

Annual Review

2023



GREAT
SPA TOWNS
of Europe

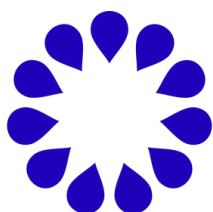


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The Great Spa Towns of Europe
Inscribed on the World
Heritage List in 2021



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GREAT SPA TOWNS *of Europe*

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Great Spa Towns of Europe Association

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Acknowledgements

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Chiara Ronchini, Paul Simons
Mayors, Lord Mayors and Site Managers of the GSTE

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Cover Page

♥ BAD KISSINGEN

Welcome



A YEAR OF CHANGE & CONSOLIDATION

2023 was a time of consolidation and development for the Great Spa Towns of Europe after a busy 18 months post-inscription. We held two General Assemblies in 2023, settling into the new structure and model of working together after the creation of the GSTE Association in 2022.

During our March General Assembly, held in the City of Bath, we were delighted to be joined by Her Excellency, Laura Davies, the UK's Ambassador and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO who presented the leader of Bath City Council, Cllr Kevin Guy, with its second World Heritage certificate - a remarkable accolade for this city.

In Bath we also said an official farewell to Paul Simons, the first Secretary General of the GSTE, and welcomed Chiara Ronchini as his successor. Paul's immense contribution to the GSTE is celebrated in this review.

In May, the Site Managers Group held an important meeting in Montecatini Terme, bringing together Planning and Urban Conservation officers together for the first time, in a very successful workshop.

We returned to Montecatini Terme for the General Assembly in October - in between numerous presentations and conferences in the Autumn, presenting the GSTE to a growing audience.

One thing that has become clear this year is the enormous added value that World Heritage Status brings to each of the municipalities, and how each of them shows their pride in this status.

We have estimated that the UNESCO label has brought in approximately 10 million euros across the whole site in extra tourism income since inscription.

Of course these extra visitors create an impact, and we are proud to say that the GSTE is currently developing a meaningful strategy for Responsible Tourism.

Stefan Szirucsek, Chair

Chiara Ronchini, Secretary General



Who we are

Leadership

Stefan Szirucsek

Chair of the Board, elected June 2022

Mayor of Baden bei Wien

Chiara Ronchini

Secretary General since February 2023

Intergovernmental Committee

With representatives from all seven States Parties of the GSTE, the Intergovernmental Committee acts as an advisory panel, and meets once per year, usually with a hybrid meeting. Since March 2023, the group has been chaired by the State Representative for Austria, Ruth Pröckl. Exceptionally, in 2023 the group met at both General Assemblies.

Pictured left to right:

Petr Kulhánek (CZ), Ingrid Boxus (BE), Chiara Ronchini (SG), Ruth Pröckl (AU), Denise Beilharz (DE/Baden-Württemberg), Katharina Arnold (DE/Bavaria), Gilles Soubigou (FR).

Board & Executive Board

The GSTE Board is made up of elected representatives of the eleven towns, usually the Mayors or Lord Mayors. The four Executive Board Members are shown in bold below.

Stefan Szirucsek, Mayor of Baden bei Wien chairs the Board and the Executive Board.

Pictured left to right:

Luca Baroncini, Mayor of Montecatini Terme, Yves-Jean Bignon, Vice Mayor of Vichy, [Chiara Ronchini SG GSTE], **Sophie Delettre**, Mayor of Spa, [Frédéric Aguilera, Mayor of Vichy], Baden bei Wien, **Stefan Szirucsek**, Mayor of Baden bei Wien, [Councillor Rob Appleyard], Mayor of Bath, **Andrea Pfeffer Ferklová**, Mayor of Karlovy Vary, Dietmar Späth, Lord Mayor of Baden-Baden, Martin Hurajčík, Mayor of Mariánské Lázně, Oliver Krügel, Mayor of Bad Ems, **Dr. Dirk Vogel**, Lord Mayor of Bad Kissingen, Cllr Ruth Malloy, City of Bath. Not present: Lenka Průšová, Mayor of Františkovy Lázně.

Site Managers Group (SMG)

Lucie Vodenková, Karlovy Vary's Site Manager, took over the Chair of this group from Tony Crouch in 2023. The SMG meets regularly online, and in person when possible, to discuss issues to do with site management, monitoring, preservation and the development of best practice. The group welcomed the new Site Managers for Františkovy Lázně and Mariánské Lázně in 2023.

Pictured left to right

Back Row: Anke Matthys (Vichy), Tony Crouch (City of Bath), Ondřej Míka (FL), Zuzana Stejskalová (ML), Lisa Poetschki (BB). Front Row: Chiara Ronchini (SG), Ginevra Gentili (MT), Rafaela Verdicchio (MT), Anne Pirard (Spa), Alexandra Harrer (BBW), Lucie Vodenková (KV).





Paul Simons and his involvement in the Great Spa Towns of Europe

Paul Simons was the Secretary General of the Great Spa Towns of Europe from March 2013 until February 2023, when he became a Special Advisor, prior to his retirement. Paul had been a driving force behind the project since the serial transnational nomination was first suggested in 2009. His knowledge, determination and diplomatic skills helped to take the project from an ad-hoc group of mayors with a good idea, to the successful inscription to the UNESCO World Heritage List as a serial transnational site.



Paul trained as an architect, and worked in several major local authorities in tourism and economic development, but could never resist a building at risk, or a conservation project, and this led him, while in Bath and North East Somerset Council, to develop Thermae Bath Spa and restore the city's dormant spa function for a new generation of spa guests. At this time, fact-finding for the project, he was involved in several spa associations both national and European, and became the President of the European Historic Thermal Towns Association's Scientific Committee, having been involved in the association from its earliest days.



When the idea of a joint World Heritage nomination was developed, Paul was again involved from the early days, and as a dedicated note-taker as well as an expert in the subject, was soon proposed for the role of Secretary General. Many years of research, comparison of towns against criteria, lengthy discussions and political wrangling to finalise the eventual eleven towns put forward for nomination followed. The 1,200-page nomination document is an outstanding piece of work which continues to be an important reference point for the GSTE.

Paul's achievement and contribution to the Great Spa Towns of Europe were celebrated at the official dinner held at the General Assembly in March, where he was presented with a unique gift commemorating his time with the Great Spa Towns of Europe.



Having completed his last major tasks, of writing a State of Conservation Report and submitting the Periodic Review to UNESCO, Paul travelled to all eleven of the Great Spa Towns with Chiara, passing on much of his knowledge, and expertise.

Paul continues to share his passion for World Heritage, as Chair of World Heritage UK. He is also Chair of Trustees at the award-winning Cleveland Pools, in the City of Bath.

1. Credibility



THE WORLD'S MOST COMPLICATED WORLD HERITAGE SITE?

The **Great Spa Towns of Europe** is a large 'Serial Transnational' World Heritage Site, formed of eleven component sites which are either complete spa towns or spa quarters of famous historic thermal spa towns and cities in seven countries. The site was inscribed on the World Heritage List at the Extended 44th session of the World Heritage Committee, meeting in Fuzhou, China on 24th July 2021.

The 'Great Spa Towns', in Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom represent a unique cultural achievement which reached its height in the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as a particular urban type and form which deserves global recognition as a phenomenon which helped to shape the Europe we know today.

The Great Spa Towns of Europe is inscribed on the World Heritage List with **Outstanding Universal Value** on the following criteria:

Criterion (ii) *Influence on Modern European Towns.*

Criterion (iii) *Taking the Cure; human health and mineral springs.*

In 2023 there were:

- 1,157 World Heritage Site properties in total
- 116 Serial sites
- 43 Transnational sites
- Just 19 were serial AND transnational
- Only 6 serial transnational sites span more than 3 countries, and only one has more countries than the 7 of the GSTE (the Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe with 18)
- no other serial or transnational World Heritage sites have towns or cities as component parts.

The **Great Spa Towns of Europe** developed around natural mineral springs which were the catalyst for innovative towns, which included therapeutic and recreational landscapes use for the cure as well as for social functions.

These fashionable resorts of health, leisure and sociability created unique architecture and town plans that had never been seen before. They were early pioneers of modern tourism, and were often able to compete on a cultural level with European capital cities.

Eleven spa towns,
Seven countries,
One World Heritage Site.

- 1 BADEN BEI WIEN *Austria*
- 2 SPA *Belgium*
- 3 FRANTIŠKOVY LÁZNĚ *Czechia*
- 4 KARLOVY VARY *Czechia*
- 5 MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ *Czechia*
- 6 VICHY *France*
- 7 BAD EMS *Germany*
- 8 BADEN-BADEN *Germany*
- 9 BAD KISSINGEN *Germany*
- 10 MONTECATINI TERME *Italy*
- 11 CITY OF BATH *United Kingdom*



1.1 Property Management Plan - building a new framework

The Action Plan within the Property Management Plan, delivered to UNESCO as part of the nomination process, was originally developed in 2016.

Since then, a great deal has changed, including the inscription of the site, and so, during 2023, the Secretariat, Board, the Site Managers and the Tourism Officers Group have worked on updating the Property Management Plan to take the Great Spa Towns of Europe towards 2030.

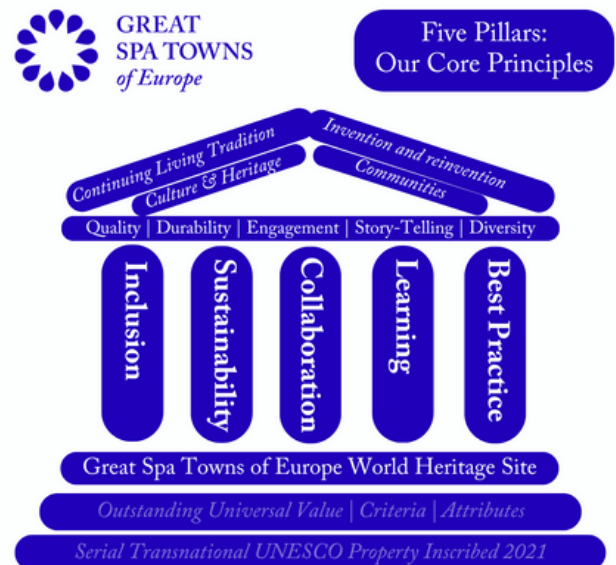
The original framework was built so that **overarching objectives** inform **objectives** which inform **actions**.

During 2023 the GSTE has shifted to an “outcome-based” framework, asking the question “What is the change we want to make?”. This leads to a guiding framework of **Aims, Outcomes, Actions and Core Pillars**, which underpin all the work that we do as our core principles.

Following the comprehensive review of the Action Plan, further actions have included developing a traffic light system for a progress tracker, refreshing the framework for prioritisation and action implementation.

The Core Pillars are now established as:

- I. Inclusion** - diversity and communities
- II. Sustainability** - Climate Action, environmental and social responsibility
- III. Collaboration** - partnerships and co-design
- IV. Learning** - education, engagement and storytelling
- V. Best Practice** - quality and innovation.



1.2 45COM Riyadh

Secretary General, Chiara Ronchini, attended the 45th World Heritage Committee in Riyadh in September, taking the opportunity to meet up with representatives of the GSTE's States Parties, including the former Chair of the GSTE's Intergovernmental Committee, Dita Limová, pictured here with Chiara. Thousands of participants from over 130 countries attended the Committee, whilst the WHSMF (World Heritage Site Managers' Forum) brought together 100 Site Managers from different UNESCO World Heritage sites from every continent.

It was also the perfect opportunity to see the Committee in action, especially since the GSTE had a State of Conservation Report that was going to be decided upon during this sitting.

Key topics of discussion and training at the WHSMF included stakeholder engagement, climate change resilience and risk preparedness, and support for site manager skills and knowledge sharing. Chiara helped facilitate workshops on impact assessment and monitoring with her working group in the WHSMF. The group also discussed the vital role site managers play in preserving the Outstanding Universal Value and integrity of World Heritage properties, especially in the light of climate change.

1.3 World Heritage Certificates

Mrs Valérie De Bue, the Belgian Minister for Heritage and Tourism presented Mayor of Spa, Sophie Delettre with the Great Spa towns of Europe World Heritage Certificate for Spa on 18th July 2023 at a special ceremony held in the Pouhon Pierre-le-Grand to celebrate the second anniversary of World Heritage Inscription.

Heritage was given pride of place at the event with the unveiling of a double exhibition:

- The "Great Spa Towns of Europe" (by the City of Spa with the support of the Walloon Heritage Agency)
- "The Inventory of the Built Heritage of Spa" (by the Walloon Heritage Agency).

Spa was the last of the eleven towns to be presented with its World Heritage Certificate.



1.4 Presentations & Conferences

1.4.1 March 2023

The GSTE was represented on the Medical and Health Pavilion Stage at ITB Berlin, with Catherine Lloyd giving a presentation entitled “The World’s Most Complicated World Heritage Site? Communicating the Great Spa Towns of Europe”.

Stefan Szirucsek, Hans Hornyik and Klaus Lorenz, all from Baden bei Wien, also appeared on stage in a panel discussion on promoting thermal towns and tourism, and the Bathrobe Addicts movement.

1.4.2 October 2023

Anne Pirard (Spa) took part in EHTTA’s annual European Thermal Heritage Day in Mondariz-Balneario (and online), talking about “Spa as a World Heritage Site”.

Stefan Szirucsek spoke on the “Great Spa Towns of Europe” at the ESPA European Spas and Balneology Congress in Karlovy Vary, as well as taking part in the Mayors Forum hosted by Mayor of Karlovy Vary, Andrea Pfeffer Ferklová.

1.4.3 November 2023

The Friends of the Lichtentaler Allee in Baden-Baden invited Chiara Ronchini to speak at their Annual General Meeting in November, where she talked about developments since 2021, and her plans for the future, including youth co-design projects, community engagement, development of tourism projects and protecting the towns in the context of climate change.

Chiara took part (online) in a panel on the “Heritage Value of Water Landscapes” at the ‘WaterScapes’ Ribeira Sacra International Meeting on Waterscapes: Bridging the Past and the Future held in Galicia, Spain.

Stefan Szirucsek, Isabelle Grégoire and others took part in various panels and presentations at the EHTTA Thermal Tourism Congress Nancy (with the participation of the UNWTO).

1.5 Trade Shows & Exhibitions

The Great Spa Towns of Europe took part in the world’s biggest travel trade show at ITB Berlin in 2023. This was the first time that the GSTE has been present at ITB, along with EHTTA and other individual members including Baden bei Wien. The GSTE also supported and attended the Medical Night reception, and took part in various panels.



1.6 Collaboration

The European Historic Thermal Towns Association (EHTTA) continued to be an important partner for the GSTE in 2023, following on from several successful initiatives in 2022, particularly in promotional terms as the two associations joined forces for the first time at ITB Berlin (See section 1.5).

All the GSTE towns are members of EHTTA, and there was a great opportunity to meet the wider ‘thermal family’ and experience a Great Spa Town, when EHTTA hosted its General Assembly in Baden bei Wien in May 2023. The programme surrounding the EHTTA General Assembly was extensive, and included some great highlights:

- Europe Day and Press Conference
- Cafe of Europe on the theme of “Music in Spa Towns”
- Les Accros du Peignoir (Bathrobe Addicts) launched in Baden bei Wien with an event at the thermal lido beach (Thermalstrandbad)
- Filming with Globetrotter TV (see section 4.3)
- A World Heritage Day celebration took place in front of the Town Hall, with Chiara Ronchini being interviewed by the Director of Tourism, Klaus Lorenz. Site Manager Alexandra Harrer, and Councillor Hans Hornyik also spoke at the event.
- Youth project with Karlovy Vary - Tastes of World Heritage digital cookery book presentation.

The Great Spa Towns of Europe was also very pleased to take part in some of EHTTA’s flagship events, namely European Thermal Heritage Day in October and to be present at the International Congress on Thermal Tourism in Nancy in November.

A formal Memorandum of Understanding between the GSTE and EHTTA will be developed in 2024, setting out how the two associations will work together, and where their similarities and differences are.





2. Conservation

CONSERVATION

2.1 Periodic Reporting

In July 2023, the first Periodic Report from the Great Spa Towns of Europe was submitted to UNESCO. It was completed by Paul Simons and Dita Limová (former Chair of the International Steering Group), and ratified by the (now) GSTE Intergovernmental Committee.

The process of submitting the Periodic Report showed that the questionnaire provided was not suitable for a serial transnational site like the GSTE, as it was challenging to showcase the complexity of the property. The GSTE provided constructive feedback to UNESCO to inform the content of future questionnaires.

2.2 State of Conservation - Decision 45 COM 7B.177

At the 45th session of the World Heritage Commission in Riyadh, the Committee decided that the GSTE needs to submit a new State of Conservation Report by 1st December 2024 to demonstrate progress on some issues that had not been fully addressed in the previous State of Conservation report submitted in 2022.

Some of these issues include further developing the monitoring programme for the property, and integrating impact assessment procedures.

2.3 Developing a Joint Monitoring System

Since the Committee's decision, the Secretary General and the Site Managers have worked extensively to address these issues, developing a joint monitoring system as well as an 'early flag' protocol for assessing impacts on the World Heritage Site.

Data collected in future has to cover issues to do with all the attributes of the world heritage site, such as the mineral springs and key buildings, tourism, environmental issues and climate.

Indicators, measurement tools, baselines for the state of conservation of each attribute and thresholds for acceptable change are all part of this complex task, which will help all involved in preserving the Great Spa Towns of Europe for future generations.



2.4 Conservation in Action

2.4.1 Baden bei Wien

The Art Nouveau Sommerarena, with its innovative retractable glass roof, was built in 1906. The aim of the two-year restoration project which was completed in 2023 was to ensure future use as a summer theatre while conforming to international and monument restoration standards. This included extensive internal and external restoration of both structural and decorative elements, construction of new facilities for performers and audience, new stage design and extended facilities for production staff.

2.4.2 Spa

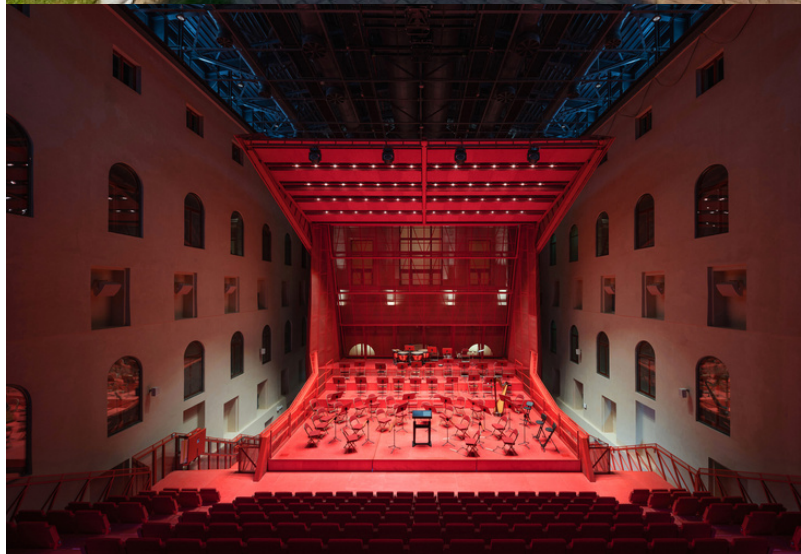
Spa's renowned Casino complex was listed on 18th April 2023, appropriately on World Heritage Day. Restoration of Leopold II Gallery (right) was completed, with new flooring and a new wrought iron structure. The Gallery was built in 1878 to shelter spa guests from the weather while they took gentle exercise as part of the cure. The adjacent Marie-Henriette pavilion is still a "work in progress". The long-awaited restoration of Old Thermal Baths, and conversion to a new spa hotel continued in 2023, and is planned to be completed by the end of 2024.

2.4.3 Františkovy Lázně

Restoration of the Lázeňská Poliklinika protected monument, originally built as a mineral water bottling plant in 1898 took place in 2023 at a cost of 5 million CZK, 4 million of which came from the Karlovy Vary Region. The Císařské Lázně (pictured, right), part of the modern day Aquaforum was also restored, allowing more opportunities to offer a greater range of spa treatments and contemporary therapy methods in an historic setting. Plans for the restoration of the historic Sadová Kavárna (Café) in the middle of central park were also initiated in 2023. The town will invest a large sum to restore the café and open it to the public in 2026-2027.

2.4.4 Karlovy Vary

The former Imperial Baths, built in 1895 were given a new lease of life with the opening of a new multifunctional concert hall designed by Petr Hájek Architekti. The concert platform stands on six steel legs in the courtyard without directly touching the protected spa landmark, meaning that everything is reversible. The Karlovy Vary Symphony Orchestra will use the new hall for its concerts, and theatrical performances will also take place. Thanks to the adjustable floor, the auditorium can quickly be transformed into a conference space or ballroom with a flat floor.





2.4.5 Mariánské Lázně

The Chopin House, home of the Fryderyk Chopin Memorial Museum, and a major venue for the Chopin Festival, celebrating the music of one of the town's most famous guests, was completely renovated over a period of two years from 2021 to 2023. Its official launch will take place during the opening of the spa season in 2024.

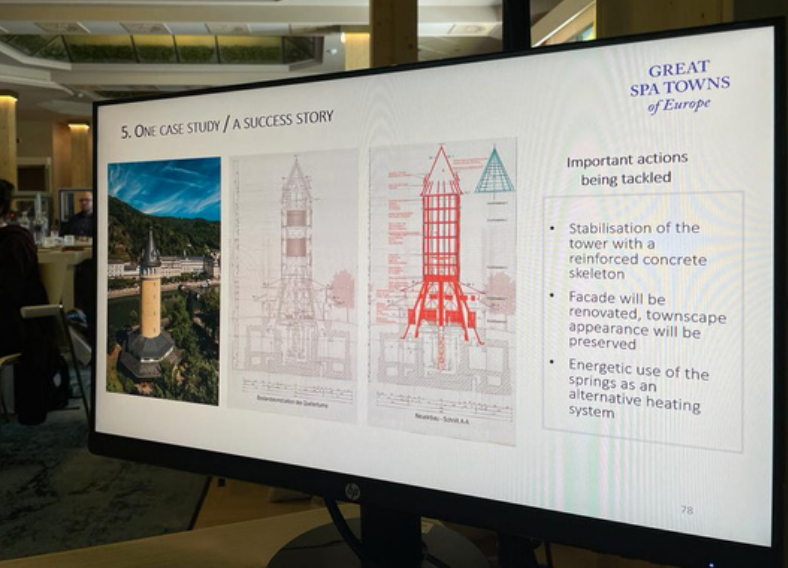
In addition, the project documentation for the reconstruction of another public building, the former town hall, was also completed.



2.4.6 Vichy

Vichy's ambitious "Renaissance of the spa town" project entered its operational phase in spring 2023. Vichy took over the ownership of its spa domain in 2021 and aims to once again become a European leader in the spa and tourism sectors. The project to transform the historic urban heart of Vichy and its thermal spa function will cost over 100 million euros and is divided into three complementary areas:

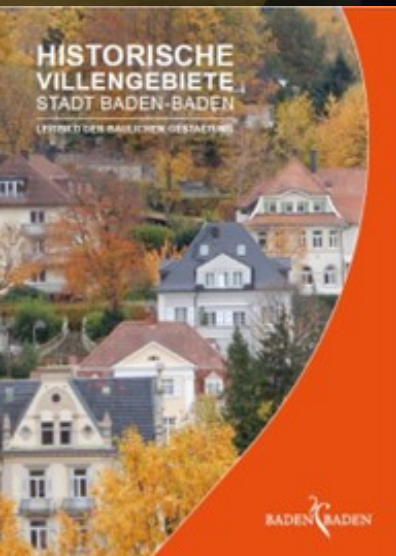
- the renovation of the Parc des Sources, led by the municipality.
- the "Accélération 2030" spa plan led by France Thermes.
- the renovation of the Casino - Grand Café by the Partouche Group.



2.4.7 Bad Ems

Restoration of some classic spa infrastructure continued in 2023, including the Quellturm or "spring tower" with its thermal-water-powered district heating scheme.

A community-led project in the heart of Bad Ems restored a "bohrturm" or derrick, saving it from demolition, and after investigating and analysing the paint layers, brought it back to its original blue. The tower houses a drill rig, pumping water from 400 metres below the ground, and has been restored by a team of around 10 volunteers from a local historic society. (See image on p44.)



2.4.8 Baden-Baden

As well as scoping out the site for a new World Heritage Information Centre, these were the most important conservation projects in 2023.

- Building guide and separate garden guide.
- Value planning for the historic city centre.
- Design statutes for the historic villa areas, part 1 (Annaberg).
- Park maintenance work (basic evaluation for updating).
- Roman Baden Baden.
- RVMO update Wind and solar screening and scoping report.

2.4.9 Bad Kissingen

The comprehensive 2 million euro renovation of the Grand Stand of the Turniergebäude or 'Tournament building' was planned and funded in 2023. As the owner of the building, the town of Bad Kissingen has received support from many partners including the federal government. The tournament building is also the first project carried out in co-operation with the German Foundation for Monument Protection. Together, they are providing funding totalling around 733,000 euros.

2.4.10 Montecatini Terme

Montecatini Terme celebrated the 150th anniversary of the birth of famous ceramicist and sculptor, Galileo Chini, a figure who is considered central to the city's 20th-century cultural history, with an exhibition in the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA). Restoration of the famous Chini glass ceiling in the town hall continued in 2023, having started the previous year.

2.4.11 City of Bath

The Bath Abbey Footprint Project was completed early in 2023, and GSTE Site Managers were some of the first people to visit the newly-opened space, while at the General Assembly in March. Canon Guy Bridgewater explained the new under-floor thermal water heating system and the conservation works which have taken several years to complete.

The exciting restoration of Beckford's Tower also started in 2023, bringing sensitive new interpretation, as well as protecting this unique building which in 2019 was placed on the "at risk" register. The National Lottery Heritage Fund project, "Our Tower: Reconnecting Beckford's Tower and Landscape for all", is due to open in late spring of 2024. Beckford's grotto was also excavated as part of the project uncovering some interesting artefacts, and allowing access for the first time in 100 years.

2.5 UNESCO Monitoring Visits

The German Great Spa Towns were visited by ICOMOS towards the end of October 2023, as part of a programme of visits for annual preventive monitoring of the World Heritage Site:

- Baden-Baden (pictured)
- Bad Ems
- Bad Kissingen





2.6 Conservation Challenges

Conservation challenges are inevitable and some, such as fire, strong winds and flooding are unpredictable, and can lead to change as buildings are repaired or replaced. Climate change is also bringing new challenges, especially in parks and gardens and in the Therapeutic Spa Landscape.

2.6.1 Planning Issues

Larger sites, such as the City of Bath, due to their scale also have to deal with large numbers of developments, some of which become the subject of “172 notices”. These not only pose an element of risk to the whole serial transnational World Heritage site, but they also have to be considered by planners resulting in time and monetary resources being spent. The long-awaited rugby ground development in Bath and the former gas works are currently subject to 172 notices. Meanwhile in Spa, a “guide d’urbanisme” to manage project development in the property and in the buffer zone has been developed alongside a training programme for city employees. Comprehensive design guidance with “dos and don’ts” for any future developments in the ‘villa quarter’ has also been developed by Baden-Baden.

2.6.2 Coping with a lack of water

The Great Spa Towns of Europe are renowned for their extensive parks and gardens, but many of them have been under threat, particularly some of the larger trees. New planting and tree works have had to be carried out in parks in Františkovy Lázně Vichy because of changes in water supply and temperatures, due to climate change. In Spa, a study for the logging and planting of the climate change-resistant trees in the Parc de Sept Heures has been carried out, while in Mariánské Lázně special ponds have been installed to help their spa parks to cope with drought (right). Many trees had to be replaced in Montecatini Terme after storms.

2.6.3 ...or too much water!

The newly-completed Cleveland Pools in the City of Bath suffered extensive flooding in spring 2023. In 2015, the project was designed to withstand a 1 in 100 year flood event. In 2018 when detailed plans were being drawn up, floods were expected to be a 1 in 30 year event. The Cleveland Pools has flooded six times in the last ten years, three of those events in the last two years. Due to climate change, over a period of just 10 years an anticipated 1 in 100 year event has become an annual event, leading to added financial burden, and operational difficulties.



3. Capacity building

BUILDING SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES FOR THE WORLD HERITAGE SITE

The Site Managers have a responsibility to deliver the GSTE's Property Management Plan (PMP), and so it is essential that Site Managers have a good understanding of the issues, not only amongst each other but with key colleagues in each of the towns and cities.

Following a series of workshops in 2022, the Urban Planning Workshop was a huge achievement for the group in 2023 - and a major outcome from the PMP.

Held in May in Montecatini Terme, and with interpretation in five languages, this event with planning and urban specialist colleagues allowed participants to share best practice examples and to really understand what it means to be a World Heritage Site.

Since this workshop, the SMG has prioritised working on issues to do with monitoring the state of conservation of the Outstanding Universal Value of the site across the eleven towns, finding ways to measure and report on planning, urban development and environmental issues, and keeping track of their potential impact on the key attributes, such as springs, spa architecture and the continuing spa function.

A new urban planning workshop is planned for April 2024 in Bad Kissingen. Following on from the feedback and interest expressed by workshop participants in Montecatini Terme, this new workshop will focus on two main threats to the property: climate change and urban development.

The Site Managers Group (SMG) brings together all the individual Site Managers appointed by the eleven municipalities to deliver the Property Management Plan of the Great Spa Towns of Europe.



3.1 Urban Planning Workshop

Montecatini Terme, Italy, was the location for the fourth event in the GSTE's Urban Planning Workshop series. Site Managers were joined for the first time by planning and conservation colleagues from each of the towns to discuss the theme of "Being World Heritage: Responding to Urban Planning and Heritage Conservation Challenges".

In total, 36 participants were brought together over an intense two days of discussion and learning, to build a shared understanding of World Heritage issues and champion the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the Great Spa Towns of Europe. The Secretary General, Chiara Ronchini chaired the event, whilst Paul Simons and two external advisors assisted with facilitation.

In 2022, the Site Managers held a series of special workshops to cement their understanding of all the issues facing our unique World Heritage Site. Previous themes were:

- Workshop I: 'Protection, Planning and Governance'
- Workshop II: 'OUV, Attributes and Elements'
- Workshop III: 'OUV, Attributes and Elements – Definitions and Management Implications'.

This Workshop in Montecatini Terme also built on a workshop, held in Prague in November 2022, where Site Managers and national focal points focused on different types of impact assessments and on how to develop mitigation measures against negative impacts on the OUV and the wider setting of the property.

One of the main objectives of the event was to achieve a shared understanding of key World Heritage priorities and goals. The workshop also promoted further collaboration and friendship between the towns, which was very successful, despite the challenge of working in five different languages.

The group also experienced some of Montecatini Terme's significant spa heritage landmarks, which included the Terme Tettuccio.



3.2 Site Managers Group Monitoring Workshop

The GSTE Site Managers have been working together on the important topic of monitoring the state of conservation of the World Heritage Site, and met online in November 2023 for a special workshop.

Using a digital interactive board to facilitate discussions, the Site Managers were able to define a joint monitoring system, identifying key indicators, monitoring tools and assessment methods for each of the “attributes” (the characteristics used to describe and assess the Outstanding Universal Value of the Site).

Climate change indicators were also part of the discussion, and data will also be gathered on for example:

- Percentage of green spaces within each town
- Number of extreme and severe weather events impacting on Historic Urban Landscape
- Number of sudden environmental and geological events.
- Number of diseased species (fauna and flora).
- Environmental pollution.

3.3 SG fact-finding visits

New Secretary General Chiara Ronchini joined the Great Spa Towns of Europe from Historic Environment Scotland in February 2023. Her first task was to meet the GSTE team, who gathered in Baden Baden where the GSTE Administration and Finance are based. Baden-Baden was the first location on a whistle-stop tour of the eleven towns of the GSTE, where, accompanied by Paul Simons, Chiara met Mayors and local Site Managers.

The visits were particularly important for experiencing each of the component parts of the GSTE and discovering their particular contribution to the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site. Local Site Managers showed Chiara the finer points of local plans and individual buildings, and she was able to see for herself the impact of some of our most pressing global issues on local environments.

Chiara and Paul finally completed visits to all eleven towns in August, with a visit to Bad Kissingen, and an official handover on the very spot where Paul had been officially appointed as Secretary General ten years earlier in March 2013 (see right).



4. Communications



COMMUNICATING OUR WORLD HERITAGE IN 2023

The Communications section of the GSTE's Property Management Plan was one of the first to receive a comprehensive make-over in 2023, translating its original aims and objectives to the new outcome-centred approach, which also includes Sustainable Development Goals, and the new pillars. The resulting document was approved by the General Assembly in Montecatini Terme.

4.1 Press and media coverage

One of Chiara's first duties as new Secretary General was to take part in a Press Conference in Baden-Baden, organised by the Municipality, where she fielded some occasionally challenging questions from local media outlets.

Coverage of the GSTE, both in print on TV and online as a result of press releases throughout the year has included:

- Chiara Ronchini's appointment and Paul Simons' retirement.
- GSTE General Assembly in Bath.
- GSTE General Assembly in Montecatini Terme (where our Austrian Chair Stefan Szirucsek was interviewed in Italian- see right).



4.2 Blogger Visits

The magnificent central dome of the historic Friedrichsbad in Baden-Baden was one of many impressive highlights experienced by 'Spa Travel Gal', Ava Roxanne Stritt, a US-based journalist and content creator.

Ava was one of the writers who featured in the ETC/EHTTA/GSTE Thermal Travels campaign in 2022, and on her way to the Thermal Congress in Nancy, she was invited to Baden-Baden for a press trip. The GSTE team were delighted to be able to work with her and facilitate the trip, creating content, and sharing some of the best places in Baden-Baden with her.

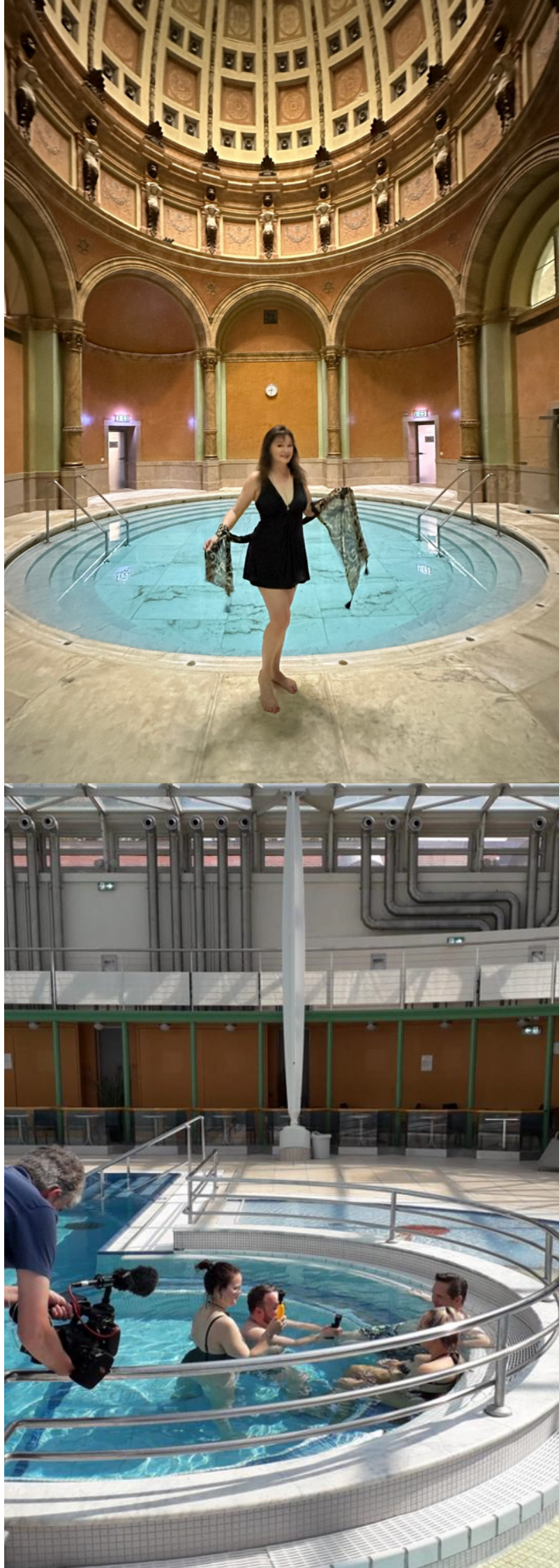
4.3 Globetrotter TV

Following a successful first series of 'The Amazing Spa Towns of Europe', with over 1 million viewers per episode, UK-based Globetrotter TV returned to film in two of the Great Spa Towns of Europe in 2023 to prepare a second series due to be aired in Spring 2024.

In Bad Kissingen, the team met with costumed guides portraying famous visitors of the past, and explored the town's famous spa buildings. Filming in Baden bei Wien, coincided with the EHTTA General Assembly, where the "Bathrobe Addicts" were being launched. This involved wearing bathrobes and visiting the Thermal Lido for the big launch!

4.4 GSTE Newsletter

The GSTE Newsletter, keeping readers up to date with news of the GSTE and its main activities, was distributed online to a growing audience, and was sent out three times in 2023 - in July, September and December. The newsletter performs relatively well, with an "open" rate of just over 50%.





Tourism Packages 2023

Immerse yourself in the
spa culture of Europe



GREAT
SPA TOWNS
of Europe



Cultural route
of the Great Spa Towns
of Europe



Spa

Waux-Hall



GREAT
SPA TOWNS
of Europe



4.5 Print materials

New leaflets were needed for a B2B audience at ITB Berlin in the spring, and so new publications were developed:

- New 12 panel B2B leaflet for ITB - A3 folded to DL size, showing the major tourism attractions of the eleven towns.
- A joint Tourism Packages Brochure was developed with EHTTA, promoting packages in both organisations.
- First GSTE Annual Review.

4.6 GSTE Online

With many significant developments and projects being undertaken in the GSTE office, social media campaigns took something of a back seat in 2023, although a new format for stories about heritage and conservation highlighted by Chiara during her fact-finding tour were a popular innovation, as were the seasonal 'winter' posts in the run-up to Christmas.

During 2023, the GSTE website was also reviewed, and plans made for refreshing its look and content in line with the new branding outlined below.

4.7 Logo development and protection

During 2023 a subgroup worked on protecting the GSTE logo with the ultimate aim of applying for a trademark in several different categories.

The text-based word mark logo of the Great Spa Towns of Europe was found to be unprotectable for trademarking purposes, and so this has been the catalyst for developing a new logo device to work with the existing logos and branding. The Withus Studio in Bath was engaged to work on the new design and branding guidelines in the autumn of 2023.



5. Communities

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN OUR WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Celebration of the Great Spa Towns of Europe World Heritage Site is a great way to involve citizens of all ages.

ICOMOS and the UN celebrate the International Day For Monuments and Sites, also known as World Heritage Day on 18th April, but within the Great Spa Towns of Europe celebrations often take place at different times. For example, Vichy celebrates the 24th July, the anniversary of the Inscription of the Great Spa Towns of Europe on the World Heritage List, and others, such as the three German towns, are aligned with the national World Heritage Day at the start of June. Others use World Water Day in March, their spa season opening, or European Heritage Days in September to involve local communities in their World Heritage.

A notable feature of the Great Spa Towns of Europe in 2023 was the imagination shown in the ways the different towns celebrate together, often developing exchange visits or joint initiatives and presentations. The various events are evidence of the deep friendship and collaboration between towns, showing how strong connections have developed over the years, particularly between the individual Mayors and between Site Managers.

This collaboration is in evidence in younger communities too, with several initiatives bringing groups of students from different towns together. In the summer of 2023, the Great Spa Towns of Europe developed a school exchange and twinning project as part of an application for funding under the CERV-2023-CITIZENS-TOWN-TT programme of the European Union. The resulting project, called INTERSPACE, will take place in 2024-2025.

World Heritage Visitor Centres and exhibitions provide good community focus, and the success of existing centres bodes well for those which were at the development stage in 2023. These include Baden-Baden, where a permanent centre is planned, and Vichy, where a new exhibition "Vichy L'internationale" will follow on from the success of "Once upon a time, the Queen of the Water Cities" in 2019.



5.1 Celebrating World Heritage

5.1.1 Baden bei Wien

10th May (during the EHTTA General Assembly):

- Café of Europe on “Music in Spa Towns” - concert/musical lectures in the Sommerarena.
- “Bathrobe Addicts” launch and flashmob.
- Tastes and Sounds of our World Heritage Site by the students of HLA Baden.

24th July: Visit to join the celebrations in Vichy.

24th Sept: Austrian Monument Day “monument [he:she:we] is/are alive - 100 years of the Austrian Monument Protection Act” - guided tour of the Beethovenhaus, a guided tour through the Kurpark with focus on the newly restored music pavilion (themed “Waltz sound & lifting windows - The Kurpark as a dynamic monument in the world heritage of the Great Spa Towns of Europe”).

5.1.2 Spa

Spa used the occasion of the presentation of its World Heritage Certificate in July to launch a new double exhibition, supported by the municipality and the Walloon Heritage Agency in the Spring Hall known as the Pouhon Pierre-le-Grand. The exhibitions explain the Great Spa Towns of Europe and “The Inventory of the Built Heritage of Spa”.

5.1.3 Františkovy Lázně

The Opening of the Spa Season takes place in early May each year in Františkovy Lázně, and involves the whole community in celebrations and blessing of the springs.

In 2023, during the town-wide celebrations, the municipality organised two kiosks to celebrate the town’s heritage.

One displayed the richness of natural healing sources where people could touch, smell, and feel locally gathered and sustainable Františkovy Lázně peat, and the other gave out information about the town’s history.

5.1.4 Karlovy Vary

The GSTE Chair and the Mayor of Karlovy Vary are pictured at a very special musical event in June 2023. The concert given by the ‘Badener World Heritage Quartet’ was an echo, two centuries later, of the benefit concert that Ludwig van Beethoven (a regular spa guest at both these Great Spa Towns) had organised in 1812 to raise money for the reconstruction of Baden. He had written the “Gedenket heut' an Baden” just after the fire in 1812, and as he was going to Karlovy Vary, he set up the benefit concert there.





5.1.5 Mariánské Lázně

Mariánské Lázně celebrated its World Heritage with an Architecture day on 30th September 2023, the Site Manager organised two specialist architecture tours in Mariánské Lázně, which were well attended. Also in September, His Excellency the British Ambassador Matt Field and his wife Martina visited Mariánské Lázně, in a visit aimed at strengthening ties between Mariánské Lázně and the UK. They were warmly welcomed by the Mayor, Martin Hurajčík, and children from the town who gave a musical presentation.



5.1.6 Vichy

To celebrate the second anniversary of the inscription of the GSTE, the Municipality of Vichy invited an official delegation from Baden bei Wien to a fabulous weekend-long event inspired by Viennese music and dancing.

Thousands of people flocked to the Parc des Sources et au Kiosque de la Source de l'Hôpital, many in elaborate costumes to sample Austrian gastronomy, take part in the Viennese Waltzes, and listen to the various music ensembles dotted throughout the town.



5.1.7 Bad Ems

Around 125,000 visitors attended the three-day Rhineland-Palatinate Day celebrations in Bad Ems, which was taken over by eight musical stages, hundreds of information and refreshment stands, and a huge pageant. The town showed off its World Heritage status, not just with the setting of the event but with information stands near the springs and events in the Kurhaus.

5.1.8 Baden-Baden

Baden-Baden celebrates its World Heritage every year at the start of June with a programme of events. This year, the Mayor of Karlovy Vary Andrea Pfeffer-Ferklová attended the weekend-long World Heritage Festival (see image on p29).



Baden-Baden also organised "Open Monument Night & Day" on 9th-10th September as part of European Heritage Days. Residents and visitors alike were invited to an innovative range of activities and events, some of which went on until midnight, and most were free of charge. The programme included a discussion about World Heritage in Baden-Baden attended by representatives from German-speaking Great Spa Towns, Bad Kissingen, Baden bei Wien, as well as the Mayor of Bad Ems, Oliver Krügel.

5.1.9 Bad Kissingen

- 22nd March: World Water Day. Bad Kissingen held a series of guided tours connected to water and brine production, including a tour of the historic waterworks.
- 4th June: German World Heritage Day. With the theme "World Heritage To Go", artistic events, children's activities, tours and information stands took over the Kurgarten, Rosengarten and Marktplatz.
- 12th October: Joint Site Manager presentation with Karlovy Vary at the European Industrial Museum for Porcelain in Hohenburg "One day in the Bohemian Spa".

5.1.10 Montecatini Terme

July saw two inscription anniversary celebrations:

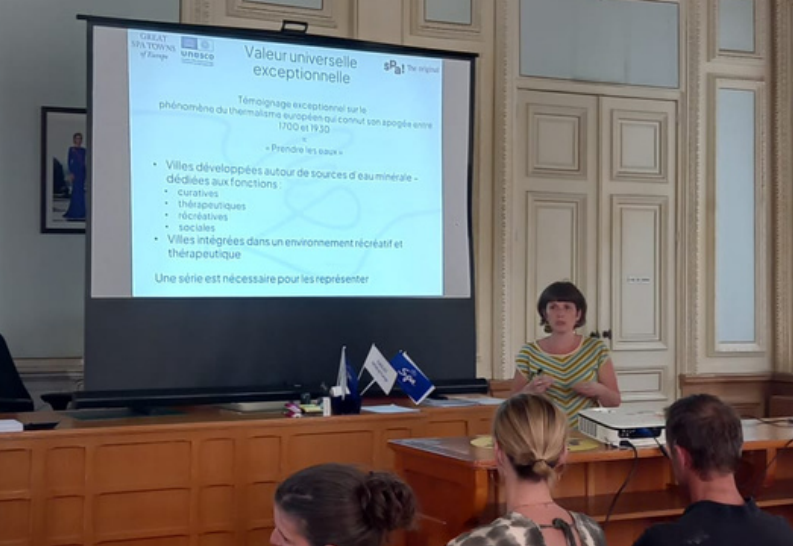
- 1st & 2nd: Vintage car parades, a gala dinner in period costumes, light and water shows with dancing fountains and Carabinieri fanfare in concert, all around the city.
- 29th - a GSTE-themed Trotting Race at the Sesana Hippodrome. Each race was named after one of the Great Spa Towns, and was introduced by beautiful images of the towns displayed on screens and monitors around the track. Secretary General Chiara Ronchini, was invited to raffle off the pairing of each city with one of the 11 horses in the race. Bad Ems won!

5.1.11 City of Bath

Bath's World Heritage Day was timed to follow the GSTE's General Assembly in early March. The ornate Ballroom of the Guildhall was filled with information stands and activities - as well as people in Georgian costume celebrating more than 2000 years of Bath's spa heritage.

Anna Maria Boll, Bad Kissingen's Site Manager, pictured here on the left, made a presentation as part of a series of talks during the event on World Heritage in the City of Bath.





5.2 Communicating locally

World heritage talks, tours, centres and special publications have been developed throughout the Great Spa Towns of Europe, engaging local communities and citizens with the subject of World Heritage and the uniqueness of the site.

5.2.1 Baden bei Wien

An exhibition running from April to November entitled "Aufbaden–Abbaden. Spa Culture in Baden" at the Kaiserhaus was featured on Austrian National television news.

5.2.2 Spa

The World Heritage Site and its Outstanding Universal Values was the subject of a meeting with local economic stakeholders.

5.2.3 Františkovy Lázně

"Na Vašem odkazu nám záleží", or "Your legacy matters to us", communicates what World Heritage means, how to take care of a building and the environment, where to find funding for projects and more. The project's first publication is available in three languages, including English. The project was conducted in close cooperation with Karlovy Vary and Mariánské Lázně Site Managers and Heritage Protection Officers.

5.2.4 Continuing Living Tradition Karlovy Vary

Site Manager Lucie Vodenková became an ambassador for the #pijuprameny campaign in Karlovy Vary, promoting drinking of the spring waters.

5.2.5 Mariánské Lázně

Property owners in the conservation areas of all three Czech Great Spa Towns are encouraged to find out more about how they can look after their properties and heritage in general through a new website www.slavne-lazne.info.

5.2.6 Bad Kissingen

Bad Kissingen's abattoir is an outstanding building, which in its shape and form is also an important part of Bad Kissingen's spa infrastructure, and the World Heritage Site. A new half-hour documentary film by Christian Beyer called "Die Ochsenkathedrale" was premiered on 16th November. It features local people talking about their memories, experiences and wishes relating to the abattoir and bring history to life. Along with the premiere, the Site Manager and project architects offered guided tours to approximately 200 people.

The World Heritage team in Bad Kissingen produced a series of short video films presenting selected highlights of the World Heritage Site in Bad Kissingen. During each film, Site Manager Anna Maria Boll presented various places and objects in Bad Kissingen and explained their significance in the context of the Great Spa Towns of Europe World Heritage Site.

In addition as well as presenting in Bath, Anna Maria also gave a talk in Bad Ems (right).

5.3 Engaging with younger people

5.3.1 Baden bei Wien

September 2022 – June 2023 - students aged 16-18 took part in a transnational school exchange, between HLA Baden, Baden-Baden, and Karlovy Vary, an project that was established in 2021 and is funded by Culture Connected and ERASMUS+. The 2022-2023 cross-border project developed a digital cookbook with GSTE-World Heritage recipes complemented by cooperation with local companies, e.g. Kochwerkstatt Flotte Lotte. The students presented their project to the public during the EHTTA General Assembly programme.

September 2023 – January 2024 – the municipality's Department of World Heritage Management organised a university-level design course for one term with the Vienna University of Technology. Students developed new ideas for some of Baden bei Wien's historic bathhouses.

5.3.2 Karlovy Vary

May 2023 – Site Manager Lucie Vodenková gave a lecture to 30 students during Graduation Week about World Heritage and GSTE.

On 27th June, students from Baden bei Wien visited Karlovy Vary. The two schools had established contact in autumn 2022, as HLA Baden school teaches tourism and cultural management, and this allowed development of a joint project in the areas of culture, history and gastronomy. They developed a digital cookbook with the theme of "This is how my world heritage sounds and tastes".

The students' presentation of their work, with Site Manager Lucie Vodenková, took place in the school in Karlovy Vary, and is one of several enjoyable memories the students have of the project.





5.3.3 Františkovy Lázně

The Site Manager and the town's head of forestry involved local children and their families in a tree-planting project to repair and prevent damage done by bark beetles. The scheme, called "Zasad se za Frantovky", has a double meaning of "Plant yourself" and "Stand up for" Františkovy Lázně. Boy scouts joined the event in large numbers to plant over 100 locally-grown deciduous trees in Wiedermann park - part of the inscribed zone.



5.3.4 Spa

Spa welcomes in a new Youth City Council every two years, and since 2017, the local Site Manager has met these children, aged 11 and 12, for one afternoon every year to talk with them about the Great Spa Towns of Europe, with the aim of them becoming ambassadors for heritage. The meeting is always organised according to the children's expectations about subjects important to them, which they report back to their class.

5.3.5 Baden-Baden

Baden-Baden's World Heritage and Urban Design Department ran a special social media campaign during the summer, with a group of students from the Robert Schuman School on the theme "Experience World Heritage through the senses". Over 5 weeks, 5 locations were linked to the 5 senses and presented by the students, who were studying event management, and trainees in image and sound technology.



5.3.6 Montecatini Terme

Montecatini Terme had financial support from the Ministry of Italian Culture to develop "Virtual and Real: the Enhancement of a UNESCO Site". The project included the creation of a comic strip with the help of a cartoonist, illustrating the characteristics of Montecatini and its similarities to the other Great Spa Towns. Educational trips for senior pupils to visit the other ten towns were also promoted to understand the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Spa Towns and their cultural function, with a trip to Baden Bei Wien planned for March 2024.



5.3.7 City of Bath

The Roman Baths Clore Learning Centre has been a great success since it opened in 2022, with 17,383 children visiting in school groups in 2023. They use the centre to find out about Bath's history, the people who lived there during Roman times and its importance in terms of World Heritage.

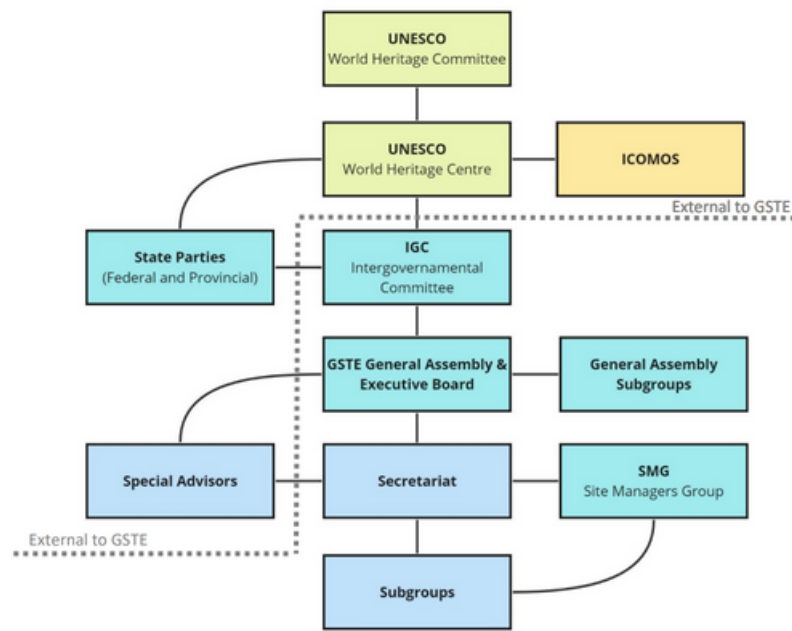
6. Resources

6.1 Governance

6.1.1 GSTE Structure

A new organisational structure was developed in 2022, and has continued to function well. The Great Spa Towns of Europe Association has five levels of governance, as follows:

1. **Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC)** of the 7 State Party World Heritage Focal Points or similar heritage representative.
2. **GSTE General Assembly** - the management board of 11 Mayors, or other political representative, of the 11 component sites.
3. **GSTE Executive Board** comprised of 4 Mayors; the Chair, 2 Vice-Chairs, 1 Finance Director. Secretary General is co-opted.
4. **GSTE Site Managers Group (SMG)** - responsible for the implementation of Property Management Plan.
5. **Secretariat** - responsible for supporting the whole system, coordinating the Property Management Plan and Action Plan implementation.



6.1.2 New Secretary General

Chiara Ronchini started her post on 13th February 2023, working with Paul Simons in his capacity as Special Advisor to the Great Spa Towns of Europe during an initial handover period, which lasted until June 2023. Chiara's first task was to work on the Audit at a meeting in Baden-Baden, where she met her team for the first time, and started to work on priorities for the Action Plan.

6.1.3 GSTE Team in 2023

The Secretary General, the Administrator, and the Communications Co-ordinator all work part time for the Great Spa Towns of Europe. Other roles are carried out in a voluntary capacity by Mayors, Site Managers and Tourism Officers, where required.

Andrea Polak is based in the World Heritage Department in Baden-Baden and works part time for the Great Spa Towns of Europe. Her focus is on administration and supporting the Secretary General.

Catherine Lloyd is responsible for press and communications within the Great Spa Towns of Europe. She is based in the UK.



6.2 GSTE Meetings in 2023

6.2.1 Intergovernmental Committee (IGC)

- City of Bath and online, 2nd March
- Montecatini Terme and online, 20th October

6.2.2 Executive Board Meetings (all online)

- #4, 12th January
- #5, 17th March
- #6, 20th April
- #7, 22nd June
- #8, 7th September
- #9, 23rd November

6.2.3 General Assemblies

- #2 City of Bath, 2nd March
- #3 Montecatini Terme, 19th October

6.2.4 Site Managers Group Meetings

- SMG 27, City of Bath, 3rd March
- SMG 28, online, 28th March
- SMG 29, online, 20th June
- SMG 30, online, 26th September
- SMG 31, Montecatini Terme, 18th October

6.2.5 Tourism Officers Group Meetings (all online)

- 24th January
- 15th March
- 28th April
- 15th June
- 5th September
- 5th December

6.2.6 Working groups and sub-groups active in 2023

- Action Plan and Prioritisation Working Group
- Trademark Protection Working Group
- Urban Planning Working Group
- Fundraising Working Group

6.3 Finances/Budgets

The Great Spa Towns of Europe had a central budget of approximately 160,000 euros in 2023.

This funding comes from the member towns, which pay an annual fee, calculated in proportion to the population of each town.

Direct expenditure is made locally within each component spa town, covering items such as:

- Staffing costs (Site Managers), plus the time of other officers such as Tourism and Planning officers.
- Match funding for capital projects.
- Education.
- Promotion and marketing.
- World Heritage centres.

Further details can be found in the auditor's reports for 2023 in Annexe 1.



6.4 New Systems and ways of working

During 2023, the new Secretary General, with the Executive Board and the support team, has put in place a number of new systems and ways of working, covering essential operations and UNESCO obligations. Laying these foundations for the Association has taken a great deal of time, but has been essential for the future smooth-running of the GSTE.

6.4.1 UNESCO-related developments

- Re-working the Property Action Plan with a new outcome-focused approach, including a new Communications Strategy and Plan.
- Development of the Five Pillars of the GSTE.
- Development and implementation of a prioritisation matrix for assessing new projects.
- Development of a Responsible Tourism Strategy.
- Monitoring Workshop for Site Managers held in November 2023.
- Climate Vulnerability Index (CVI) presentations delivered by Australian researchers from James Cook University to Mayors and Site Managers during the summer and autumn.

6.4.2 Operational developments

- Setting up a Microsoft Sharepoint system for the Office Team and the Site Managers Group.
- Setting up of new policies: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; Child Safeguarding Policy Statement; Terms and Conditions.
- Weekly team meetings instigated.
- Administrative handover with Paul Simons.

6.4.3 Financial developments

- First audit of the GSTE Association carried out in February 2023 in Baden-Baden.
- Set up of the financial system - optimising invoice run, and streamlining the payment process.
- First application for European funding, and setting up of a fundraising working group.

6.4.4 Communications developments

- Publication of the first-ever Annual Review covering the period from inscription to December 2022.
- First detailed Communications Strategy and Plan developed.
- Development of a new logo and branding guidelines.
- Redevelopment of the GSTE website.





7. Responsible Tourism

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM AT THE FOREFRONT OF VISITOR MANAGEMENT IN THE GREAT SPA TOWNS

Tourism is in the DNA of the Great Spa Towns of Europe, as these and other thermal towns are held to be some of the earliest mass tourism destinations in the world. From the earliest days of rail travel in the 1840s, most of the Great Spa Towns have been on the European railway network, and the railways in turn helped some of the towns to sustain large numbers of visitors in the grandest and most innovative hotels.

Today the railways and networks such as the Eurovelo network are at the heart of a new responsible tourism strategy being developed.

The Great Spa Towns have always been linked, and throughout history, famous guests such as Goethe and Beethoven have travelled between them to take the waters and this connectivity is also at the heart of the new projects in development.

7.1 Responsible Tourism Approach

During 2023, the Secretary General carried out an audit of the Responsible Tourism Initiatives in the Great Spa Towns of Europe.

A Responsible Tourism Approach was approved at the General Assembly in October 2023 with four main outcomes for the Great Spa Towns of Europe at property level :

1. Improving the quality and consistency of tourism data for the GSTE.
2. Strengthening the mechanisms to share best practice and experience among the Tourism Officers of the GSTE and beyond.
3. Developing a Responsible Tourism strategy based on: Sustainable tourism products; Eco-friendly transport; Preventing mass tourism; Environmentally friendly public procedures.
4. Developing a "Spa Route" to improve connectivity between each of the towns.



7.2 Visitor Numbers

Tourism data, while important, is not yet collected consistently throughout the Great Spa Towns of Europe. Some towns are able to share detailed data about types of guests, whether they stay in the spas, and how long they stay. UNESCO requires that detailed tourism data is submitted as part of its periodic reporting, and therefore the collection of good quality visitor data is a priority for 2024. Data for 2023 was not always available at the time of writing, as some towns receive their figures later in the year.

Nevertheless, it is estimated that between them the 11 Great Spa Towns welcome about 17 million visitors per annum (2023 Periodic Reporting), and it is clear that visitor numbers are recovering after the pandemic.

Marketplace surveys of the GSTE show that the main international markets for visitors among the seven towns that responded are within Europe. Only one town reported that its main international market was outside of Europe, in the USA.

7.3 Tourism Officers Group (TOG)

The remit of the Great Spa Towns of Europe Tourism Officers Group, set out in 2021, is to meet at least quarterly, to deliver an overarching tourism strategy and to develop and implement communication and activities programmes.

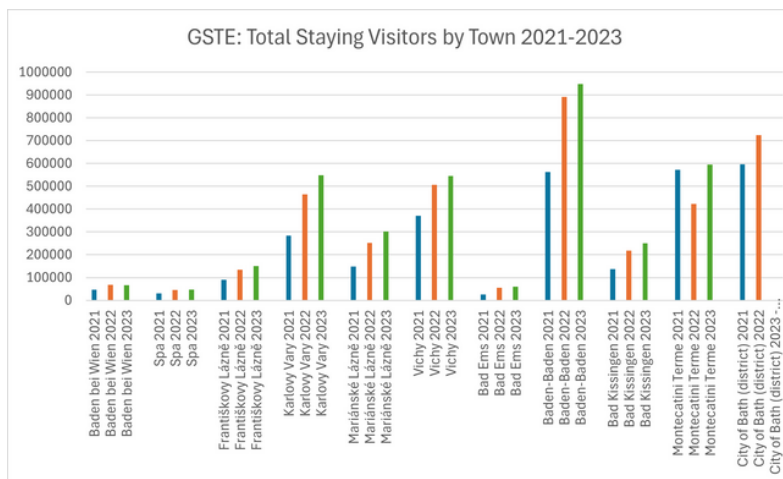
The TOG met six times in total in 2023, to discuss the development of the responsible tourism strategy, data collection, and the viability of projects which had been suggested from external sources. Meetings of this group are all held online.

7.4 Tourism Infrastructure - Hotels

Many major hotels in the Great Spa Towns are being refurbished, some after major disasters such as fires, and others because of a need to provide higher standards of accommodation, as well as updated spa facilities, for discerning visitors. As these hotels come back into use, the carrying capacity of the GSTE will be much greater.

Some of the major hotels in development include:

- Spa: a new five star thermal spa hotel is being developed on the site of the old thermal baths.
- Vichy: As part of the 'Acceleration 2030 Thermal Plan', work has now started on the redevelopment of the Hôtel Ibis, the Thermes Callou, and the Résidence de Tourisme Callou.
- Baden-Baden: the complete refurbishment of the Brenners Park Hotel started in 2023, modernisation and redevelopment of the Europäischer Hof Hotel is nearing completion, and work has started on the redevelopment of the Badischer Hof hotel following a devastating fire in 2021.



In 2023, there were approximately
4.3 million overnight guests
in the Great Spa Towns of Europe



7.5 Examples of the Added Value of World Heritage Tourism

7.5.1 Baden bei Wien

Specialist World Heritage Tours – participants have doubled since 2019 from 20-30 per tour to 50-70 per tour, and new guides have had to be employed.

7.5.2 Františkovy Lázně

Comparison of visitors from USA, UK, Switzerland, France during 2017-19 vs 2022-24 shows that these visitors have doubled after the inscription/covid-19 pandemic. This is supported by data from the Czech statistical office and while the numbers are relatively small, this is significant for a town which mostly caters for more local (Czech) guests.

7.5.3 Karlovy Vary

The small World Heritage Centre in Karlovy Vary contains a World Heritage exhibition as well as a lookout tower and a café in the restored Castle Tower which opened in 2022. From July - December 2022 there were 2,180 paying visitors and in 2023 there were 4,600 paying visitors.

7.5.4 Baden-Baden

Exclusive World Heritage Tours have grown steadily from 12 tours and 131 participants for the last 6 months of 2021 (post inscription) to 38 tours and 559 participants in 2022. In 2023, the numbers had grown hugely to 49 tours with 915 participants. Specific World Heritage visitors to the Visit Baden-Baden website have also grown although they remain at less than 1% of the 2.8 million visitors received by the website.

7.5.5 City of Bath

In the first seven months of operation, the new World Heritage Centre in the City of Bath received 48,130 visitors and in 2023, numbers exceeded the centre's own annual target of 100,000, with 127,051 visitors passing through its doors.

This success goes hand in hand with an exceptionally good year for the Roman Baths Museum, at the core of Bath's double World Heritage inscription, where visitor numbers in 2023 were close to 1 million, nearly up to pre-pandemic levels. In 2023, Bath and North East Somerset Council's Heritage Services department, which includes the Roman Baths, contributed a record-breaking £10,000,000 to the Council's revenues (approximately 11.5 million euros) and the Council itself calculates that "in theory, without the Roman Baths, our council tax (a tax paid by local citizens) would need to increase by 10%".



Annexes



ANNEXE I:

GREAT SPA TOWNS OF EUROPE ASSOCIATION AUDIT

Extract of the GSTEA Financial Audit 2023, prepared by Internal Auditors: Cllr Ruth Malloy (City of Bath), and Zuzana Stejskalová (Mariánské Lázně), and approved at the General Assembly in Bad Kissingen on 18th April 2024.

Great Spa Towns of Europe Association

Financial Audit 2023 - Report

27th February 2024, Baden-Baden

Auditors: Ruth Malloy, Bath & Zuzana Stejskalová, Mariánské Lázně

Present: Chiara Ronchini, Lisa Poetschki, Simone Bruck & Smriti Pant

I Circumstances

Baden-Baden is responsible for the bookkeeping of the Great Spa Towns of Europe Association (GSTEA).

Account balance on 31st December 2023:

Current account: 67,245.79 EURO (Sparkasse Baden-Baden Gaggenau)

The carry-forward figure to the 2024 budget is 19,238.78 EURO

The audit of the trust account 'Great Spa Towns of Europe' was performed on 27th February 2024. For the control of the trust account all the bookkeeping, including the bank statements as of the reporting date 27th February 2024, were at the disposal of the auditors. The control was performed on the basis of all the bills/ invoices of the payment transactions. The factual and calculative correctness of the bills/invoices was checked by drawing samples.

All the requests for additional clarification from the auditors, including items and transactions, were provided for review and additional questions were answered. There were no reasons for complaints as to the accuracy and quality of the information provided.

The total income for the 2023 financial year was 152,693.76 EURO and the total expenditure was 249,608.17 EURO.

In the year 2023 all the 11 participating Great Spa Towns paid their yearly contributions, as agreed. Total: 147,774.00 EURO.

The keeping of a fiscal surveillance list was continued.

The division of the cost for fees and travel/accommodation expenses was continued.

ANNEXE I:

GREAT SPA TOWNS OF EUROPE ASSOCIATION AUDIT

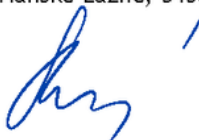
The account management by Secretary General Chiara Ronchini is clear and concise. The single items had been assigned to the respective items of the annual budget. Simone Bruck, Lisa Poetschki, Smriti Pant and Chiara Ronchini were at the disposal of the auditors and answered pertinent questions immediately and completely.

Bath, 12th March 2024



Ruth Malloy

Mariánské Lázně, 31st March 2024



Zuzana Stejskalová



GREAT SPA TOWNS *of Europe*

UNESCO-Welterbe
Bad Kissingen ist seit
weiteren Kurstädte
eingetragen.

Die bedeutend
des europäisc
Blütezeit zw
erlebte. No
Baden-B
Marien
Terme



♦ MONTECATINI TERME

www.greatspatownsofeurope.eu

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