

World Water Day 2024: WATER FOR PEACE

Video Message of Riccardo Mortandello, EHTTA President

Every year, World Water Day (22 March) raises awareness and inspires action to tackle the water and sanitation crisis.

In our European Historic Thermal Towns we are most aware about this special gift of nature. It plays an important role for us in several respects, which is why we take World Water Day as an opportunity to celebrate water in our towns every year.

European Thermal Towns – Symbols of Hope and Reconciliation

Throughout history, spa towns in Europe have not only been havens for relaxation and rejuvenation but have also served as unique venues for peace talks and diplomatic meetings during times of war and conflict. These towns, with their serene atmosphere and neutral ground, provided the perfect backdrop for delicate negotiations and discussions aimed at resolving disputes and ending hostilities.

One notable example is the Congress of Vienna, held in 1814-1815, which played a crucial role in reshaping Europe's political landscape following the Napoleonic Wars. Representatives from various European powers convened in Vienna, Austria, but the negotiations extended beyond the formal sessions to the nearby spa town of Baden bei Wien. Here, amidst the healing waters and tranquil surroundings, diplomats engaged in informal discussions and social gatherings, laying the groundwork for the treaties and agreements that would shape the continent for years to come.

Similarly, during World War I, spa towns such as Spa in Belgium and Bad Nauheim in Germany became centers for diplomatic activity. Neutral countries, including Switzerland and the Netherlands, hosted peace talks and mediation efforts, with representatives from warring nations gathering in these peaceful retreats to seek an end to the conflict. The calming ambiance of these spa towns provided a respite from the chaos of war and created an atmosphere conducive to dialogue and negotiation.

Even during World War II, spa towns continued to play a role in diplomatic efforts. Despite the ongoing conflict raging across Europe, the peaceful setting of Montreux for example allowed delegates in 1944 to engage in constructive dialogue and reach agreements that would shape the region's geopolitical landscape in the years to come.

These historical examples underscore the significance of spa towns as more than just centers of relaxation and well-being. They serve as symbols of hope and reconciliation, where even amidst the turmoil of war, the pursuit of peace and diplomacy endures. In the tranquil embrace of these idyllic retreats, adversaries have come together to find common ground, forging bonds of understanding and cooperation that transcend the divisions of conflict.

We are experiencing this in these conflict-ridden times: People of different origins and from countries at war are coming together peacefully and united in the healing environment of our European Historic Thermal Towns. These are beautiful images and scenes that give us hope!