

Sacred Natural Sites:
**An ancient philosophy and universal
cultural practice with fundamental
significance to protected areas in Asia**

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Working Group 3 Culture/Traditions and Protected Areas



International Union for the Conservation of Nature



World Commission on Protected Areas



CSVPA

Specialist Group on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas

80-100 Members



Emerging from CSVPA

Thanks to

IUCN Japan



Biodiversity Network Japan



Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund



What is a Sacred Natural Site?

Areas of land or water having special spiritual significance to peoples and communities (Oviedo and Jeanrenaud 2007)



Particularly rich expression in Asia



Sacred Natural Sites – what have we learnt?

Mountains,
Rivers,
Forests,
Groves,
Springs,
Lakes
Rocks
Caves,
Seas,
Coral,
Mangroves



The world's oldest conserved - protected areas

To the Maya the center of the world is surrounded by 6 sacred sites created from the Earth itself.
This volcano is one of them – *Photo: B. Verschuuren.*



Give meaning and identity to people

Between 20 and 40.000 year old rock paintings at a sacred ceremonial site near Kunnbarrlaninja west Arnhem Land, Australia – *photo: B. Verschuuren*



Universal phenomenon almost every country and human culture



Soliga person pouring libations at a shrine in Biligiri Rangaswamy
Temple Wildlife Sanctuary, India - Photo: Nitin D. Rai



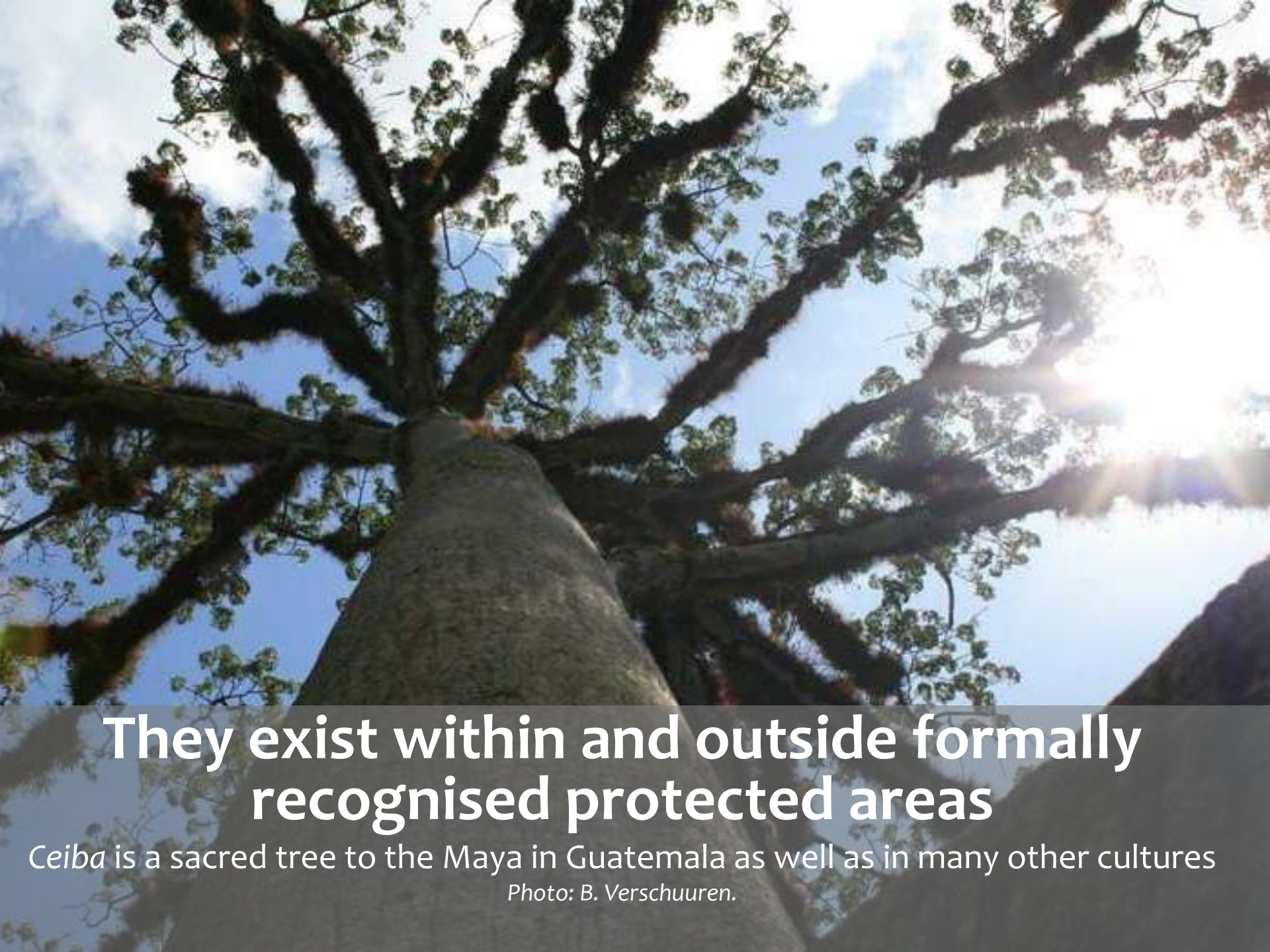
High levels of biological diversity

True Mona monkey is an endemic and sacred species surviving at Tafi Atome monkey sanctuary in Ghana – *Photo M. Scace.*

Help manage natural resources sustainably

The mythical giant octopus helps regulate fishing at Kayangan sacred sea – Coron Island, Philipines - Photo: A. Sampang





**They exist within and outside formally
recognised protected areas**

Ceiba is a sacred tree to the Maya in Guatemala as well as in many other cultures

Photo: B. Verschuuren.

Are resilient networks of people & landscapes

Procession of the Elders of the Kaya Kinondo, the Coastal Sacred Groves of Kenya - Photo: UNESCO





Accommodate local religions & mainstream faiths

A Shinto statue is positioned next to a Buddhist one in Sensoji Temple forest garden Tokyo, Japan – Photo: B.Verschuuren

Unrecognised primary conservation network - form backbone of modern protected area system



Holy Islamic Kramats encircle Lions point near Cape Town South Africa keeping development at a distance - Photo: R. Wild

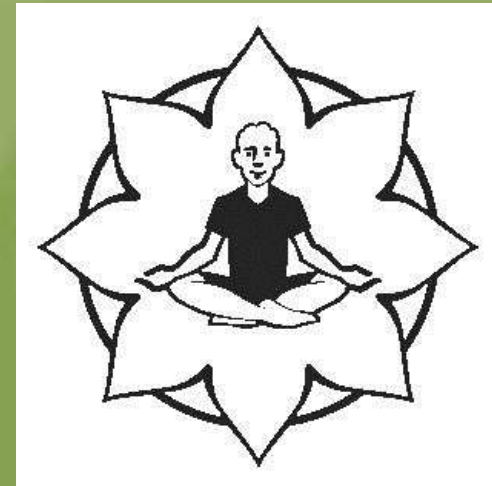
Are poorly understood and under-resourced



The fever tree has been used to cure people since pre-Christian times at Wijchen, Netherlands – photo: B.Verschuuren

Ecosystem services and SNS

- Cultural Services include the non-material benefits people obtain from contact with ecosystems. They include aesthetic, spiritual and psychological benefits.
- Cohesion and decision-making



Sacred Natural Sites and a New Global Philosophy of Protected Areas

Sacred natural sites are:

- Ancestral philosophy of protected areas
- Form a key component of the **Asian Philosophy of Protected areas**,
- Support to and deepen the new paradigm of protected areas to become a key element of a **‘New Global Philosophy of Protected Areas’**

Equity & Effectiveness in PA management

Aichi Target 11: By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through **effectively and equitably managed**, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and **other effective area-based conservation measures**, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes.

Equity & Effectiveness in PA management

- Traditional SNS guardians poorly recognised by managers of modern protected areas
 - Social safeguards
 - Can top-down PA agencies support SNS?
- Traditional guardians are not biodiversity managers and may unaware of and compromising biodiversity values

Engaging with sacred site guardians – recent developments



IUCN UNESCO Guidelines

Under development from 2003

Launched at World Conservation Congress 2008



Guidelines translation

- Full Translation into 7 languages -
 - Russian, Korean, Japanese, English, Spanish, French, Estonian
- Essential guidelines - blue pages – 5 additional
 - Italian, Persian, Czech, Chinese, Greek, Portuguese



Policy influence

- PA Categories
- Restoration Guidelines
- IUCN Resolutions
- IUCN Recommendation
- Inputs into CBD
- Asian Parks Congress
- World Parks Congress 2014



Community advocacy tool

- Venda, South Africa used for advocacy with government



- African Biodiversity network - Custodians Statement
- East Africa 2012

Community Films



**Sacred Forests
of Zanzibar**
Misitu ya Jadi
ya Zanzibar

Facilitation & Training by
Mwambao Coastal
Community Network

With the Support of

SACRED
NATURAL
SITES & Tazara

1 Challenges of Sacred Groves
Changamoto kwenye Misitu ya Jadi

2 Guardianship of Sacred Groves
Urithi wa Misitu Jadi
2012
community films

Challenges of Sacred Groves of
Zanzibar, Tanzania

<https://vimeo.com/58632407>

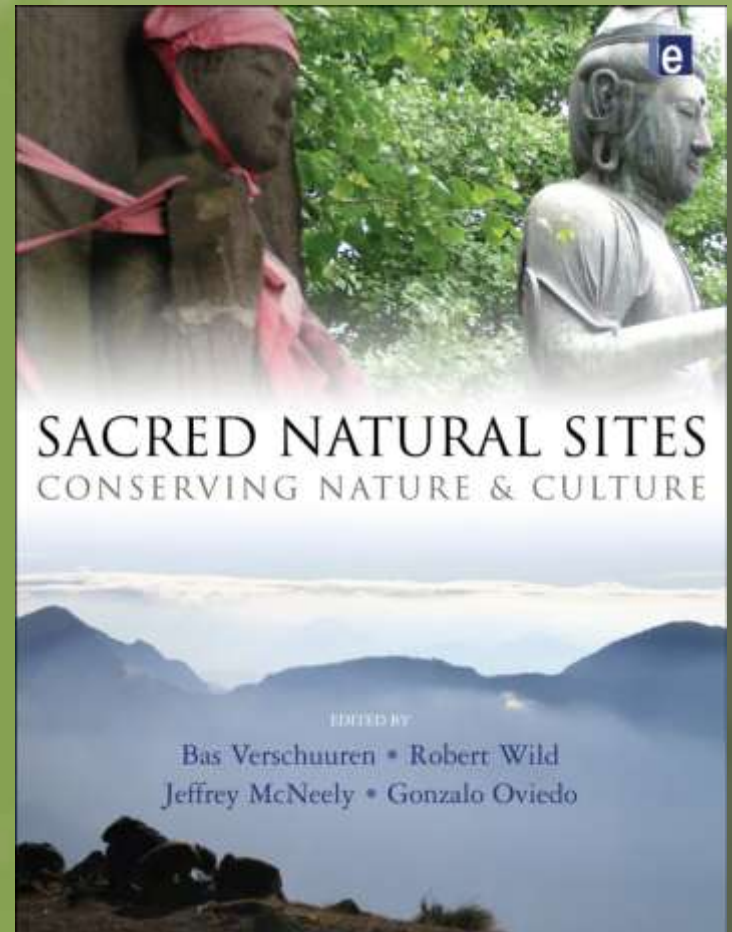
Guardians of Sacred Groves of
Zanzibar, Tanzania

<https://vimeo.com/58897622>

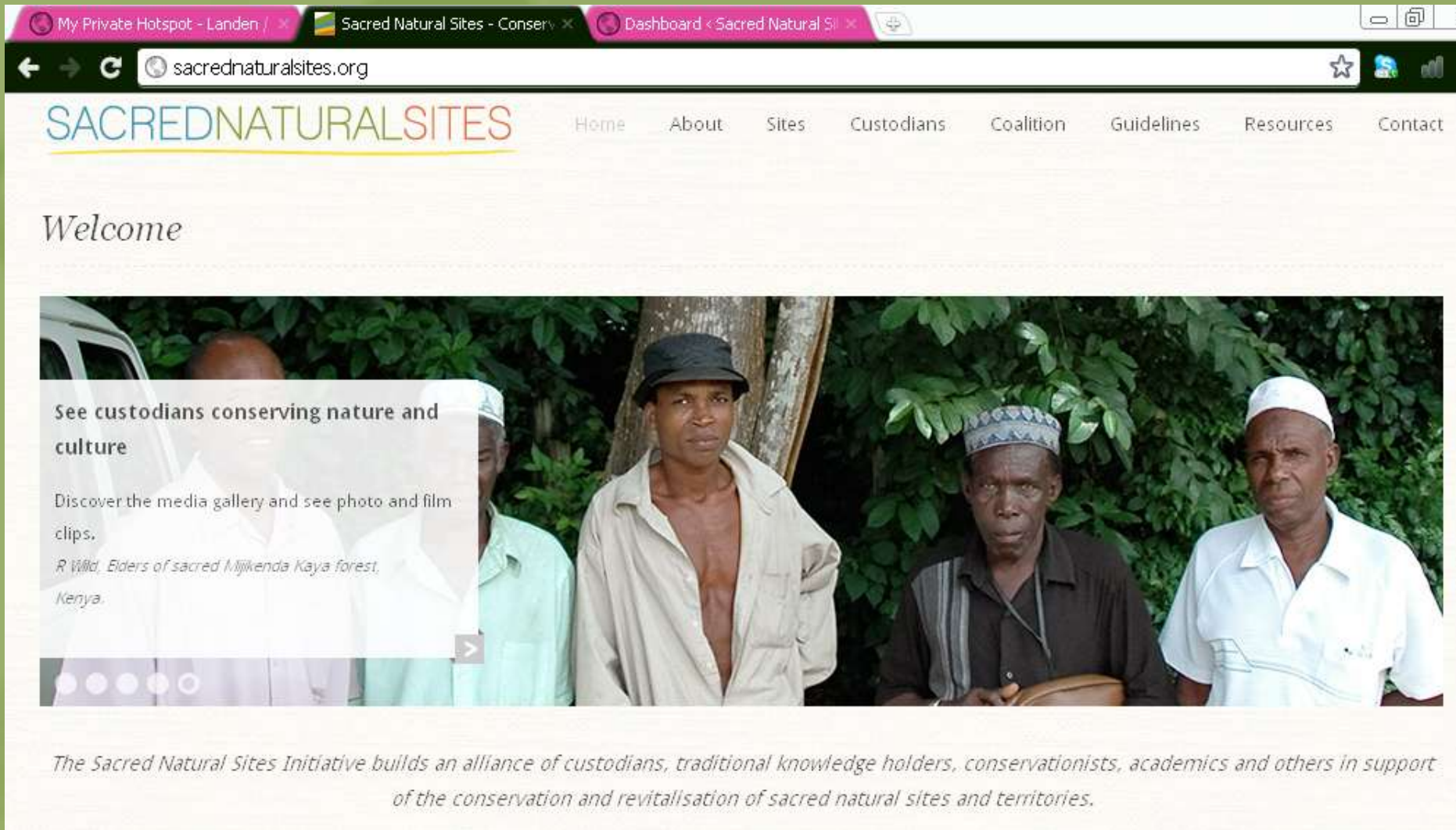
Book Earthscan

Sacred Natural Sites – Conserving Nature and Culture

- 27 case studies
- 55 authors, scientists, practitioners, indigenous peoples, custodians,
- Launched at CBD COP 2010



Website and social media



The screenshot shows a web browser with three tabs: 'My Private Hotspot - Landen', 'Sacred Natural Sites - Conserv', and 'Dashboard < Sacred Natural Si'. The address bar shows 'sacrednaturalsites.org'. The website header features the logo 'SACREDNATURALSITES' and a navigation menu with links for Home, About, Sites, Custodians, Coalition, Guidelines, Resources, and Contact. The main content area begins with a 'Welcome' heading, followed by a large image of four men in a forest. A semi-transparent text box on the left of the image contains the following text: 'See custodians conserving nature and culture', 'Discover the media gallery and see photo and film clips.', and 'R Wild, Elders of sacred Mijikenda Kaya forest, Kenya.' Below the image is a horizontal line of five small circles, with the first one highlighted. At the bottom of the page, a paragraph reads: 'The Sacred Natural Sites Initiative builds an alliance of custodians, traditional knowledge holders, conservationists, academics and others in support of the conservation and revitalisation of sacred natural sites and territories.'

www.sacrednaturalsites.org

Getting Custodian voices heard!

International meetings

WPC, 2003, 2014

WCC, 2008, 2012

CBD COP, 2010, 2012

ISE 2010, 2012

APC 2013



Supporting Cultural Restoration



Many SNS are ICCA

- Most SNS are areas conserved by indigenous people and local communities.
- Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCAs):
- Many fall outside boundaries of govt protected areas
- Very vulnerable to land use and cultural changes



Facing significant threats

- Threats from ‘economic sectors’
 - Agribusiness, Mining, Forestry, Infrastructure urbanisation
- Incorporated into government protected areas
- Cultural loss intergenerational gaps



Towards an Asian Network of Sacred Natural Sites?

- Defining objectives
- Types of network
- Host institutions
- Membership
- Work stream – what activities would it do?
 - Asian SNS statement
 - Information sharing
- Maintaining momentum?





**Re-awakening the power of place
Restoring the sacred in nature**



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Arigatou gozaimasu

Cám ơn

Thank you