

Medland 2020

A voice in common for Mediterranean forests and their products

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In this article, the association Forêt Méditerranéenne seeks to offer an outsider's perspective on the Medland 2020 project. A difficult task indeed, but worth every effort because it reaches into the very heart of the association's preoccupations over the last 35 years. All the experiments and experience presented in this issue took place as part of the European Union's projects for cooperation, contributing to a shared framework for the management of Mediterranean regions and localities by fostering the use and protection of natural resources and making the most, both economically and socially, out of these territories... This article attempts to analyse how pooling the results and sharing acquired knowhow can boost the success of all those involved in Mediterranean forestry.

The Medland 2020 project has been an opportunity for us to realise yet again that the forests and woodlands of the regions and countries around the Mediterranean Rim occupy a lot of space but concern only a small number of people who are spread out fairly evenly within the social fabric of each country: landowners, professional organisations, local and regional elected representatives, the administrative bodies of all levels of government, research centres... in fields as varied as wood production, the prevention of natural risks, visitor reception, and other non-commercial services.

The promoters of this project might be seen as almost foolhardy: the challenge has been to bring together thirteen disparate projects, some of them arising happen-chance from circumstance, some with dubious methodology. In France, we might well talk of the "marriage of the carp and the rabbit" though in the Ivory Coast their cuisine successfully combines meat and fish...

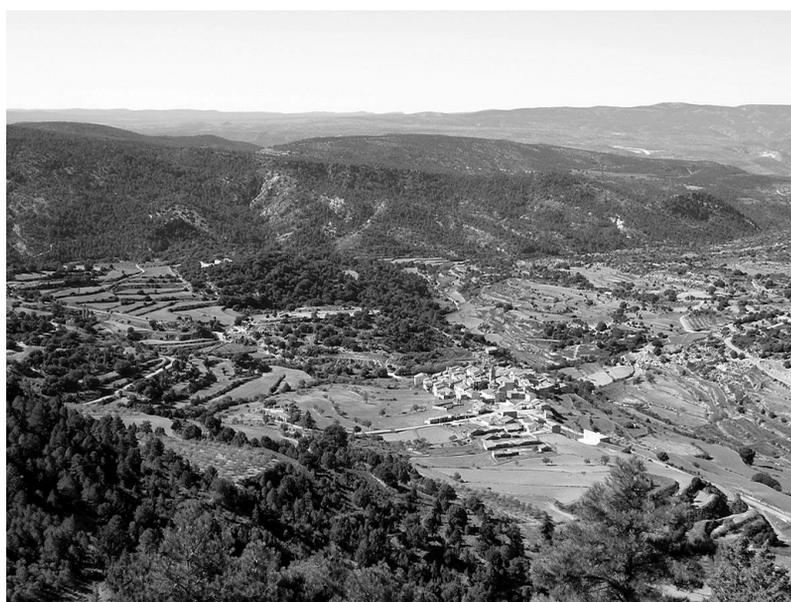
This approach to Mediterranean forests cannot be reduced, as more northerly traditions and practices would have it, to those areas covered with enough trees to be managed for the production of wood. In fact, this approach reflects perfectly the multifarious ecological and socio-economic contexts as well as the multiple uses of the forests and the often ill-defined woodlands which can be found everywhere around the Mediterranean Rim.

The concepts which have been the life blood of the Medland 2020 project were developed as long ago as the 1990s by local organisations in France (e.g. the Luberon Regional Nature Park via its involvement with agricultural and forested areas). But they worked in isolation, their efforts neither synchronised nor harmonised with the work of other regions around the Mediterranean. The overriding merit of Medland 2020 is to have succeeded in coalescing in the same programme, with the aim of their harmonisation, diverse but inter-related concerns and issues. The project offers the possibility of such harmonisation at the level of the countries belonging to the northern arc of the Mediterranean Rim with the hope of seeing local initiatives federated within the present international context.

Shared governance for these areas

Several projects in the Medland 2020 collection focused on the governance of natural areas, forests and woodlands. It seems that when a situation has come to a dead end and needs unblocking, it is more effective that management decisions involving these areas be taken by the stakeholders themselves, not individually but in concertation with one

Picture 1:
Managing Mediterranean natural areas means getting the whole population involved.
Author AIFM



another and with all others who live in the locality or region. It is no longer acceptable, as it was previously, to design a management scheme and then present it to the public concerned. People are better educated than in the past despite the fact that now they are actually ignorant about rural life. And better represented, too, even though democracy can always be improved more or less everywhere. The time has long gone when a land use and development document, for years the forester's bible, had to be kept secret. Here, then, is the explanation why, in the Qualigouv or the Forest Model project, the partners investigated ways of designing and implementing projects so as to involve the inhabitants of the areas as much as possible, perceiving a project more as a tool for development rather than for forestry *per se*.

It is true that the two projects mentioned brought together only ten or so regional authorities as partners. Taken separately that is not a lot but it adds up to much more if we factor in the experience and understanding that each one derived from the overall activity, even if this does not yet represent real mutual capitalisation as meant in the scientific community. A network has been established, individuals and institutions are eager to continue meeting up to exchange ideas and experience and progress together. Let's not forget that this partial, provisional conclusion can be said of more or less all the projects.

Climate change and wildfire: heightened risk around the Mediterranean Rim

A second family of projects derives from the efforts to prevent the risks that threaten the forests, localities and regions: ForClimadapt in relation to climate change, Cypfire and Protect for wildfire.

In these fields, forest managers cannot just stand back and wait for research to come up with significant results to guide their action. First, they must understand the extent of the problems confronting them in their areas, then consult scientists about their doubts, propose collaboration, all the while striving pragmatically to find the best way forwards. Here again is a new approach

in which the research scientist is at the heart of things, involved with the first beneficiaries of his or her findings: another form of inter-disciplinary collaboration, guaranteeing efficient transfer and the best possible implementation of the results from research. These three projects have generated not only information but, without a doubt, a new mindset for the partners.

In the field of climate change forestry professionals certainly have questions but, again, cannot wait too long for the answers because there are urgent, indispensable decisions in management that cannot be put off. ForClimadapt enabled six teams to launch research, not randomly but focused on finding new pathways in the light of the strong probability of future change: an increase in arid conditions and an accentuated occurrence and impact of extreme events in areas with a Mediterranean climate, from the Alentejo (Portugal) up to the mountain zones of the Southern Alps and the Pyrenees.

As to wildfire prevention, however great the advances made, there will still be room for progress in understanding the immediate environment and its phenomena as well as in improving techniques for prevention, forecasting and fighting forest fires. The interest in projects like Protect or CypFire lies in the fact that it is not necessarily the fire services that take the initiative but, rather, teams grouping researchers in the field and managers with a hands-on involvement who accept submitting their conjectures and results to the observations and criticisms of their peers.

The danger of the (over) consumption of land by urbanisation

The Mediterranean Rim is unfortunately not the only place at risk from urban sprawl



Picture 2:
Trial plantation in the south of Portugal (ForClimadapt project).
Author DAIFM

but there can be no doubt that the Mediterranean region's powerful attractiveness is manifested in the huge demand for land to extend built-up areas with all their related infrastructure. This urbanisation eats up forests and other natural areas but, also, prime agricultural land. The OSSDT project proposes indicators for monitoring the phenomenon and makes several recommendations for limiting the consumption of land and the fragmentation of landscapes.



Picture 3:
Mediterranean natural areas suffer from great pressure for building land; here in the south of France
Photo DAIFM



Picture 4:
The use of wood chips offers a new outlet for Mediterranean wood (Proforbiomed project, France, June 2014)
Author DA/IM

Ensuring better management for natural and forested areas around the Mediterranean by enhancing their profitable use

Wood production in these areas is generally fairly low, with the exception of mountainous areas. Furthermore, the quality of the wood products is often mediocre due to prevailing climatic pressures and a general lack of silvicultural management. As a result, there is very little economic incentive for landowners whose capacity for self-financing forest management is thus very limited. Consequently, it is absolutely essential in Mediterranean regions to find other sources of finance deriving from products and services that until now have not been exploited.



Picture 5:
Perfume, aromatic and medicinal plants are direct outlets for biodiversity.
Author FranceAgriMer

Recovering energy from biomass

Running the whole range of heating furnaces using wood chips represents a new outlet for low-value wood or such by-products as the residues from logging. As with every innovative economic sector, much information and drive are required to overcome the landowners' reluctance to get involved. In addition, while questions remain about the compatibility of the various operational characteristics of small- and medium-sized companies with those of major industrial groups, trials must be carried out (Proforbiomed project) to find the best economic and technical solutions for mobilising a resource that is scattered, voluminous and with a low per-unit value, or to organise and guarantee the supply for large-scale heating facilities (Woode3 project).

Marketing small non-wood products

To make forestry management a reality, owners must become open-minded and aware of all the possibilities. One such is mushroom picking via contracts with pickers. Such organised agreements, which bring in a little income, also facilitate limiting abuse and damage to the stands (Sylvamed project).

Payment for the forests' environmental services

Modern societies, now mainly urban, are keen on nature. Some areas on the outskirts of towns and cities are "invaded" by heavy visiting which can disturb the owners and lead to nuisance and damage. Shared governance has been envisaged in the Slovenian town of Celje where a scheme for the recreational use of the plots has been suggested to landowners willing to participate (Sylvamed).

This same project has inventoried the cases of payment for services linked to the guarantee of the quality of spring water; some contracts are already in effect between forest landowners and professionals in the drinking water sector.

Profitable use of biodiversity

The organisation of sustainable nature tourism in the protected areas along the Portuguese coast (2BParks) should permit the limiting of negative impact on the remarkable biodiversity of these areas while at the same time stimulating the activity of an entire economic sector: tourist agencies, travel companies, restaurant and hotel businesses, not to mention the bodies involved in teaching about nature... this type of tourism, characterised as sustainable, is also a focus of the Susten project.

Biodiversity has also got direct economic application and outlets: this is the case for perfume, aromatic and medicinal plants (PAMP). Mediterranean forests and natural areas harbour a multitude of plant species that contain a wealth of molecules sought after by craft and large-scale industrial companies. They can also be grown on farms (MEDISS project).

Initiatives to encourage marketing products locally on short commercial circuits are also aimed at optimising the rural economy (Rururban project).

Synergy indispensable in areas of low production

This apparently disparate “bouquet” of projects grouped under the Medland 2020 umbrella has highlighted a number of features apparently quite banal but most often characteristic of Mediterranean forest and natural areas.

Such areas are obviously distinguished by a specific climate and a rich biodiversity adapted to the climatic constraints but, also, to usages by humankind going back thousands of years. The ecosystems involved are capable of providing a multitude of services and products but rarely in sufficient quantities to make a profit for the landowners and thus finance their management. Wood remains important but cannot remain the only resource used profitably. Given the multifunctional nature of the areas, it is fairly clear that at the level of action and perspectives a dominant role should go to the commonly-agreed undertakings of managers and users, a preponderance highlighting the interest in co-building that involves all the stakeholders in forests and woodlands and, also, in shared governance which is likely to be more efficient.

Emergence of a voice in common

The way of working, not to mention actual methods, varied depending on the project but an integral part of all of them were the visits and encounters between the participants so that they could get some real insight into the concrete situations involved in the partner projects.

In most cases, each site was the object of at least one visit and a seminar was the ideal. This made for more than a simple awareness of a situation because the explanations that were inherent to on-site visits reiterated the overall physical and institutional framework structuring each project.

Thus, the information obtained by the visitors rarely took the form of a recipe for success because conditions varied from one site to another; rather, they saw a way of approach to their undertakings. In the not-so-distant past, this was called “communico-operation” (Synthesis of Recoforme, the project from the previous wave).

Here lies the reason that the catalogue of good practices planned for in many projects, should they in fact appear, will not have the importance that might have been expected; what matters in the last analysis is the shared transformation of the people who took part. It is difficult to assess such a phe-

Picture 6:

The partners in the Qualigouv project meet in the Luberon in France.
Photo GMICRPF



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nomenon and to measure the real effects of cooperation. Even so, case by case analysis shows that the participation in such a project often permitted the carrying out in each region or locality of operations that, apart from obvious reasons of finance, would not otherwise have been possible without the subtle input from the partners in larger amounts than is often realised.

All these projects assembled here manifest the interventions, opinions and expertise of a very large number of partners. With their varied thematic interests and diverse geographic origins they constitute a microcosm as significant as the Partnership for Collaboration on Mediterranean Forests which was set up in 2010, with the FAO's Sylva Mediterranea committee as the core. This Partnership, which groups some thirty participants, concerns mainly institutions, including the Blue Plan, the International Association for Mediterranean Forests or the Association for Forest Modeling, national governments and academic bodies; there are no regional or local councils involved. It has nevertheless made a powerful contribution to the emergence of a common approach to Mediterranean forests and natural areas and it can be expected that from this will emerge a single, common voice used by people from all round the Mediterranean Rim when they talk about their forests.

It is clearly indispensable that the European mechanisms that enabled these projects to be undertaken and merged them together to form part of the overall Medland 2020 programme, should facilitate the continuation and enrichment of their work.

In the history of the European Union's projects, from Interreg on down to Med, it has been almost impossible to come across the term "forest": one had to look out for references to biodiversity, sustainable development... and still no clear link to the areas managed by professional foresters, local and regional government authorities or specialist bodies. Medland 2020 has served to reassert this necessary approach and that has been one of its principal qualities.

Preparing the future

It needs to be said that missing from this concert has been a significant player, livestock farming. It is likely that in the Med programme, which is now coming to an end, there have been some projects involving extensive livestock farming in the forests and natural areas, either to reduce their vulnerability to wildfire or to implement a genuine silvo-pastoralist approach beneficial to both trees and grazing land. It is regrettable that certain of them could not be integrated into the Medland 2020 programme.

But it will be possible in the future, so great is our optimism that the next wave of European projects, for the period 2015 – 2019, will take into even better account the rightful place of questions linked to the understanding, management, protection and effective exploitation of Mediterranean forests and natural areas at the core of local and regional governments.

We believe we can confirm the favourable sentiment of most of the Medland 2020 partners about committing themselves to this viewpoint in order to make heard in matters of land use and development the single, common voice of Mediterranean people whenever their forests are concerned. In any event, the association Forêt Méditerranéenne, with the help of the International Association for Mediterranean Forests (AIFM), stands ready as always to make its contribution to the undertaking.

Picture 7:

A theme overlooked in Medland: livestock farming
 © Medland

