

Mediterranean Plant Conservation Week

SESSION 3 PARTICIPATORY ACTIVITY – DISCUSSIONS’ SUMMARIES

In the participatory activity of Session 3, moderated by Ugo D’Ambrosio (Global Diversity Foundation, ugotopia@yahoo.com), 5 tables were set up with Thematic Areas which were manned each by a moderator. Participants are divided into 5 random groups, each of which started working the room at one of the Thematic Areas. Every 15 minutes the groups rotated, moving to a new Thematic Area. The participants had the opportunity to discuss a variety of topics related to the human dimension in plant conservation. Here we provide a brief summary of the discussions held for each Thematic Area.

T1. Common Systems and Plant Conservation (Concha Salguero, Trashumancia y Naturaleza / EFNCP, consalguero@gmail.com)

- Do you have ICCAs or common systems to manage resources in your areas?
- Do you think ICCAs/common systems can be a good formula for conservation?
- Which do you think would be the next steps to make these systems work for conservation?

According to the participants, their respective countries all seem to have some kind of common management systems, although in different states of maintenance and/or activity. In some, ICCAs had practically disappeared, although some practices still remained (e.g. Germany), while in others, they are very alive and active (e.g. *Agdal* in Morocco and common pastures in Spain). Particularly, in the Balkans, some participants associated these systems with more contemporary governance models, like those developed by the communist systems. None of the participants had heard about the concept of ICCA prior to the morning seminar; afterwards, they could recognise the similarities with these systems and the systems existing in their countries.

Regarding the second question, the general impression was that these systems could certainly help plant conservation through various means (participatory approach to disseminated land flora and environmental values, involvement in the success of land management plans, citizen science, etc.), but, in order to be operative, there was also a general agreement on the necessity of recognition of these systems by the authorities.

Several ideas were provided to make these systems work for conservation. It was generally agreed that networking will play a key role in common management and conservation between the different groups and NGOs involved on these matters. Initially, this network would help share information on ICCAs and common systems, which are still going unrecognised for the most part. Later on, it would serve as a channel for knowledge transfer of ICCAs and common systems possibilities for conservation and natural resources enhancement.

T2. Science and Mobile Pastoralism (Engin Yılmaz, Yolda Initiative, engin@bican.net)

The objective of this thematic station was focused on how scientific data production can be used to provide evidence of the importance and benefits of Mobile Pastoralism as a cultural practise regarding biodiversity conservation. Thus, three questions were addressed to the participants to explore:

Q1. The local state-of-the-art of mapping data of the practise in each country to be used in scientific correlations.

Q2. The possible examples of scientific data production in regard with the practise.

Q3. The possible indicator species which can be correlated with the practise in a scientific study.

A1. In most of the countries such maps don't exist and even when they exist they are not accurate enough to use for scientific studies. The practise is no longer present in a few countries such as UK or present with a few communities with short distance movements in some other countries such as Croatia. In almost all of the countries there is a high rate of abandonment of the practise and/or the practise was forced to transform due to obstacles, which decreased the level of benefits it traditionally provided for biodiversity and even caused adverse impacts on biodiversity. One of such examples is from the Middle East, where trans-boundary migration is no longer common because of the border policies and security issues.

As it is the case for some other countries, many of the nomadic pastoralists in Algeria were forced to change their traditional ways due to various drivers and started to use trucks to carry their herds. This leads to stress on grazing lands (overgrazing) as the herds remain longer than they used to at winter and summer sites, without a gradual migration process.

Along with the long-distance movement patterns, the importance of the short-distance movements were also emphasized by the participants.

The practise has an important role for community governed areas, such as *agdals* in Morocco. There are also initiatives at regions such as Alps, aiming to revive the practise.

A2. Regarding possible examples of scientific data production, many participants focused initially on two functions of the practise as a study subject: its role for a seed distribution and the impact of grazing on vegetation.

Other ideas for possible scientific study themes were: Traditional Ecological Knowledge, such as the use of plant species; impact of mobile pastoralism on biomass storage and its contribution to the ecosystem services provided by the habitats; comparative studies between grazing sites and the surrounding areas on abundance of species; the bio-pesticide input mobile pastoralism provides; specific correlations between the practise and endangered species which are related to the live-stock movement; and, the role of this practice in rural economies, including in local food chains.

A3. The possible indicator species which can be correlated with the practise in a scientific study proposed by the participants were the trees *Fraxinus dimorpha* and *Quercus ilex* on the one side, and carnivores and scavengers on the other.

T3. Revitalisation and Promotion of Cultural Practices for Conservation (Sana Mzoughi, WWF North Africa, smzoughi@wwfna.org; Irene Teixidor-Toneu, Global Diversity Foundation, irene.teixidor.toneu@gmail.com)

Some cultural practices have a positive impact on conservation: (1) Is it possible and desirable to promote them and revitalise them? (2) How could it be achieved? (3) Could these practices be replicated in other places? Besides addressing the three questions proposed, some overarching issues were discussed, for example the importance to clarify how incorporating cultural practices into conservation actions help fulfil a bigger end, for example complying with CBD and GSPC.

Why protect cultural practices? Cultural practices represent local heritage. A strong culture that keeps its particular practices alive, has a protective function not only for biodiversity, but also for people's

wellbeing and mental health. A high emphasis was put during the discussions on the links between culture and wellbeing, which are often overlooked and they should be put forward. Although biodiversity doesn't translate into wellbeing, green, natural spaces do; wellbeing depends on people's perceptions that are shaped through media, awareness campaigns, education, etc.

The diversity of practices is linked to plant diversity, habitats, etc. and cultural practices are locally adapted and often sustainable, at least traditionally. If a practice has been used during prolonged periods of time (centuries), it is likely sustainable. On a pragmatic level, integrating cultural practices for conservation could allow conservationists to work at small scales, with conservation actions that are locally sound. Development and conservation should be adapted to each territory; solutions from one place cannot be directly imported to others (i.e. European strategies applied to North Africa), and taking into account local culture and knowledge can help make conservation strategies locally adaptive. Finally, TEK can be informative to the natural sciences.

How to promote cultural practices for conservation? Much of the discussions had to do with raising awareness with the various stakeholders (governments, scientists and the communities). Communities are often not aware of the global value of their territories, knowledge and practices; awareness should be raised among local communities, so they are aware of this. It is also important to convince governments of the role of local cultural practices and knowledge when devising conservation actions, but first the scientific community needs to be convinced. The collection of more data on the impact of these practices for the environment, would help make the case that they have positive effects for the conservation of biodiversity.

The study and integration of cultural practices into conservation has to be carried out with a bottom-up approach, because as scientists, we may bias and impose our pre-conceived ideas into local cultures unless the process is community-based and participatory.

An important issue raised by various groups was the importance to integrate innovation in cultural practices in sound way. Also, it was seen as important to add (economic) value to the produce from traditional cultural practices in order to support these practices. For example, facilitate organic certification, sell delicatessen products, etc. Innovation could include new crops that are adapted to local conditions. This could potentially counterbalance the lobbying from agricultural powers, which promote new technologies and create a view of traditional agriculture as old fashioned and outdated.

Could these practices be replicated in other places? Some aspects of local cultural practices can be replicated, others not. The practices themselves depend on the local management and governance systems that sustain them, and cannot be replicated without those taken into account.

T4. Sacred Sites and Sacred Species (Liza Zogib, DiversEarth, liza@diversearth.org)

The aim of this participatory session was to introduce the theme of spirituality and its links with nature.

After a short moment of silence, reflecting on how nature makes us feel – here are the words / phrases evoked by participants: **Simplicity – Free – Like I can fly – In awe – Calm – Relax – Home – Questioning – No worries – Myself – Happy – Excited – Welcome – God – Peace – Serenity – Majesty – Liberté – Joy – Awesome – Mixed feelings – Healing – More sensitive – Reflective – Relief – Different – Grand champ de vision – Linked to God**

Sacred Sites and particularly sacred species listed by participants:

Lebanon: region of churches and monasteries related to Saint Sarkis in rural areas (oak trees); Harissa forests; Qadisha valley; Waqf (plenty); Cedars of God, Bcharré; salamander (bride of the Spring); *Cedrus libani*; owls.

Macedonia: churchyards with old oak trees; Monastery of Treskavec; Cocev Kamen – fertility stone; Prespa Ohrid – around 364 churches; St John's Wort (Grass of Mary); 'Housekeeper' and subspecies; peacock, deer, some birds.

Palestine: Makam shrines with *Pistacia atlantica*, *Ziziphus spina-christi*, *Quercus calliprinos* (very old trees, fear of cutting); Church in Bethlehem.

England: monastic sites like Lindisfarm; coastal monastic sites – dunes; old trees in churchyards (no pesticides); pre-Christian sites like Stonehenge; Yew trees, Waxcats (fungi).

Tunisia: Marabout sites, e.g. Sidi Bou Said; Nafta – 200 Marabouts around *palmerai*; Olive trees.

Morocco: cemeteries – sacred; Marabout, *Agdals* (Igourdane); Palm trees, *Argania spinosa*, *Olea europaea*; owls; storks; *Pistacia atlantica* in East of Morocco.

Egypt: Saint Catherine (World Heritage site and hotspot for plants and birds), Siwa (site).

Greece: Mt Athos; village forests; cliff monasteries (e.g. Meteora); Delphi, Mount Olympus; endemic plants, Moni Malevis, Parnon Peloponnisos; Laurel, Oak, Liliun (Big Friday); Olive tree.

Spain: El Rocio Hermitage – *Rosmarins officialis*, *Pistacea lentiscus*, *Mentha suaveolens*; Doñana National Park – Marshalls pine, dunes, Juncia – corpus Christi; Tentudia's Monastery – Oaks, *Centaurea tentudaica* (200 individuals only found here).

Turkey: Ancient trees – Yew, Platanum, Tillea, Cedars, Prayer trees / Wish trees; storks.

T5. Integrating Community Conserved Territories and Areas in conservation (Shalimar Sino, SPNL, shalimar.sinno@gmail.com; Hassan Rankou, Global Diversity Foundation, h.rankou@kew.org)

The moderators explained the participants of this session about the *Agdals* and *Himas*. *Agdals* (North Africa) and *Himas* (Middle East) are community conserved areas designed to preserve and protect ecosystems for the sustainable use of natural resources by the people and for the people, and empower the local communities and ensure their engagement in managing their distinctive landscapes.

The session's title was "Integrating Community Conserved Territories and Areas in conservation". Hassan and Shalimar asked the participants, after giving them a brief on the *Agdals* and *Himas*, whether they believe that these two concepts can be considered as ICCAs and are very well integrated in conservation. The participants agreed that *Agdals* and *Himas* are Community based managed areas that lead to conservation of the landscapes and empower local communities.

Participants discussed a few points that are essential to be considered:

- Communities engaged in *Agdals* and *Himas* should be well trained to be able to follow and monitor the presence of new plant species, threats, and habitat changes that would affect individual species; thus, capacity building trainings (to build ecological knowledge) are important.
- The need of appropriate recognition and knowledge on the different forms of ICCAs worldwide and their impact on conservation.
- Create a network between the different ICCAs to build on and share experiences of conservation.
- Secure resources and incomes through policies that ensure the well adapted role of ICCAs.