



**2018**   
**EUROPEAN YEAR  
OF CULTURAL  
HERITAGE**  
[#EuropeForCulture](#)



# Europe's cultural and natural heritage in Natura 2000



## Europe – a rich natural and cultural heritage

Europe boasts a stunning variety of plants, animals and landscapes for its small size. Much of its fauna and flora is found nowhere else in the world. Differences in climate, topography and geology have played an important role in shaping this unique biodiversity – so has Europe's long association with the land.

From the Arctic Circle to the Mediterranean Sea, from the Carpathian Mountains to the Atlantic Coast people have worked their land for centuries in accordance with local conditions. This has created an intricately woven pattern of semi-natural habitats that are exceptionally rich in wildlife yet entirely dependent on continued management for their survival.

This rich natural and cultural heritage is a defining element of our European identity. It brings communities together and builds shared understandings of the places we live in. It is also a very useful resource that can enhance social cohesion, employment and economic growth.

Throughout 2018 – the European Year of Cultural Heritage – events are planned all over Europe to encourage people to discover and engage with Europe's cultural and natural attractions, and to reinforce our sense of a European belonging. The European Year will also be an occasion to reflect on the place that cultural and natural heritage occupies in all our lives and to remind ourselves of the need to protect such unique values for generations to come.

*Alpine marmots, Austria.*



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## Natura 2000 – a showcase of EU natural heritage

Europe has worked hard over the last 25 years to create a network of nature conservation areas across the EU, called the Natura 2000 network, in order to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity in Europe. We can be justly proud of the fact that this is now one of the largest coordinated networks in the world spanning all Member States.

The Natura 2000 network currently contains some 27,000 sites and covers almost a fifth of the EU's land area as well as a significant proportion of its marine waters. Thanks to its size and breadth it enables all EU countries to work together within a common legal framework to conserve our most endangered species and valuable natural habitats.

In reality, it is much more than just a refuge for endangered species and rare habitats. It also preserves countless other valuable species, healthy ecosystems, time-honoured land uses, while embracing important aspects of our rich and diverse cultural heritage.

As a major showcase of EU natural heritage, Natura 2000 offers plenty of opportunities for tourism, recreation, as well as spiritual reflection in a healthy environment, incorporating related cultures and lifestyles. Indeed, many Natura 2000 sites are closely associated with cultural sites. For instance, of the 365 World Heritage Sites in the EU, almost 20% are located in, or directly on the border of a Natura 2000 site. A further 142 sites (or 42%) are within walking distance (2 km or less away).

*Natura 2000 offers lots of opportunities for discovery.*



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# Map of Natura 2000 and World Heritage Sites

The European Natura 2000 network contains over 27,000 sites covering around 18% of the EU land territory and significant parts of the surrounding seas.

## KEY

- Natura 2000 sites
- World Heritage Sites



Ireland: The Burren



UK: St Kilda



Denmark: Stevns Klint



Germany: Wadden Sea



Poland: Bialowieza



Austria: Dachstein massif



Hungary: Hortobágy



France: Iroise marine park



Portugal: Sintra



Croatia: Plitvice Lakes



Bulgaria: Rila Monastery



Spain: Las Medulas



Italy: Matera



Greece: Meteora



## Linking natural and cultural heritage

In recent years there has been a growing recognition within the European Union of the interplay between cultural and natural heritage and of the need for greater cooperation between the two. The 2008 financial crisis and subsequent decreases in public budgets has also provided a further incentive to pool resources and explore potential synergies and opportunities for collaboration in terms of planning and management.

The development of new information technology, while having a disruptive impact on some institutional structures, has also facilitated contacts among different administrations, scientists, civil society and businesses and helped to raise the awareness of Europe's remarkable tangible and intangible heritage.

Natural and cultural heritage suffer from a similar range of threats and pressures and is best served by an integrated management approach to ensure their long-term sustainability. One of the main drivers of integration is due to the capacity of cultural and natural heritage sites to attract visitors, which can in turn have a cascading effect on the local economy through new opportunities for sustainable tourism, business, and produce development around the sites.

Strong heritage also offers important educational and volunteering opportunities for both young and old and encourages dialogue between different cultures and generations.

To explore these issues in greater depth, the Commission recently published a set of case studies on linking Natura 2000 and cultural heritage. They are presenting practical examples of how the management of nature and culture has been successfully integrated across Europe, highlighting the actual or potential role played by the Natura 2000 network.

## Potential areas of synergy

The study identifies a number of areas where synergies exist between natural and cultural heritage:

- *Natura 2000 and historical and archaeological sites:* The European territory includes innumerable sites of great historical and archaeological importance, many of which also have natural values and are, for this reason, part of the Natura 2000 network.
- *Natura 2000 and cultural sites in cities:* most European capitals and many other European cities host both cultural heritage and natural assets, which are often protected as Natura 2000 sites. These sites can play a major role in raising awareness of urban wildlife through learning, exploration and recreational pursuits;
- *Spiritual value of Natura 2000 sites:* sacred natural sites are important because traditional respect for the environment can lead to well-conserved areas with high biological diversity.
- *Inspirational values of Natura 2000:* Landscapes and wildlife protected through the Natura 2000 network have long been a source of inspiration, and of cultural and artistic expression. They are also an invaluable resource for science and education.
- *Natural and cultural tourism:* the use of cultural and natural areas for recreation and tourism is growing steadily. This can be both an advantage in terms of recognition and branding, and a challenge in ensuring the protection of these fragile assets.
- *Natural and cultural values of landscapes:* Europe is characterised by innumerable diversified landscapes transformed by the interactions of people and nature over time. Traditional patterns of land use have proven sustainable over centuries and are living examples of cultural heritage.

*Mont St Michel in evening light with storm clouds, Normandy, France.*





### **LAS MEDULAS, SPAIN: SPLENDID NATURE IN ANCIENT MINES**

The spectacular rock formations of Las Médulas in Northern Spain result from one of the largest gold mines in the Roman Empire dating back to the 1st century A.D. Because of its outstanding cultural and natural values, the area is designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site and forms part of a larger Natura 2000 area of great importance for birds and bats in particular. The site is managed with the aim of ensuring the preservation of its significant cultural and natural features. It represents a good example of integrated management that takes into account both interests.



### **MATERA, ITALY: A SUBTERRANEAN CITY WHERE CULTURE AND NATURE LIVE SIDE BY SIDE**

The Italian city of Matera is located in the southern region of Basilicata. It is famous for its Sassi (literally “stones”), a peculiar system of dwellings and churches carved into the rock, inhabited since the Paleolithic age. The city is both a World Heritage Site and part of the Natura 2000 network. Two very rare bird species, the lesser kestrel *Falco naumanni* and the lanner falcon *Falco biarmicus* nest under the Sassi roofs and work is underway to conserve these colonies. New standards have also been set in the construction regulations to ensure the use of raptor-friendly roof tiles and cavities in buildings, thanks to integrated management planning.



### **UKONSAARI ISLAND, FINLAND : THE NATURAL AND SPIRITUAL HOME OF THE SÁMI**

Ukonsaari is one of Finland's most renowned ancient remains and the most famous sacred place of worship for the Sámi people. It forms an important part of the Sámi culture and identity. It is also an important Natura 2000 site situated in Lake Inari which is Finland's third largest lake. The area is being managed in an integrated and highly collaborative way, involving all stakeholders and authorities. This is helping to ensure that the natural and sacred values of the site continue to be protected while maintaining traditional land uses and encouraging tourism to develop in a sensitive and sustainable manner that is well adapted to local conditions.



### **MOUNT ATHOS: A PERFECT BALANCE BETWEEN NATURE AND CULTURE**

Mount Athos, the ‘Holy Mountain’, is located in north-eastern Greece. The peninsula with its 20 ancient monasteries is only accessible by sea, contributing to its sense of isolation. Mount Athos is well-known for its cultural and spiritual traditions, as well as for its magnificent landscapes and high biodiversity. It is both a World Heritage Site and a Natura 2000 site. Thanks to EU LIFE funding and the successful and systematic implementation of an integrated and multi-disciplinary management plan, the monks are restoring the peninsula's flourishing virgin forests and re-creating a landscape worthy of the spiritual and cultural importance of Mount Athos and its monasteries.



### **NATURE CONCERTHALL, LATVIA: USING CULTURE TO IMPROVE AWARENESS OF NATURE**

Nature Concerthall is an innovative approach to raising public awareness of nature conservation. The idea originally stemmed from musicians wishing to break out of traditional concert venues, and scientists wanting to find new ways to interest the public in biodiversity. Both felt that mobilising people's empathy towards nature would not only strengthen their capacity to absorb the information presented to them but also motivate them to do something for nature. Over the years, the Nature Concerthall has proven to be a great success, with up to 10,000 participants annually. The innovative approach has succeeded in drawing thousands of people from different backgrounds who would not normally be interested in nature conservation.



### **THE EUROPEAN GREEN BELT: NATURE ALONG THE FORMER IRON CURTAIN**

An extraordinary ecological network and living memorial landscape has developed along the former Iron Curtain, which divided the European continent into east and west for nearly 40 years. Unwittingly, this inhabitable border region has conserved many valuable habitats and acted as a retreat for numerous endangered species. Recognising this remarkable heritage, the European Green Belt initiative aims to protect, maintain, reconnect and restore natural and cultural heritage features over some 12,500 km and across more than 20 countries. Almost 150 governmental and non-governmental organisations are working together in the Green Belt preserve, as a memorial landscape of immense natural and cultural heritage.



## Linking nature and culture: factors of success:

A number of elements have been identified from the Commission's report *Linking Natura 2000 and cultural heritage: case studies* that can contribute to ensuring the viability and durability of initiatives aimed at protecting, managing and utilising natural and cultural heritage features for the benefit of all:

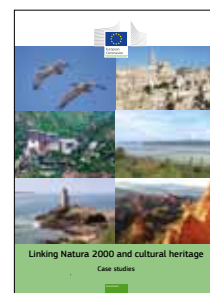
- a single management body in charge of both natural and cultural aspects or at least an interdisciplinary approach, a shared, long-term vision and harmonised legal frameworks for protection;
- sound knowledge of all assets that represent the cultural and natural heritage of a site;
- effective engagement of local residents and stakeholders;
- a precise assessment of ecological and cultural sustainability versus sustainable use (visitors, economic activities, etc.);
- integrated management plans and planning tools to combine different management prescriptions and objectives and overcome potential conflicts, e.g. use of zoning;
- awareness-raising information and dissemination both locally and further afield of the area's diverse heritage assets and of their potential to attract tourists and inward investments through branding, local products sale and a diversified tourism offer;
- an interdisciplinary approach and the design of innovative solutions adapted to local circumstances;
- monitoring of impacts, e.g. of tourism on the overall sustainability and socio-economic viability of the initiatives.



*Rote Rehe II, by Franz Marc (1880–1916).  
Franz Marc looked to the natural world as an antidote to modern life.*

## For further information:

- European Year of Cultural Heritage: <https://europa.eu/cultural-heritage>
- Commission website of the EC on links between Natural and Cultural heritage: [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/links\\_natural\\_cultural\\_heritage\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/links_natural_cultural_heritage_en.htm)
- EC report on case studies linking Natura 2000 and Cultural Heritage: [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/pdf/case\\_study\\_natura2000\\_cultural\\_heritage.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/pdf/case_study_natura2000_cultural_heritage.pdf)
- European Natura 2000 day 21 May: [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/EUnatura2000day/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/EUnatura2000day/index_en.htm)
- '101 Event Ideas – *Heritage and Nature, a landscape of possibilities*' and '*Bringing Heritage and Nature to Life*'.  
<http://www.europeanheritagedays.com/Home/Content-page.aspx?id=1ea69aeb-cd18-445a-a202-f75195925f9d>



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