

Protected sites in the Alps with an internationally awarded natural or cultural designation as of 1 January 2015 – an overview

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Abstract

The former Working Group UNESCO World Heritage of the Alpine Convention was tasked by the Alpine Conference to check the possibility of applying other instruments and international programmes to enhance the awareness about sites in the Alps. Following this mandate, as of 1 January 2015, 1345 internationally designated sites, divided into 12 categories, of cultural and natural heritage in the Alps could be identified and compiled in a list. The results were analysed according to the following topics: 1) percentage of Alpine sites within the global, total scope of application of the designations (programmes and conventions), 2) agencies involved (globally and regionally active organizations), 3) number of the culture/nature sites and 4) multiple designations of an individual site. Following an intensive revision (which led to a substantial enlargement of the list, as the initial list included 98 sites before it was augmented 14-fold), the list has been made available for the recently created WG Sustainable Tourism of the Alpine Convention as a basis of its work.

Introduction

The Working Group (WG) UNESCO World Heritage (2007–2014) (2015) of the Alpine Convention was tasked by the Alpine Conference for its (last) working period 2013–2014 to check the possibility of applying other instruments and international programmes to enhance awareness of the value of sites in the Alps. The mandate referred to the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of 2003, to Biosphere Reserves, Geoparks, Ramsar Sites and to the European Diploma of the CoE, all of which should be considered. (see also Arbeitsgruppe UNESCO-Welterbe, Alpine Convention 2013).

This broad approach covering other programmes and conventions is partly backed by the World Heritage Committee. Paragraph 41 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention 2013 stipulates that, “*the World Heritage Committee recognizes the benefits of closer coordination of its work with other UNESCO programmes and their relevant Conventions.*” The advisory bodies of the World Heritage Committee – such as IUCN – also recommended in their evaluation of sites proposed for entry in the World Heritage List to “*consider the potential use of alternative means of recognition of these sites through national and regional systems of protection and promotion.*” (IUCN 2014).

Based on the mandate, the author was asked by the members of the WG to draw up a list of all sites in the Alps with an internationally recognized designation of cultural and natural heritage.

The version presented to the WG in autumn 2014 identified 98 sites in the Alps with (at least) one of the following seven designations: World Heritage Site,

Geopark, Biosphere Reserve, Ramsar Site, CoE European Diploma, EN Prize / EU Award or CoE Cultural Routes. Following discussions with experts, the author revised the list in spring 2015 and included five additional designations of EU, CoE and IUCN: Natura 2000, Emerald Site, Strict Nature Reserve (IUCN Category 1a), Wilderness Area (IUCN Category 1b) and National Park (IUCN Category 2). However, this revision led not only to a considerable enlargement of the list (a 14-fold increase), see Table 1, but also to substantial changes in the results. The present list covers 1345 sites of the above-mentioned designations in the Alps (Table 2, Supplementary Table, online).

At the first meeting of the WG Sustainable Tourism of the Alpine Convention on 17 April 2015 in Belluno, Italy, the author offered to provide the members of the WG with this list (Sustainable tourism WG 2006). The information contained in the list could serve as basis for fulfilling the task stipulated in the mandate of the WG valorization of the cultural and natural heritage in the Alps for sustainable tourism. The substantial amendments to the list caused some delay in the submission.

Overview

Many sites in the Alps have been designated as regionally or globally important by assigning or granting those natural and / or cultural designations. In a study by ALPARC in 2013, some 400 larger protected areas (over 100 ha) in the Alpine area were identified. These designations are of diverse protective character and size, and they were awarded either by applying regional, national or international standards. Some of these sites hold multiple designations and *titles* (Table 3).

Table 1 – International designations in the fields of nature and culture.

Designation	Legal basis	Main objectives	Governance structure	Area of implementation
World Heritage	World Heritage Convention 1972	Protection of the natural and cultural heritage, WH List, list WH in Danger, international cooperation, financial assistance through the World Heritage Fund	191 State Parties to the Convention, meet every 2 years as General Assembly WH Committee (21 member states) Secretariat: UNESCO-WHC, advisory bodies (ICOMOS, IUCN, ICCROM)	Global
Geopark	Voluntary, non-legally binding network of member territories (Global Geoparks Network – GGN), background: GGN Charter (code of conduct & best practice)	Promotion of the significance and need for protection of geological heritage through engagement with local communities, awareness-raising on climate change	32 participating states Coordination: Global Geoparks Network (GGN) UNESCO provides ad hoc support to national Geoparks initiatives	Global
Biosphere Reserve	Intergovernmental UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme (MAB), 1995	Harmonized conservation management of biological and cultural diversity, economic and social development based on local community	All 195 Member States of UNESCO's International Co-ordinating Council of the MAB Programme (MAB-ICC, 34 Member States) Secretariat: UNESCO-MAB Secretariat	Global
Ramsar Site	Convention on Wetlands of International Importance 1971 (Ramsar Convention)	Conservation and wise use of wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation	168 Contracting Parties (Meeting of the Conference of the Parties) Standing Committee (18 members) Secretariat hosted by IUCN	Global
Strict Nature Reserve (IUCN Category 1a)	IUCN classification of protected area categories (justification in: Best Practice Guideline No. 21)	Protection of biodiversity and eventually geological/geomorphological features, strict control of human visits, use and impacts	Classification administered by IUCN	Global
Wilderness Area (IUCN Category 1b)	IUCN classification of protected area categories (justification in: Best Practice Guideline No. 21)	Large unmodified or slightly modified areas, with little or no human habitation to retain the natural character and influence	Classification administered by IUCN	Global
National Park (IUCN Category 2)	IUCN classification of protected area categories (justification in: Best Practice Guideline No. 21)	Protection of large areas with characteristic species and ecosystems and various visitor options (scientific, educational and recreational programmes)	Classification administered by IUCN	Global
Natura 2000	Network of conservation areas on the basis of 2 EU Directives: Birds Directive (1979) Habitats Directive (1992), dividing EU-territory into nine biogeographic regions	2 types of protected areas: Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) on the basis of Sites of Community Importance (SCIs) as stipulated in the Habitats Directive Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds as stipulated in the Birds Directive	All 28 Member States of EU SPAs selected by Member States SACs selected by Member States, followed by evaluation and selection through EU Commission Natura 2000 as the EU's contribution to the Emerald Network	Regional (EU)
Emerald Site	Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Berne Convention)	Emerald Network consists of Areas of Special Conservation Interest (ASCIs), which should ensure the conservation and protection of habitats and species listed under Appendices I and II of the Berne Convention	Member states of the Berne Convention Currently only sites in Switzerland designated as Emerald sites Emerald Network is based on the same principles as Natura 2000, quasi its extension to non-EU states	Regional (CoE + North Africa)
CoE European Diploma	Since 1965 awarded by the Committee of Ministers of CoE to natural and semi-natural areas and landscapes of exceptional European importance	Recognizing representative elements of the biological, geological and/or landscape heritage of exceptional European importance	47 Member States of CoE Annual Meeting of the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma of Protected Areas Secretariat: CoE	Regional (CoE)
EU-Prize / EN Award	Winners selected by NGO Europa Nostra, supported by the European Commission within its Culture Programme	Recognizing and promoting best practices for conservation (Category 1), research (Category 2), dedicated services (Category 3), education, training and awareness-raising (Category 4)	Sites and citizens from all European countries eligible in-situ assessment by independent experts, judged by four Heritage Awards Juries, organized by EN	Regional
CoE European Cultural Route	Enlarged Partial Agreement (EPA) on Cultural Routes (CoE, 2011)	Reinforcing the potential of cultural routes for cultural cooperation, sustainable development and social cohesion, focus on themes of symbolic importance for European unity, history, culture and values.	23 members of EPA Governing Board of EPA technical body: European Institute of Cultural Routes (EICR, Luxemburg)	Regional (CoE)

Table 2 – Number of designated sites within and outside the Alps. *not confirmed, **approximately, not confirmed

Designation	Number of sites as of 1 January 2015		Share of Alpine sites in %	Source
	Global total ¹	in the Alps ²		
World Heritage property (cultural and natural)	1 007	20 ³ (16 cultural + 4 natural)	1.99	World Heritage List (UNESCO 2015)
Geopark	111	11	9.91	Members List of the GGN (Global Geoparks Network 2015)
Biosphere Reserve	631	10 ⁴	1.58	List of Biosphere Reserves in Europe & North America (UNESCO 2016)
Ramsar Site	2 186	33	1.50	List of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar 2016)
Strict Nature Reserve (IUCN Category 1a)	11 100**	411	3.70	WDPA (Protected planet 2015) & ALPARC Lists (ALPARC 2012)
Wilderness Area (IUCN Category 1b)	2 940**	22	0.75	WDPA & ALPARC Lists
National Park (IUCN Category 2)	150**	13 ⁵	8.66	WDPA & ALPARC Lists
Natura 2000	28 943*	779 ⁶	2.70	Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2015/71, 3.12.2014 (Official Journal of the European Union 2015)
Emerald Site	37	22	59,5	List of Emerald Sites (December 2014)
CoE European Diploma for Protected Areas	73	9	12,3	List of areas holding the Europe. Diploma for Protected Areas
EU-Prize/EN Award/Category 1, 2002–2014	239	6	2,51	List of the EU-Prize/EN Awards (Europanostra 2015)
CoE European Cultural Route	29	9	31,03	List of the CoE (Council of Europe 2014) Cultural Routes
TOTAL in the Alps		1 345 ⁷		

¹ This number includes the sites in the Alps

² Sites fully or partly in the Alpine region

³ Each of the three serial and cross-border WH properties between two or more Contracting Parties of the Alpine Convention (Prehistoric Pile Dwellings around the Alps, Monte San Giorgio and Rhaetian Railway in the Albula / Bernina Landscapes) was counted only once.

⁴ The cross-border Mont-Viso / Monviso Biosphere Reserve (France / Italy) was counted only once.

⁵ Including Triglav National Park (not classified by IUCN under Category 2, only national designation as NP) and Swiss National Park (classified by IUCN under Category 1a)

⁶ This figure includes only sites of community importance for the Alpine biogeographical region.

⁷ see also Supplementary Table, online

Table 3 – Sites in the Alps with multiple designations.

Multiple Designations	Biosphere Reserve (BR)	Geopark (GP)	EU Prize/EN Award (EU/EN)	Ramsar Site (RS)	National Park (IUCN Category 2) (NP)
World Heritage property (WH)		WH Sacri Monti of Piedmont and Lombardy = Sesia-Val Grande GP WH Heritage of Mercury, Almadén and Idrija = Idrija GP			WH The Dolomites = Dolomiti Bellunesi NP
Biosphere Reserve (BR)				Laubersmad-Salwidili RS within Entlebuch BR since 2005	Svizzer NP = Val Müstair BR Berchtesgaden NP = Berchtesgadener Land BR
Geopark (GP)	Parc Naturel Régional du Luberon GP = Luberon BR				
CoE European Diploma (ED)	Julian Alps BR = ED Val Müstair BR – Parc Naziunal = ED		ED Triglav NP = EU/EN Pocarjeva Domacija, Triglav NP		Les Ecrins NP
EU Prize/EN Award (EU/EN)	Julian Alps BR = EU/EN Pocarjeva Domacija, Triglav NP				

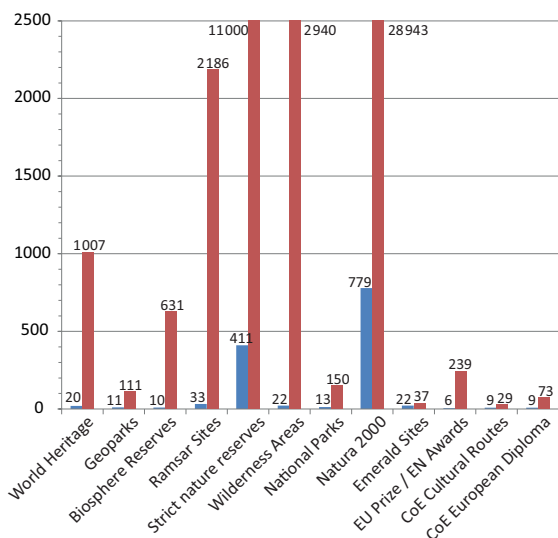


Figure 1 – Distribution of designations: number of sites worldwide (red) / Alps (blue) (1st January 2015).

The following matrix presents 12 international culture and nature designations in the Alps considered in this study. The criterion for inclusion was the international recognition of the sites by 1 January 2015.

“*In the Alps*” refers to sites which are fully or partially situated within the area of the Alpine Convention as defined by the Contracting Parties.

Statistics

The statistics underlying the following analysis reveal some *imbalances*. Some protected areas are present in high numbers on a global scale (e.g. Strict Nature Reserve – IUCN Category 1a) or at regional level (e.g. Natura 2000 sites), whereas other categories are less often used or less frequently awarded. However, a high number of sites at global or regional level also exert an influence on the frequency of certain categories in the Alps. Of the 1345 designated sites in the Alps, 88.5% belong to just two categories: Natura 2000 site (779 sites) and Strict Nature Reserve (IUCN Category 1a: 411 sites), Figure 1.

Natura 2000 sites and Strict Nature Reserves (IUCN Category 1a) form the majority of protected sites in the Alps; together they account for 88% of all Alpine sites (Figures 2 and 3).

Analysis

1345 designated sites of 12 categories could be identified in the Alps (see also Supplementary Table, online). The results can be analysed in terms of:

1. percentage of Alpine sites within the global total of designations,
2. agencies involved,
3. culture / nature categories and
4. multiple designations.

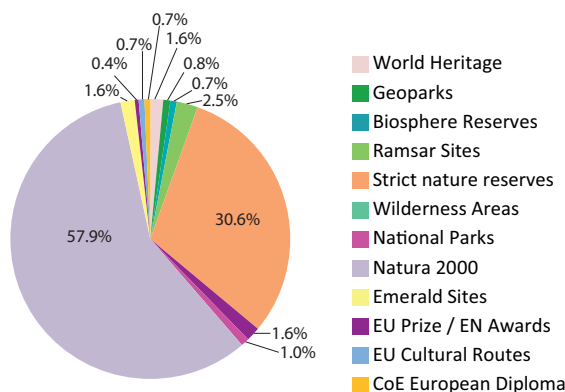


Figure 2 – Percentage of designations in the Alps (1st January 2015). $N = 1345$.

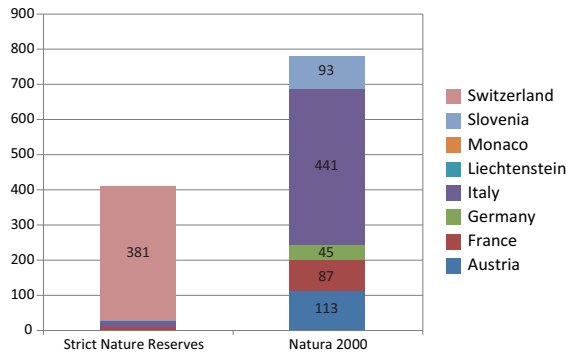
Percentage of Alpine sites within the global total of designations

With regard to the percentage of Alpine sites, three groups can be identified within the 12 categories: an (exceptionally high) proportion of 59.5% of Emerald Sites of the CoE are Alpine sites, but these are located in only one country, Switzerland. Almost a third (31%) of the Cultural Routes of the CoE cross the Alps. However, this high proportion is an estimate by the author, as the available information on the routes (Council of Europe 2014) does not always allow identifying the exact course and location of these linear sites. Geoparks and CoE European Diploma sites make up nearly 10% and 12.3%, followed by National Parks with 8.66%. As these sites have clearly defined locations, these figures are exact. The third group, forming the majority, with percentages between 1.5% and 3.7%, include seven different designations: Wilderness Areas (IUCN Category 1b, 0.75%), Ramsar Sites (1.5%), Biosphere Reserves (1.6%), World Heritage properties (2%), EU Prize / EN Awards (2.5%), Natura 2000 sites (2.7%) and Strict Nature Reserves (IUCN Category 1a, 3.7%). Again, these figures are precise, as the exact positions of the sites are defined (Figure 4).

Agencies involved

Regarding the agencies involved, designations of the CoE make up a higher share of Alpine sites (12.3%–59.5%) than those of global organizations. The higher share of CoE designations in the Alps stems from the CoE’s regional area of responsibility, which is restricted to Europe. An exceptionally high proportion of 59.5% of the Emerald Sites are located in the Alps. The reason for this figure is the fact that Emerald Sites are currently inscribed from only one country – Switzerland.

However, at EU level, the EU Prize / EN Awards, which are also restricted to Europe, do not follow the trend set by the CoE. With an Alpine share of 2.5%, they are rather close to the figures of global organizations, e.g. that of the Natura 2000 network with its 2.7% share in the Alps.



Country	Strict Nature Reserves	Natura 2000
Switzerland	381	0
Slovenia	1	93
Monaco	0	0
Liechtenstein	0	0
Italy	20	441
Germany	0	45
France	6	87
Austria	3	113

Figure 3 – Distribution of designations: Number of Strict Nature Reserves and Natura 2000 sites in the Alpine states (as of 1 January 2015).

IUCN categories present a slightly wider range: Alpine Wilderness Areas (Category 1b) make up just 0.75% of the total. Of the Strict Nature Reserves (Category 1a) 3.7% are located in the Alps, against 8.66% of the National Parks (Category 2).

Of the designations based on UNESCO's global programmes and conventions (World Heritage, Ramsar Sites, Biosphere Reserves) a strikingly low share between 1.5% and 2% is Alpine. Geoparks are an exception: although the network is global, almost 10% of the sites are located in the Alps (Figure 5).

Categories culture / nature

There is a clear dominance of natural site designations in the Alps, due in particular to the high number of Natura 2000 sites (779 sites) and Strict Nature Reserves (IUCN Category 1a, 411 sites). Of the 1345 designated sites, 98% (1314 sites) were awarded a natural designation and only 31 sites (2%) a cultural designation. It should be noted, however, that the World Heritage properties exert a small modifying effect on this result. Following the global structure of the World Heritage List (1007 properties: Culture/Nature/Mixed: 780/197/30), the number of cultural properties in the Alps (16) is four times as high as that of natural World Heritage sites (4) there (Figure 6).

Multiple Designations

Some sites – or parts of them – have more than one designation.

One of the Geoparks is a Biosphere Reserve (Luberon, France), two are World Heritage properties (Sacri Monti of Piedmont, Italy and Idrija, Slovenia). Two Biosphere Reserves – apart from the already men-

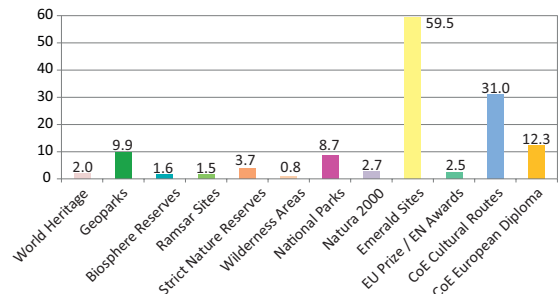


Figure 4 – Share of Alpine sites of the global total in % (as of 1 January 2015).

tioned Geopark Luberon in France – also received the European Diploma of the CoE (Julian Alps, Slovenia and Val Müstair, Switzerland). Several National Parks also received the European Diploma of the CoE (including Les Ecrins NP, which is protected under seven different designations, apart from National Park, also Site of Community Importance, Special Protection Area, Biological Protection Order, National Nature Reserve and Forest Biological Reserve). Moreover, National Parks also became World Heritage properties (e.g. Dolomiti Bellunesi NP = The Dolomites WH) or Biosphere Reserves (e.g. Svizzera NP = Val Müstair BR, Berchtesgaden NP = Berchtesgadener Land BR). Julian Alps BR was also awarded the EU Prize / EN Award. Entlebuch BR, Switzerland, includes Laubersmad-Salwidili Ramsar Site. In Italy, eight Strict Nature Reserves (IUCN Category 1a) form part of the WH property The Dolomites / Dolomiti Bellunesi NP (Table 3).

One can assume that some of the 779 Natura 2000 sites and 411 Strict Nature Reserves in the Alps have also got other designations.

Conclusions

International actors have awarded many labels for the protection of the natural and cultural heritage in the Alps. As a result, the Alps are an intensively protected area – especially the natural areas. However, the labels also serve as tourist attractions and as assets for promoting the tourism destinations.

However, it is not yet clear how the labels contribute to results other than *just protecting nature*. (The emphasis here is on nature, as only 2% of the designations in the Alps have a background in cultural heritage).

Therefore several questions arise with regard to the *Alpine labelling*:

First, the impact of labels on tourism requires deeper research. Do labels stimulate more tourism or are they an obstacle for touristic development? The question of how the labels are used as touristic resource is currently subject of the WG on Sustainable Tourism of the Alpine Convention, which was set up by the XIII. Alpine Conference on 21 November 2014 in Turin. As one of its tasks the WG has worked since

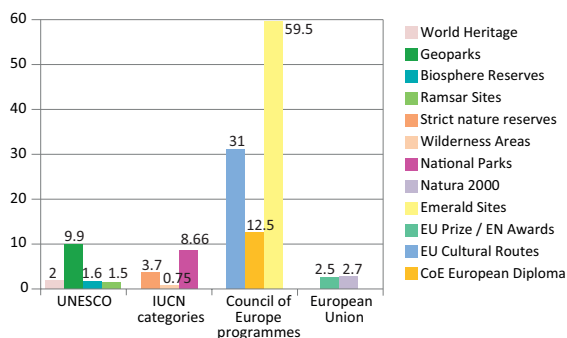


Figure 5 – Share of Alpine sites based on agencies and programmes involved, in % (as of 1 January 2015).

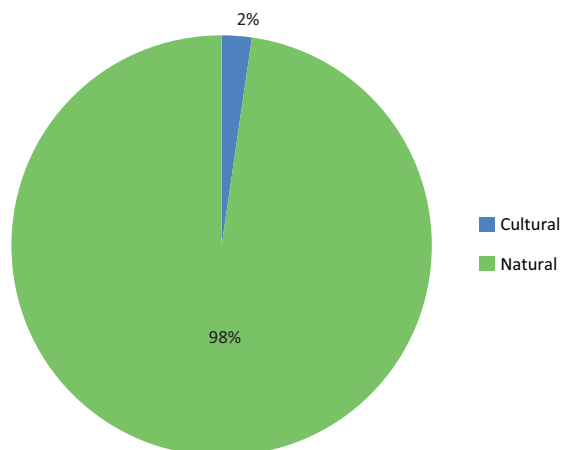


Figure 6 – Number and share of cultural and natural designations in the Alps (as of 1 January 2015). $N = 1\,345$.

early 2015 on the valorization of the natural and cultural heritage of the Alps (Alpine Convention 2006).

Moreover, 98% of all labels refer to the protection of the natural heritage, while the protection of the cultural heritage plays a minor role. We have to ask if there is no Alpine cultural heritage worth protecting through international labels or if no suitable international *cultural* labels for the Alps are available.

Finally, the influence of *nature labels* on the protection of cultural elements – like cultural heritage – deserves closer investigation. Most of the nature labels also cover areas of human land use. These Alpine cultural landscapes enjoy a high protective status through the Alpine Convention (1991, Art. 3, 4, 8). However, protection instruments provided through cultural property and cultural heritage protection measures are inadequate to ensure an overall protection regime. The protection of cultural landscapes cannot be achieved by putting the areas under a glass cover – which would result in Alpine *open air museums*. A broad set of measures is necessary to maintain the status of the cultural landscapes as stipulated by the regulations of the Alpine Convention. It should be analysed if and how international designations, for instance, Biosphere Reserve, can contribute to the overall protection of cultural landscapes in the Alps.

In this context the question should be raised if these labels have the capacity to contribute to a sustainable development in the Alps. Geographer Werner Bätzing identified a possible scenario with regard the future of the Alps, which he located somewhere between *wilderness* and *amusement park* (Bätzing 2015). What is the effect of these international designations? Do they cause *wilderness* or do they turn the Alps in *amusement parks*?

Abbreviations

ALPARC	Alpine Network of Protected Areas Association, Chambéry (France)
C	Culture
CoE	Council of Europe
GGN	Global Geoparks Network
EN	Europa Nostra

EU	European Union
ICOMOS	International Council on Monuments and Sites
IFP	Inventaire des paysages, sites et monuments naturels d'importance nationale (Switzerland)
IUCN	World Conservation Union
MAB	Man and Biosphere Programme
N	Nature
NP	National Park
NSG	Naturschutzgebiet
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WDPA	World Database on Protected Areas
WG	Working Group
WH	World Heritage

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