

Creating the Bouhachem Nature Park with a participatory approach (Morocco)

by Nisrin ALAMI

In the framework of the Mediterranean Forest Week of Avignon, the International Association for Mediterranean Forests (AIFM) and Plan Bleu, organised three sessions on “Forests, societies and territories”. The objective of these sessions was to promote a territorial and intersectorial approach for forest management and initiatives aimed at improving forest governance. They began with presentations of territorial experience of the participatory management of Mediterranean wooded ecosystems such as the Bouhachem Nature Park in Morocco.

The Tangiers-Tetouan Regional Government Council (TTRC) has set up an initiative for local sustainable development in the rural area of Jbel Bouhachem (Rif area of Northern Morocco), chosen on account of its fragility and rich natural and cultural heritage. This undertaking, unprecedented and experimental in Morocco, took its inspiration from the procedure defined in France for setting up regional nature parks. From its very beginnings, the project for the Bouhachem Nature Park (PBNP) has benefited from the methodological back-up of the Lubéron Regional Nature Park in S.-E. France, within the framework agreement for cooperation between the TTRC, the Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur (France) Regional Government Council and the France-Volontaires Association.

In 2001, the TTRC, whose effective scope includes land use and development, environmental protection and socio-economic development, decided to foster a new mode of sustainable management for natural resources and sustainable development which was to involve the whole range of local stakeholders and residents. The upshot has been the experimental project of the Bouhachem Nature Park.

The PBNP, located in Northern Morocco in the Rif region, is backed by the TTRC, 6 rural municipal councils (Derdara, Tanaqoub, Laghdir, Beni Leit, Al Oued and Tazrout) and 3 Provincial Assemblies (Chefchaouen, Tetouan, Larache). The zone under study extends over 105,000 ha., of which half is forested, and has 48,000 inhabitants (there are 159 tribal or douar areas).

The Jbel Bouhachem Mountain comprises an historical, cultural, religious and natural heritage of premier importance but is under threat from increasing deforestation due largely to wildfire and clearing. The site was classified as a Priority 1 Site of Biological and Ecological Interest (SBEI) in 1995. Encompassing 8,000 ha., this SBEI, shaped like a half-circle, constitutes the heart of the PBNP. The Park territory contains a dozen natural habitats of very great heritage value, including zeen, Tauzia, and cork oak stands, natural forests of

1 - Jointly with FAO/Silva Mediterranea, the Mediterranean Model Forest Network (MMFN), the association of Mediterranean forest owners (ARCMED) and COFOR International.

The project's purposes as fixed by its Charter:

1. **Protection:** of natural and cultural heritage, foster management of habitats and natural resources in keeping with sustainable development, and fight pollution.
2. **Land use:** contribute to sustainable land use and improvement throughout the defined territory, side by side with the partners involved.
3. **Development:** contribute to economic, social and cultural development as well as to the quality of life throughout the defined territory.
4. **Information:** ensure the welcome of the public, provide information and education and promote the participatory approach of the inhabitants.
5. **Experimentation:** encourage experimental, repeatable action in the fields referred to above, and contribute to international programmes for research and cooperation.

North African maritime pine and cedars and oueds with Portuguese laurel.

The different stages of the project

Stage 1: Feasibility study (2001-2002)

- Delimiting the land area for the Bouhachem Nature Park project (geographical identity and coherence);
- Identifying the priority lines of sustainable development;
- Mobilisation of the different parties around the project.

Stage 2: Drafting with local concertation the Framework Charter for the defined area and identification of micro-projects illustrating the Park's undertaking (2003-4)

- Setting up the scientific and association councils;
- Defining, with all those effectively involved in the defined area, the orientation and objectives of the Bouhachem Nature Park for the coming 20 years;
- Drafting the Articles of Association and defining how the management body responsible for the future park will function.

Stage 3: Setting up the management structure and carrying out the prototype micro-projects (2004-present)

- Voluntary membership of local and regional government authorities (rural

municipal councils, provincial assemblies, the TTRC);

- Municipalities grouped into districts for the inception and management of the PBNP;
- Carrying out, in accordance with the Charter, of 9 micro-projects for the improvement of basic infrastructure and 9 others as technical back-up for local associations developing initiatives in rural and cultural tourism, raising awareness and education in environmental matters etc;
- Building and equipping the Centre for the future Park and an ecomuseum (Jbala).

Perspectives for the project and difficulties

After the establishment of the district groupings of municipalities, those involved in the PBNP must, in accordance with the Charter, carry out the following actions:

- Adopt the annual operating and investment budget and set up the projects scheduled by the project's action plan and programme.
- Appoint a Park director and technical staff.
- Reflect seriously on the role and place of nature parks in Morocco.

The PBNP is gradually and patiently making headway. Even so, some aspects are hindering progress. Firstly, the legal vacuum surrounding nature parks is in the process of being filled with the promulgation of the new Act 22-07 on Protected Areas (16 August 2010) which defines "nature parks" (it will be possible for local and regional government authorities to manage them). Also, the concept of the park has still not been fully embraced by local stakeholders and others involved: these people want tangible results in the short term whereas the whole undertaking has a long-term perspective. Lastly, at the moment the PBNP lacks a structure for bringing drive and coordination to the local people involved and which will ensure the project's vital continuity.

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