

Forests, societies and territories in the Mediterranean: towards an integrated, participatory approach to the role of forests within territorial systems

Conclusions and recommendations

by Pierre DÉRIOZ

Three sessions entitled “Forests, societies and territories” during the 2nd Mediterranean Forest Week, allowed an interesting cross-sharing of various experiences and pointed out the importance of a territorial and intersectorial forest management and successful initiatives improving forest governance. Pierre Dérioz gives here the main conclusions and recommendations of these works.

Besides the increasingly widespread recognition of the long-standing multi-functional role played by Mediterranean forests, the mainstreaming of forestry questions within global socio-economic development issues (such as combating poverty by promoting activities which valorise forest resources, or developing leisure outdoor activities) means that they are now being addressed within a systemic context. Although forest boundaries never perfectly match administrative borders and the regulatory and financial systems established by States or supra-national bodies (EU) have to be borne in mind, the intermediate level of the « territory » (French-style « *pays* », parks, groups of municipalities, rural federations, cities...) would appear to be the most appropriate one at which to follow this integrated approach. Linked in a myriad of ways to local societies – resources, recreational activities, fire hazard, landscape, etc. – Mediterranean forests should be considered in terms of their role within territorial systems. While certain territorial structures (Territorial Forest Charter, Massif and Territorial



Picture 1:
Pierre Dérioz moderates
the “Forest, societies
and territories” session
of the 2nd Mediterranean
Forest Week of Avignon
Photo DA

Development Plans, Model Forests) are likely to arise from a forest-based approach, the issues they raise also extend beyond strictly woodland matters.

Adopting this type of multi-faceted approach to woodlands means that from the outset the aims of forest protection and good management can be faced up to the situation on the ground, its constraints and possibilities. Whatever the stakeholders – from the forest owner with little involvement to the State administration and the municipalities – the issue of forest management and its objectives (protection / production) often arises in blunt economic terms, with the income it generates or could potentially create being compared with the costs involved.

Just as the costs are multiple (the costs of management but also « non-management »), so « benefits » may also come in numerous guises: wood, non-wood products, tourism, carbon fixation and storage, regulation of water regimes, or improved fire defences with managed forests. This raises the question of what contribution beneficiaries (possibly society as a whole) should make to management costs. The relevance, sustainability and potential spread of experimentation underway, which calls for the deployment of means tailored to the objectives and guaranteed for the medium/long term, require broad social backing and the participation of many different players or groups of players in approaches of a more « bottom-up » nature.

Broad-ranging consensus would appear to have been reached on the forest management front regarding the development of consultation and participatory democracy. The terms for such participation are not a given, however, and raise questions regarding the legitimacy of the players involved (the issue of appropriation is crucial in this respect, as are uses and management competences). Moreover, besides the eternally tricky task of defining social parameters for the players to be included, the extent of participation also has to be clarified: participation in the diagnosis, in determining the stakes, in drawing up the project, in deciding on its implementation and assessing its effectiveness? There is scope here for huge misunderstanding and frustration and for seeing the debate monopolised by frontline managers, with the risk that the views of forestry experts may be steam-rolled by those of players for whom forests are a matter of secondary importance. Thus in France, the scope would appear to be limited solely to stakeholders from the forestry and timber sectors in the case of Massif and Territorial Development Plans, whereas the negotiation of Territorial Forest Charters tends to involve a wider range of territorial stakeholders.



Picture 2:
From left to right, Nisrin Alami, Patrizia Tartarino,
Mohamed Saadieh and Ahmet Senyaz presenting
their case studies of pilot sites from the Med
Qualigouv project and other initiatives
(2nd Mediterranean Forest Week of Avignon)
Photo DA

Applied to different territorial contexts, the same concepts (park), principles and apparent concerns (biodiversity) seem to produce somewhat divergent results which, according to the feedback collected during the sessions, raise questions about the key elements in their success. The importance of recognised leaders assuming guidance of the approach (councillors, professionals or members of associations) and selecting the appropriate social perimeters for the participatory approach, ensuring that councillors and administrations are highly involved from the outset (since they are ultimately responsible for making decisions and acting as the favoured mediators vis-à-vis financial partners on other levels), both call to mind the crucial significance of determined political backing. Choosing the « right » approach and providing for effective leadership with adequate means (human and financial) to ensure correct functioning over a relatively long period go hand in hand with the relevance of the territorial backdrop to the projects, in other words fine-tuning them to the local context, their geographical, administrative and social coherence (notion of « population catchment area »). It is indeed these median levels which provide for subsidiarity and stakeholder proximity, with the occasional need to also involve stakeholders from nearby urban centres, given the inter-linkage between built-up, agricultural and woodland areas in the Mediterranean (Dannieh, Provence). Yet for all this local relevance, which is dependent upon the quality and accuracy of the initial diagnoses, the appropriate legal framework is still of the essence - able to provide the correct instruments (Regional Nature Park, joint syndicate...) or on the contrary to jeopardise the approach (cf. The legal « duds » in the case of the *Terra delle Gravine* park).



Three pilot sites of the MED Qualigouv project
From top to bottom:

Picture 3:
The *Terre delle Gravine* regional Park in the Province
of Taranto in Italy

Picture 4:
Juniperus thurifera old-growth tree in the region
of Valence in Spain

Picture 5:
Natura 2000 site in the regional Park of Alpilles
in France

Photos David Gasc

Pierre DÉRIOZ
Géographe
UMR Espace-Dev 228
IRD
Université d'Avignon
et des Pays de
Vaucluse
FRANCE
Email: pierre.derioz@
univ-avignon.fr

The long-term rollout of such initiatives sets the scene for the gradual emergence of a joint local culture on forest and/or consultation through « collective learning », evolving towards forms of « adaptive management ». It depends on the openness of the participatory approach, in other words its readiness to embrace a potentially very different stance to that of the approach backers, such as local people's dire need for firewood or grazing land or the disengagement and lack of interest on the part of some forest owners. A key element in this « openness » involves providing for transparency of communication and procedures for circulating information, as well as clearly defining the roles attributed to participants, leaving scope for scientific knowledge to feed into the debate without stifling it, and ensuring the accuracy of the monitoring/assessment procedures required to provide effective guidance. Through networks open on the outward, such as the AIFM and its Qualigouv project, the Plan Bleu, Mediterranean Network of Model Forests and Silva Mediterranea committee networks, ideas and methods can be exchanged and good practices transferred

(ensuring that they are suitably adapted to each specific context before being transposed) and appropriate tools produced for creating synergy between initiatives and territories: the indisputable virtues of meetings and structures which allow for cross-analysis should prompt the rapid creation of a « meta-network » (a « network of networks »), to which cooperation projects and this 2nd Mediterranean Forestry Week have probably made a useful contribution.

Once all of these conditions are present, leadership tools are operational (rich pictures, Imagine or Masterplan methods, study trips...), stakeholders are on board and the project hangs together (spatially, socially, technically, but also in terms of its phasing), some (visible) signs of success as of the first steps would not go amiss— hence the strategic importance of their choice at operational level and of correctly gauging stakeholders' initial expectations.

P.D.

Picture 6:

The AIFM's team widely involved in the "Forest, societies and territories" sessions and in the whole Mediterranean Forest Week event, in the "Palais des Papes" courtyard in Avignon.
Photo DA



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