

Cultural Landscape of Sintra

The Moorish Castle between the Old Town and the Sintra Hills



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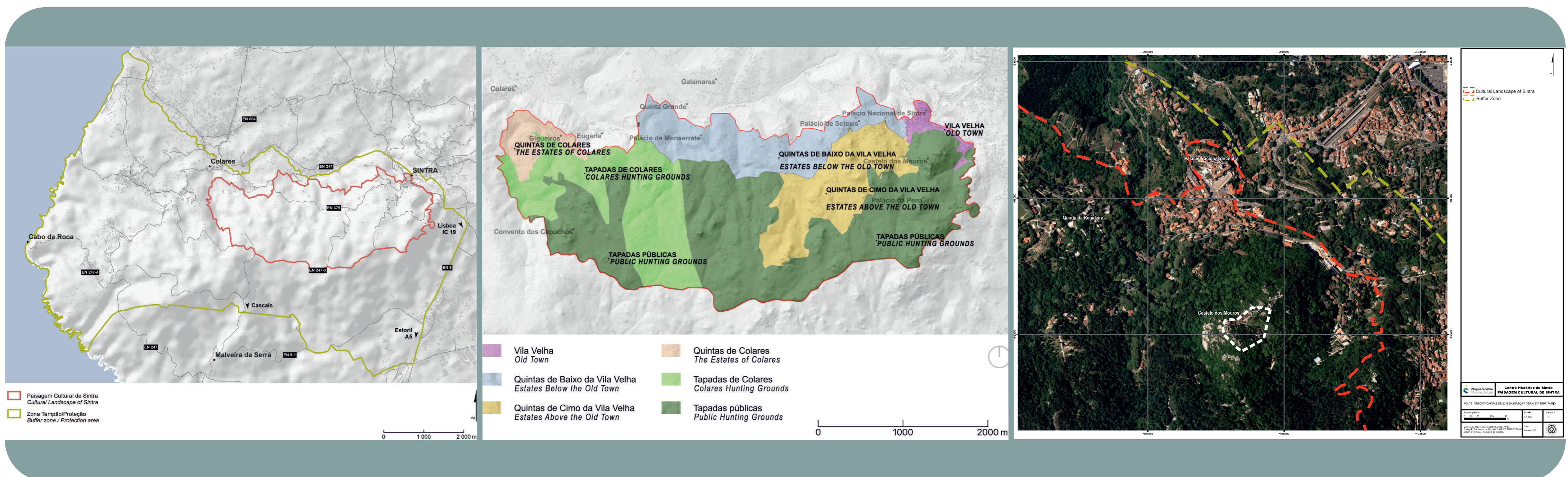


CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF SINTRA

The Cultural Landscape of Sintra was inscribed in the World Heritage List in 1995 and the respective Declaration of Outstanding Universal Value was approved by the World Heritage Committee in 2017. The 2021–2026 Management Plan understands the Cultural Landscape of Sintra as a combined work of nature and of man under the influence of the physical constraints and the successive social, economic and cultural forces – both external and internal – and specifically as an evolving and living Cultural Landscape where the evolutionary process may advance while retaining the manifestations of its evolution over the course of time.

The Cultural Landscape of Sintra is divided in six Landscape Management Units, whose limits are defined by the attributes each one encloses.

The Landscape Management Unit called “Public Enclosures,” corresponds to the higher level areas, bordering the “Old Town”, “Estates Above the Old Town” and “Estates of Colares” units, and intercepted to the west by the “Colares Enclosures” unit, from which it differs mainly in the fact that it is under the direct management of Parques de Sintra. It is dominated by the prominence in the landscape of the Moorish Castle.



The Moorish Castle

A privileged vantage point looking out over the Atlantic coastline, the floodplain and the Sintra Hills, the millennium-old Moorish Castle, founded under Islamic rule, occupied a then strategic position for defending both the surrounding territory and the maritime access routes to the city of Lisbon. The artefacts found on this site identify how, in between the walls and their adjoining areas, there lived a population in an area now named the Islamic Quarter.

The Moors lived here through to 1147, when Sintra was handed over to Afonso Henriques, the first King of Portugal, following the conquest of the cities of Lisbon and Santarém. Strategically and as a means of defending these lands, the running of the town of Sintra and its immediate hinterlands was bestowed on Gualdim Pais, a master in the Knights Templar, who received a charter in 1154.

With the settlement of a Christian population in the Moorish Castle, the Islamic Quarter began to disappear and give way to a Medieval town with its occupation ongoing through to the 15th century. At that time, the site was steadily subject to abandonment given that, with the conflicts between the Moors and Christians long over, the population no longer felt the need to seek shelter within the vicinity of the fortification. This Medieval town included the Church of São Pedro de Canaferrim, built between the two rings of walls.

Already into the 19th century, and in keeping with the Romantic spirit prevailing in that period, King Ferdinand II undertook restoration work on the castle, breathing new life into the medieval imaginary surrounding this site. These renovation works damaged part of the Christian burial grounds of the Church and, for this reason, the order was given to build a tomb to house the bones found there. Given the inability to distinguish whether these were Christian or Moorish human remains, the tomb bears the inscription: “What man brought together, only God may separate”.

The castle has been undergoing archaeological excavation ever since 1976, and has returned countless discoveries as regards the history of this site and its many inhabitants. The Church of São Pedro de Canaferrim has now been converted into the Moorish Castle Interpretation Centre exhibiting objects and finds from the archaeological excavations ongoing between 2009 and 2013 as well as presenting the castle's history.



Challenges on Management

It is clear that valuing the historical places of the past represents a fundamental dimension to the challenges the world currently faces.

The Key-issues for the management of an archaeological site as the Moorish Castle, on a Cultural Landscape are:

- Natural disasters: risk of fires and storms;
- Selective control of invasive species as a priority measure for the conservation of the natural heritage;
- Conservation of the cultural heritage;
- Urban requalification;
- Financial resources;
- Visit management and quality.

Parques de Sintra
(Management Entity)



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