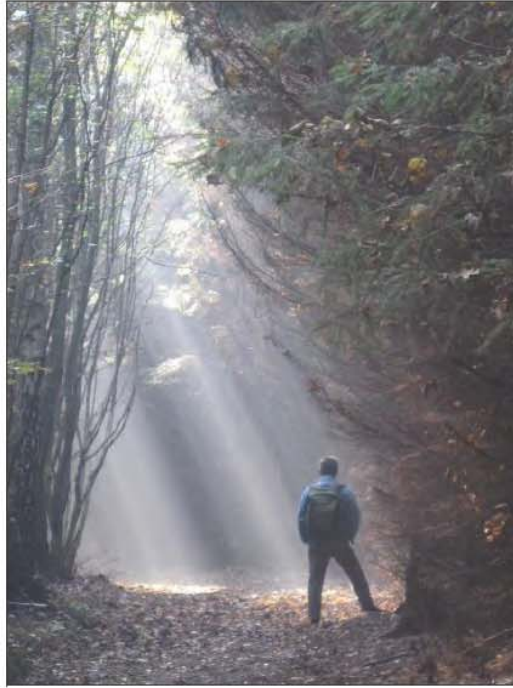


Josep-Maria Mallarach (Ed.)

**Spiritual Values of Protected Areas of Europe
Workshop Proceedings**



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Cover photo: Magic moment in the nature reserve "Goor" on Rügen Island, Germany, during the field visit of the workshop (Vita de Waal)

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Spiritual Values of Protected Areas of Europe

Conclusions

Josep-Maria Mallarach, editor

This summary attempts to encapsulate with brief bullet points the main findings and conclusions of the working groups, as well as the key points of the presentations and discussions that took place during the workshop on *Spiritual values of Protected Areas of Europe*, held at the International Academy for Nature Conservation, Isle of Vilm, Germany, 2–6 November 2011. Its structure follows the ten questions that were suggested as topics of debate to the participants of the workshop.

1. Redefining 'spiritual values' for Protected Areas of Europe.

- ⤴ The spiritual values of nature (beauty, majesty, peace, unity, harmony, interdependence, cycle of birth/dead and rebirth, continuity, nourishment, abundance) are perceived by many people both inwardly and outwardly to be linked, and throughout the ages have instilled in people a sense of great reverence and gratitude to the Source of these values.
- ⤴ Since times immemorial, human beings have learnt to respect the power of natural elements and have established spiritual relationships with nature. For many people today nature as a spiritual experience still conveys feelings of reverence, awe, humility, amazement, gratitude, harmony, peace, unity and belonging, although at times may also be associated with stupefaction, fear and astonishment.
- ⤴ The perception of spiritual values of nature is often carried out in silence, which is when one reaches a state of inner calm, emptiness or atonement, thereby allowing for an intensification of inner perception. This is often attained through personal contemplation or meditation, although in other situations it may form part of age-old tradition and ritual as enjoyed by the whole of the community.
- ⤴ Spiritual values or meanings of nature can be – but not necessarily – described in religious terms and act as a catalyst of different forms of identities.

- ⤴ Spiritual values of nature can be experienced when one is affected by spiritual atmospheres – feelings that are not only subjective but universal – emanating from events and phenomena in nature that infuse the observer with intimate feelings of awe, humility, fascination, continuity and deep proximity.
- ⤴ The spiritual meaning of nature can be described and presented using different forms of expression, although certain aspects can never be fully communicated without personal experience and will always remain beyond words.
- ⤴ For many people, the spiritual domain extends beyond the human cultural domain and on towards the Infinite or Absolute. The religious experience of nature is located in the nexus between spiritual and cultural domains, that is, it is culturally mediated. However, some natural spiritual values or meanings, including those related to biological diversity, can be regarded as universal and therefore are part of most human religions, beliefs and spiritual traditions.
- ⤴ In an era that pays excessive heed to a scientific approach to nature and to material values, there is a danger that nature be considered merely as a resource or object of study. The spiritual and emotional dimensions of nature need to be reintegrated to motivate and inspire people to take action to conserve and protect our common heritage.
- ⤴ Spiritual and religious dimensions play a significant role in many people's relationship with nature. Linking spiritual practices and natural experience helps develop new, deeper understandings of nature and therefore fosters attitudes of deep respect and reverence towards the natural world and, in general, the whole universe.

2. Mapping types of spiritual sites in Protected Areas of Europe. Where do which types occur?

- ⤴ Many people recognise that there is a spiritual dimension to nature. For these people, spiritual values are found everywhere in nature and so can be experienced in all Protected Areas. However, spiritual values may have different intensities or significances.
- ⤴ Sacred/Holy natural sites or elements such as mountains, trees, springs, wells and islands are found throughout Europe. Some are related to ancient spiritual traditions, some to existing religions, whilst others are in the process of being restored or revitalised.

- ⤴ Sacred natural sites related to shamanistic or local traditional natural religions are found in most of Scandinavia and Russia, as well as in the Baltic countries. Examples include the Estonian *hiis*, some of which are still venerated, while others continue to inspire feelings of respect.
- ⤴ Sacred natural sites related to the ancient Celtic, Cucuteni-Trypillyan, Dacian, Etruscan, Hellenic, Megalithic, Roman and Slavic civilisations are found in many regions of Europe and are sometimes embodied by imposing remains. In some but by no means in all cases these sites have been reused by later religions.
- ⤴ The sacred landscapes surrounding monasteries or tekyies are quite significant in southern and eastern Europe. In the Balkans, where many were destroyed, as well as in other regions of eastern Europe, these assemblages are currently being revitalised or restored. This is also the case of a number of hermitages and their lands. Many such sacred landscapes are found within Protected Areas.
- ⤴ Some Protected Areas have been established over ancient routes of pilgrimage. This is the case of the *caminos rocieros* in the Doñana wetlands (Spain) or Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in the Rhone Delta (France). In other cases, hundreds of kilometres of pilgrims' ways connect numerous Protected Areas, including the Camino de Santiago (Saint James' Way) linking Spain, France and Portugal, the Via Lauretana in Italy or the Via Francigena between Rome and Canterbury (Italy, Switzerland, France, United Kingdom), and foster landscape connectivity, as well as the restoration of natural and cultural heritage.

3. Custodianship/ownership patterns of spiritual sites and main stakeholders in Protected Areas. Who is responsible for management?

- ⤴ In general, sacred natural sites and landscapes have custodians or guardians rather than owners. Nevertheless, religious buildings and their facilities located in sacred sites usually do have owners, which may be public, private or both.
- ⤴ Custodians/guardians of sacred natural sites have the duty to safeguard the spiritual values of the related spiritual community. This may have certain implications for the conservation of natural heritage.
- ⤴ Custodians/guardians of sacred natural sites in Protected Areas should inform visitors of the behaviour *vis-à-vis* the conservation of the natural heritage that is expected from them.

- ⤴ Custodians/guardians of sacred natural sites in Protected Areas should be consulted before a new Protected Area is set up or when adopting new management goals or plans in an existing Protected Area. They should also be given the chance to participate in management within the context and circumstances offered by the site (only in very few cases do they ever have any responsibilities or influence on management).

4. How well are spiritual values recognised by Protected Area administrations and the public? What is the pertinence and importance of sacred natural sites for contemporary Europeans?

- ⤴ In most European Protected Areas spiritual or non-material values are not explicitly discussed in planning or management documents. This is so even in cases in which spiritual values are the main feature that attract visitors to the Protected Area.
- ⤴ In some Protected Areas spiritual values are implicitly considered in relation to aesthetics, health and well-being, or other related cultural values, but not as a management domain in its own right.
- ⤴ Recent surveys conducted in some countries (e.g. Finland and United Kingdom) show that one of the main reasons why visitors go to Protected Areas is to enjoy a spiritual experience within nature – solitude, beauty, silence, grandeur, harmony, etc.
- ⤴ In many European countries there is a much felt need to promote new, creative and effective approaches that will allow different societal groups (mostly urban) to profoundly reconnect to Nature.
- ⤴ Most Protected Areas offer outstanding opportunities and have a unique potential for enabling people to experience spiritual values of nature.
- ⤴ Local, national and international pilgrimage routes provide a unique experience that combines nature, spirituality and faith in a personal journey of contemplation.

5. How could religious and spiritual organizations be integrated into the conservation of natural heritage related to spiritual values in Protected Areas?

- ⤴ It is important to promote a holistic, democratic and inclusive approach to heritage management in Protected Areas.

- ⤴ The potential overlap between religious and spiritual stakeholders should be recognised and work should be carried out at different levels (i.e. local, regional and institutional) to promote cooperation and unity in activities involving natural heritage.
- ⤴ Where they are powerful, religious organisations should be encouraged to influence policies (and their makers) and visitor behaviour affecting Protected Areas and nature conservation from national to local level.
- ⤴ Religious and spiritual organisations and authorities can play a significant role in educating and raising awareness by acknowledging the moral and spiritual dimensions of nature conservation, thereby fostering greater motivation for conserving natural heritage.
- ⤴ It is essential to respect the cultural and spiritual heritage of indigenous peoples and communities within protected areas (e.g. in northern Scandinavia and Russia¹), including their oral traditions, traditional knowledge and use of nature.
- ⤴ Concerned managers in Protected Areas should nurture both their sacred natural areas and the pilgrims that visit them. They should encourage pilgrims and visitors alike to adopt respectful attitudes to all aspects of a site's heritage – natural, cultural and spiritual – so that it will continue to be similarly attractive to future generations.

6. What challenges and opportunities does working with these stakeholders offer?

- ⤴ Challenges
- ⤴ Spiritual people do not like their spiritual experience to be overly "administrated and managed". They expect to find a space where they can freely immerse themselves in the experiences nature offers and the inspiration a spiritual site evokes.
- ⤴ Most managers of Protected Areas do not as yet recognise the value that sacred sites and related religious and spiritual tourism may represent, and often do not include spiritual and religious organisations in the planning and management processes of these sites.
- ⤴ Success is unlikely if the local community is not involved in protecting its own sacred landscape since the community *is* as much a component of the

¹ In addition to the sami spread from Norway to the Kola peninsula, there are many other indigenous peoples in European Russia and some other Eastern European countries, such as the kalmyks, karelians, komi, kori, mari, mordvins, nenets, skolts, vepsians, etc.

landscape as the forests, the mountains or the rivers are. Some elements of working landscapes, including local communities or custodians, may be too weak to resist new pressures and impacts and so must be nurtured.

- ⤴ The public must be informed if a particular sacred site cannot be visited, for example in the case of pilgrimages, festivities or particular ceremonies established in local communities that are not open to the public.
- ⤴ Managers of Protected Areas should address the needs and interests such as ritual calendars of different stakeholders. Such initiatives need to be discussed and agreed upon with the custodians and guardians of sacred sites.
- ⤴ The needs of the guardians and the traditional community must be respected if a sacred site is secret or if they do not want to form part of a body organised along non-traditional lines. Specific requirements relating to sacred sites, e.g. solitude and silence, may also exist.
- ⤴ Religious and spiritual people and authorities should recognise rule-based Protected Area management.
- ⤴ Conflicts arising between the different spiritual stakeholders of a particular site may have negative impacts on the conservation of its natural heritage. In these cases, equitable reconciliation has to be fostered and special care should be taken when protective measures in such sites are being planned and discussed.
- ⤴ The target group of custodians/guardians of sacred sites, or 'holders' of the spiritual knowledge is not always homogeneous and may require different styles of language for effective communication. Collaboration with the representatives of organised religious sites (e.g. shrines, sanctuaries and monasteries) is usually easier.

Opportunities

- ⤴ Protected Areas are ideal places for experiencing the spiritual values of nature and as such provide excellent opportunities for forming strong bonds between religious and spiritual people, conservationists and managers of Protected Areas.
- ⤴ There is a great potential for joining forces as a means of developing the conservation, protection and revitalisation of spiritual natural sites, and looking at natural, cultural and spiritual heritages as an integrated whole.

- ⤴ Protected Areas are good places for identifying new sources of funding for sacred natural sites and the spiritual dimension of nature conservation, including investment by religious organisations.
- ⤴ There is a great potential for communicating and revitalising the importance of natural spiritual values via artistic languages such as traditional music, poetry and sacred dances.
- ⤴ Sacred natural sites are good places for sharing the spiritual and cultural values of nature emphasising those values shared by all that are universally recognised.

7. How and under which circumstances could spiritual values increase or enhance public support for Protected Areas?

- ⤴ Managers of Protected Areas could emphasise the fact that religious/spiritual natural sites have been established and recognised since pre-historical times in many highly diverse civilisations and have often been preserved as a result. Recognition of this long-standing reverence may increase respect and public support.
- ⤴ Managers should acknowledge the fact that certain spiritual activities creating a deep affinity to nature have been performed since ancient times and should continue to be nurtured (e.g. rituals, ceremonies, prayers, meditation and contemplation).
- ⤴ Managers of Protected Areas could improve communication and enhance the acceptance of geological and biodiversity values by adopting more accessible, less technical languages and tools that enable people to relate better to the spiritual values of nature, thereby creating deeper and more positive attitudes and emotions.
- ⤴ Managers and planners could also increase interest in Protected Areas by teaching, documenting, mapping and interpreting spiritual values via participatory processes, workshops, lectures and observations, and also by using local place names, myths, legends and traditional tales.
- ⤴ Nature conservation is the core mission of managers of Protected Areas, whereas spiritual values are an added value that complements biodiversity-related values. However, managers should be aware – and acknowledge whenever appropriate – that in many cases spiritual values are the root reason for nature protection and the designation of a Protected Area.
- ⤴ For religious/spiritual communities, natural values are the external or tangible dimension of spiritual values. Therefore, from a spiritual

perspective, a deep encounter with Nature has the capability to connect with the inner dimensions of nature and with human faculties that go beyond the rational.

- ⤴ Custodians of sacred sites and other 'holders' of spiritual values are natural allies in nature conservation and could thus be potential facilitators for Protected Areas with regard to local people and enhance the acceptance of necessary conservation measures.
- ⤴ Honest dialogue between managers – or other staff – of Protected Areas and the 'holders' of spiritual values is crucial. Therefore, as a first step contact, communication and a search for common ground for cooperation is necessary.

8. What conflicts might arise between the conservation of nature and the conservation of spiritual values?

- ⤴ Strict nature conservation (e.g. IUCN category I) may deny visitors the right to access or use a site – even for religious or spiritual uses – in cases in which the (newly) Protected Area has been established on a sacred natural site that has been used and venerated for centuries.
- ⤴ Too many pilgrims or other 'spiritual visitors' may have a negative impact on nature conservation, e.g. disturbance of vulnerable species, trampling and erosion, the picking of endangered plants, etc.
- ⤴ The promotion of activity tourism/recreation usually results in greater visitor numbers and could have a negative impact on the sanctity of spiritual sites and harm the spiritual experience of nature.
- ⤴ The boundaries of Protected Areas might not coincide with the boundaries of spiritual sites and thus might lead to a loss of the site's spiritual importance or significance.
- ⤴ Nonetheless, it is important to stress that the level of conflicts between the conservation of nature, on the one hand, and of spiritual values, on the other, is low and occurs only on a local basis in some Protected Areas of Europe. Economic interests are a more serious and widespread threat and may harm both natural and spiritual heritage.

9. How can spiritual values be maintained and enhanced without affecting the conservation of Protected Areas of Europe?

- ⤴ Custodians of sacred natural sites should cooperate with conservation professionals to decide when access to certain vulnerable or fragile

spiritual places should be significantly reduced, restricted or otherwise altered in the best interest of the preservation of their values, just as managers of Protected Area do with some fragile habitats.

- ⤴ When needed, solutions adapted to local and cultural realities should be implemented to resolve conflicts. When required, codes of conduct for religious/spiritual users should be developed in a participatory fashion and creative ways should be employed to communicate with interested parties.
- ⤴ Both regulation and technical solutions may be needed to minimise damage such as soil erosion and trampling in cases of mass pilgrimages and other similar events.
- ⤴ Managers of Protected Areas should have an open attitude to religious/spiritual visitors. This implies dialogue during the planning and management processes involving local people and those involved with specific spiritual values (religious communities, practitioners) in the Protected Area.
- ⤴ In cases of custodians of sacred/holy natural sites without links to any specific entity or tradition that are based on individual knowledge and/or intuitive perception, it is preferable to make use of their links with local people and/or the staff of the local Protected Area.
- ⤴ In the exceptional case of custodians that are not willing to actively communicate/cooperate (e.g. some indigenous communities) with managers of Protected Areas, a questionnaire can be used. Nevertheless, in these cases, custodians should not be studied without their express approval and decisions should not be taken on their behalf without their previous and informed consent.

10. What are the main implications and recommendations for management in Protected Areas that aim to maintain and promote both spiritual and natural values?

- ⤴ Develop a common understanding of spiritual values, whilst putting nature into its cultural context, encouraging the use of words that are appropriate for each language/culture.
- ⤴ Integrate spiritual values into all aspects of Protected Areas, from names, boundaries and designs, to planning and management objectives and actions, all the while working with local stakeholders.
- ⤴ Build and communicate the evidence for spiritual values in Protected Areas by using case studies and existing expertise in Europe.
- ⤴ Develop a stronger spiritual component in principles and management actions regarding visitor conduct, education and community involvement in

Protected Areas, as well as setting up training programmes for Protected Area staff.

- ⤴ When appropriate, set up interpretation centres and programmes regarding the spiritual meanings of sacred natural sites in protected areas in order to raise respect for these sites amongst visitors and/or to enable visitors to enjoy their spiritual atmospheres.
- ⤴ Use well-designed methods for protecting sacred landscapes and avoid using standard recipes imported from outside that are foreign to the values and practices of the local community. Participant observation is the best method for working towards the development of participatory conservation strategies as it offers in-depth insight on pertinent questions.
- ⤴ The 2008 IUCN-UNESCO Guidelines for managers of Protected Areas including sacred sites provide very useful guidance for indigenous peoples, but need to be broadened for use with sacred natural sites with connections with the historical religions of Europe (Christianity and Islam), as well as newcomers such as Buddhism.
- ⤴ Take into consideration the statements of the workshops of the IUCN WCPA Delos Initiative held in Spain (2006), Greece (2007) and Finland (2010), as well as the recent workshop on intrinsic and spiritual values of the Europarc Federation Congress held in Germany (2010).
- ⤴ Collaborate when appropriate with the WCPA Specialist Group on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas, especially with The Delos Initiative, collating case studies and developing a list of experts using existing communication tools.
- ⤴ Develop recommendations and guidelines at European level, building on the Manual of Intangible Heritage that is being prepared by the Working Group of the Spanish Section of the Europarc Federation. Bearing in mind the diversity of contexts, different approaches should be devised for:
 - Fostering the spiritual experience of Protected Areas in general.
 - Contemporary sacred natural sites and sacred landscapes.
 - Ancient sacred natural sites and sacred landscapes.
 - Protected Areas including monastic/sufi communities, hermits and equivalents.
 - Pilgrimages inside protected areas or connecting protected areas.
 - Shrines or temples attracting large numbers of pilgrims or visitors.