage their faithful and other religious organisations along these lines.

¹ The Delos Initiative is part of the IUCN World Commission of Protected Areas Specialist Group on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas (CSVPA SG). (www.med-ina.org/delos)

5. In this positive context, a number of European Christian and Buddhist monastic communities are taking the lead, with effective and innovative approaches to the ecological management of their lands, be they formally declared as Protected Areas or Community Conserved Areas or not, such as the Orthodox monastic communities of Mt Athos, Greece.
6. Closer collaboration in the conservation of sacred natural sites between their custodians and conservationists is slowly growing, but greater efforts are required before synergy is established and positive common goals for safeguarding the natural, cultural and spiritual values are attained.
7. In spite of some positive trends, threats against sacred natural sites appear to be growing –even within legally declared protected areas– especially against those that are the most modest and natural, due to changing land use patterns, expanding urbanisation and insensitive development initiatives. Mobilising international public opinion may help in averting such threats and the Delos Initiative is requested to play a role in this process.
8. Tourist pressures on sacred natural sites may often be a threat, causing physical and spiritual degradation. Public use, when acceptable, needs to be addressed through appropriate visitor management measures and greatly improved public awareness.
9. Sacred Natural Sites should be inventoried to avoid damage and irreversible losses of cultural, spiritual and natural heritage and to be incorporated into national planning and legislation. The process of the National Inventory of Estonia is a good example. The developing Carpathian Heritage Inventory (as a result of the Carpathian Convention) provides an example of international co-operation in this field. Those that are private must also be protected, regulating public access to the sites and to the databases and other relevant information.
10. Effective conservation of sacred natural sites requires the active and informed participation of all stakeholders in systematic efforts to reach consensus on objectives and required measures.
11. The first assessment on the relevance of the 2008 IUCN-UNESCO Guidelines for Managers on Sacred Natural Sites (which focus on indigenous Sacred Natural Sites) clearly showed the need to developing additional guidelines for natural sacred sites related to mainstream religions.
12. Networks of sacred natural sites in particular regions must be recognised and strengthened, or re-established where feasible. Pilgrimage trails or paths may play an important role in this sense, which may be enhanced when they also provide landscape linkages, like some sections of the Way of Saint James (Spain

and France) or Via Lauretana (Italy) and many others in the Carpathian Mountains.

13. Studies conducted by Metsähallitus showed that most visitors to protected areas of Finland are attracted to them not to view or observe species, habitats or landscapes, but to have a personal experience of peace, harmony, grandeur...in Nature, which shows that, even in some highly secularised countries of Europe the immaterial values of nature have the priority for the society at large.
14. In addition to being only a heritage from the past, some Sacred Natural Sites may be 'dynamic' in the sense of being related to either current or future manifestations of the Sacred. This response to emerging human needs has yet to be adequately recognised and protected.

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