**Nature forests:** extremely rare in Europe – 0,7 % of the total forest area, left in strict forest reserves and other protection categories in Europe (Parviainen et al. 2000)
Nature – or natural?

a) natural forests:
– original tree species composition
– absence of tree felling for a substantial period of time (decades)

b) nature (primeval, virgin) forests:
– natural composition and distribution of species
– complex structures (stratified on vertical plan and mosaic on horizontal plan), according to the development stages (specific textures);
– diversity of sizes and ages (occurrence of very old trees);
– the occurrence of CWD – dead wood (standing or fallen), in different stages of decay
– intact biogeochemical cycling (C/N ratio – Puka, Rajca...)
Fully functional primeval forest ecosystems characteristics
Some examples in Europe:

- **Fontainebleau** (136 ha, La Tillaie) reserve; Grassy oak forest in 8th century, and last cut over in 1372. Described in 1664 as high forest with mature beech, oak, and some hornbeam and lime. Protected since 1853; longest untreated reserve in NW Europe.

- **Sainte Baume** (isolated, species-rich beech forest of the Sainte-Baume range of Provence, characterized by the strong representation of evergreen undergrowth), La Massane in the East Pyrénées (in the past intensively used for grazing, charcoal production etc.)

- A 250-year-old beech forest in **Val Cervara** (Abruzzo NP) with an area of 100 ha, with some 500 year old specimen (Piovesan et al. 2005)

- **Rothwald** reserve is located in the Lower Austrian Calcareous Alps on the eastern side of the Dürrenstein (1878 m), near the border to Styria. With 412 ha the largest and most important natural forest area in Austria.
– **Peručica**: Sutjeska National Park, Bosna i Hercegovina, 1292 ha in size, large complex of fir-beech primeval forest

– **Chorna Uholka – Shyrokiy Luh**: Eastern Carpathians, Ukraine, 10 000ha in size, largest beech primeval forest in Europe

– **Izvoarele Nerei**: Southern Carpathians, Romania, 5000 ha, large beech forest preserve
In Slovakia, a complex geology, vertical differentiation and rugged terrain...
...contributed to the preservation of a primeval forest collection.
Why to include primeval forests into nature based tourism?
a) enabling remote communities to benefit from it (trained guides, accommodation)
b) securing public support for nature forests conservation
c) science and education
What is their potential for forest recreation and nature tourism?

- public awareness < 5%

- accessibility: unrestricted
– impressions (aesthetical, imaginative… put forward by the "habitat" concept)

"It is in vain to dream of a wilderness distant from ourselves, there is none such. It is the bog in our brain and bowels, the primitive vigor of Nature in us, that inspires that dream. I shall never find in the wilds of Labrador any greater wilderness than in some recess of Concord." (Henry Thoreau)

Simon Schama, Ethan Matt Kavaler (Arboreal Gothic), Czeslaw Milosz...
- sensations (record dimensions…, the "giant trees' appeal)
– learning, science… (example of intentions-driven behaviour)
Is there a potential for forest recreation and nature tourism in temperate primeval forests?

YES

How can it translate into reality?

a) awareness rising

b) combined use of primeval forests' impressive power and science

c) capacities
1995–onward research of visitors nos. in the Dobroc Primeval Forest:

- controlled access (guided trips only)

- European Diploma awarded in 1997

- proposed for World Heritage List inscription together with other 21 localities (a serial nomination)
Survey carried out prior to the start of the Green Diplomacy showed that 4% of adults taking part in the poll were able to name a primeval forest in Slovakia (a large majority of them mentioned the Dobrocsky Primeval Forest).
1) European Diploma Award; 2) Green diplomacy (media coverage); 3) Open-air forestry museum + proxy trail opening; 4) World Heritage List inscription
Possible overexposure issue solved by a proxy trail
Conclusion: primeval forests' visitors responded to planned measures and balanced developments have been achieved.