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## **The Role of European Forest Municipalities and Local Communities in the Management of Mountain Forests.**

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The paper provides an overview of the retrospective and current role of forest municipalities and local forest communities in the conservation and management of their natural resources in different countries of Europe.

With a special focus on mountain areas, where natural resources are often, and world wide, held in common or nominally by the state rather than privately owned (TMI, FAO, 1997), different examples are examined and compared (Zingari, 1998).

Interactions between natural resources, institutional arrangements and cultural frameworks which are consistent in the conservation and management are highlighted (Cole & Wolf, 1993).

Socio-economic and environmental trends are reviewed in mountain forest communities, identifying issues, factors and patterns and processes of interdependencies between mountain and lowland populations, including conflicting interests in exploitation, encroachment and external changes (Zingari, 2000, in press).

In view of drawing lessons from a wider comparative approach to European mountain resources use, both on a synchronic and a diachronic level, some research opportunities are outlined (Price, 2000, in press).

Finally, the experience carried out on mountain forest in Europe within the institutional network linked to the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe is presented and commented, in the light of major international initiatives aiming at raising the awareness on the natural, economic, institutional and cultural fragility of most of the mountain regions world wide.

## **Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to provide a short overview on the role of European forest municipalities and local communities in the management policies of mountain forests. Municipality- and local community-based ownership is a form of property intimately linked to a management issued by a large set of interests and by multiple roles of resources. It is also a form of property largely found in mountain regions in Europe and worldwide.

The overview is brought by the experience made by the author in assisting forest municipalities in raising their awareness on rights and responsibilities carried towards local populations and local resources in a changing society. The establishment of a European Federation of Municipal and Local Community Forests (FECOF) has been a critical step in the identification of those rights and responsibilities by the different member countries, and in the consequent negotiation with national and European level parties in forest policy decisions. The Federation also identified priority areas in Europe, namely mountain regions beside mediterranean ones, where forests considered both as natural and socio-economic resources are drastically affected by changes. FECOF established a European Observatory on Mountain Forests to assess changes and propose measures in favour of these forests.

## **What we consider by forest municipalities and local communities**

Municipal woodlands in Europe include forests owned by municipalities, their associations, and local communities (FECOF, 1992); in some cases, privately owned forests are managed under common property regimes (Morandini, 1996). Most of the available statistics on national forest land do not provide a clear view of ownership patterns and figures, merging municipal forests with state forest under the 'public' heading.

The legislation governing municipal woodlands, is based on usage rights dating back to Roman times and to the Middle Ages. Until the XIXth Century, when governments and private interests started a dominating control over forests, this property regime was highly represented in most of the European countries.

Currently, the majority of the forest land in Europe, i.e. 65%, is privately owned by some 12 million individuals and companies, 90% of them on a small scale basis (< 5 ha). The state is the second forest owner in Europe. In Belgium, Spain, Italy, Luxembourg, France, Germany, Switzerland, Andorra and some other countries in transition like Slovenia, local communities play an important role as forest owners with a growing control over policies and management. In Europe they are nevertheless a minority.

## **About mountains**

Forests and mountains are receiving a growing international attention since Rio Agenda 21, Chapter 13 on mountains: today the highest rates of deforestation are found in mountainous regions (FAO, 1995). Those regions are affected by socio-economic marginalization and poverty with unbalances between downstream and upstream benefits (Mountain Forum, 2000; Price & Butt, 2000; Mountain Agenda, 2000; UN Social and Economic Council, 2000). To raise

awareness on those global problems, United Nations declared 2002 as International Year of Mountains.

Mountain areas and their resources, in Europe and world wide, are of special interest in terms of common property regimes. In these areas, the land and the natural resources are often held in common or nominally by the state rather than privately owned (TMI, FAO, 1997).

What has been the role and the interaction of local communities in the management of mountain forests is a complex, still largely unexplored question (Zingari, 2000). Both the ecosystems and the communities are particularly rich and fragile in mountain regions. Nevertheless, some examples provide evidences of remarkable adaptative mechanisms to balance the use of resources with the needs of communities (Brouwer, 1996; Merlo, 1995). Mechanisms can be cultural (institutions, family, heritage, goods transmission), economic (values, uses, trade, added value), and technical (knowledge and know-how), and they can vary on small geographical scales as some classical studies have shown (Cole & Wolf, 1974, 1993; Netting, 1981; Viazzo, 1989).

Current efforts in understanding the perspectives of community involvement in forest management are gaining importance. The Working Group on Community Involvement in Forest Management, established in 1996, is providing regional profiles and case studies of paramount importance (IUCN, 1998, Jeanrenaud, 2000).

### **Institutional arrangements of FECOF**

The European Federation of Municipal and Local Community Forests (FECOF) is the platform for federating the variety of community-based forest owners and, in some cases, managers around Europe. Currently, municipalities from some ten countries all over Europe.

FECOF represents a few thousands forest owners with some 25 to 30 million ha of woodland in Europe. The forest area per owner is higher than the private one with averages of over 400 ha (France).

The position of FECOF is potentially critical in the growing capacity of local stakeholders to participate in the definition of forest, land use, local development policies. Nevertheless, cohesion between different countries representatives is still weak. An in-depth retrospective study is lacking and would certainly help to provide an acknowledgement and a real working identity to this important group of forest stakeholders.

A European Charter of Municipal Forests (FECOF, 1992) states some relevant and forerunner principles like sustainable management, public interest, multifunctionality, socio-economic issues, public relations and capacity building. The mechanism of the charter to raise awareness has been renewed with a second contribution specific to mountain forests (FECOF, 1995), providing a consensus basis for the establishment in 1996 of an *ad hoc* European Observatory on Mountain Forests (Zingari, 1998).

The strategy of FECOF is so far limited by the lack of a wide technical and socio-economic approach to the forest policies. Efforts to gain some measures of support from the European Union have led to include municipalities and their associations to benefit from direct grants (European Union, 1999). These grants are prominently available for forests in less favoured areas, namely mountains.

Another challenge for the Federation of forest communities in Europe is the building of alliances between local stakeholders. Experience has shown that different groups represented in Europe (private forest owners, farmers, hunters) have simultaneously put forward initiatives or positions on issues regarding forest policies.

The future of a wide and sound representation of forest communities in Europe is linked to the reinforcement of a common strategy, including an increased internal cohesion, a better communication inside and outside, long term objectives and the awareness raising of FECOF associates on the emerging issues and roles of forests from the local to the global scale.

The past has delivered in Europe a diversity of patterns in forest ownerships which have been reduced, and represented by leading statistics, in two main groups: private and public. Sometimes a slight distinction is made under the public heading between state and other public sectors. Things look different when downscaling in one country or another, from one region to another, and even more different when retracing over time scales.

The private group is supposed to gather some 12 million forest owners, with over 65% of the total forest area, in a Confederation established in 1996 (Confédération Européenne des Propriétaires Forestiers CEPEF, 1998) scattered in more than 20 countries. Differences are consistent between countries and within the owners: more than 80% of private forests in Portugal and less than 20% in Greece; 90% of private forests under 5 ha in France with only 1% over 50 ha.

### **Three examples from national contexts**

When looking at the local scale within national contexts, differences are large in forest communities models. Some examples can be reminded to provide features of these communities in different national contexts and to draw lessons on mechanisms for sustainability.

Italy is a mountain dominated country through the Alpine (1,200 km long) and the Apennine ranges (1,400). The complex system of interlinked local cultures did not originally oblige the Roman administration, which ruled on a federative basis, to apply restrictions in the use of mountain forest resources to local peoples and communities. In many examples silvo-pastoral resources are reported to have been under local commons arrangements throughout the Middle Ages, both in the Alps and in the Apennines, much less in the lowland. A well-known example is the Valley of Fiemme in the Dolomitic Alps where the 'Magnifica Comunità' still provide a model of sustainability in the use of resources (Merlo, 1995; Morandini, 1996). A less-known example is that of the *Comunaliae Parmensi*, led by early Ligurian peoples across the Northern Apennines and evolving today to a successful participatory scheme in the conservation and sustainable development of local communities. The capacity of such local

systems to secure the continuity of resources has been integrated in the first Italian forest law of 1923 producing the so-called '*forest consortium*'. This arrangement is a participatory ownership and management mechanism in which all parties, local inhabitants, mayors of villages, private and municipal owners, are called to join efforts in a long term, actually permanent, action towards the conservation and economic development of local natural resources. Although the scheme applies to all municipal forests as an obligation and to private forests as a choice, the implementation of this law has been delayed until recently when the concept of and the demand for sustainability in management started to increase. Experience has shown that anywhere a Consortium is established by municipal forest owners, a number of private owners join the scheme avoiding, either the abandonment of management or the mismanagement of forest resources.

In France the distribution of the 11,000 municipal forest owners, called '*Communes forestières*' and grouped in a powerful national federation since 1933, is overlapping with the distribution of mountain areas (Zingari, 1998). As mountain forests are by their own character providing a large set of values, roles and interests, the forest municipalities are facing increasing environmental responsibilities. They are key-players in the implementation of global concepts such as biodiversity conservation and sustainable management. Between forest municipalities, led by a local council and recognized as the authorities responsible in the implementation of environmental policies, and the central authority keeping a leading technical and political role, the balance is not constantly found. In 1991 an attempt was made between the Forest Service and the *Communes* to establish a charter of partnership, information sharing and exchange of views (FNCFF & ONF, 1991). This gentlemen agreement was a political compromise between two groups trying to find a viable solution to a latent conflict: the aim was ambitious "*safeguard the future of communal forests, ensure that they play an active part in the economic life of the community and maintain the balance in the countryside, thereby improving the quality of life of present and future generations*". The National Association of *Communes forestières*, established in 1933, is one of the most active forest organisations in France with a view on Europe, as a founding member of the FECOF. In 1996 it promoted the establishment of the European Observatory of Mountain Forests, followed in 1999 by the project of an Observatory of Mediterranean Forests. Its role in the political debate is central, with a capacity of making alliances with other groups and providing training to local administrators.

Spain has at least two field examples which are not well-known in the scientific literature: Foresna-Zurgaia in Navarra, Pyrenees and ASCUD in Castilla and Leon. At the national level, some 2,000 communities (*ayuntamientos*) own 5 million ha of forest land. The first is an association established in 1992 with a group of twenty local communities and two hundred private owners, some of them elected officials. The forest land of Navarra, some 370,000 ha, is owned by local communities (65%) and private individuals (28%). The driving force of the association is the forest management tradition on one side and the market crisis since the 80s on the other side. Forests and the economic activities, including employment opportunities offered, are considered the core relation in conservation and development of the area. The association helps to find mechanisms to raise awareness (a local journal and a guide of small- and medium-size enterprises are published), be represented in decision-making and benefit from a political attention. The second example is found in the region of Pinares, Castilla and Leon, where

ASCUD is first of all an association of villages. Peoples and villages have a tradition, once again in a mountainous region, of common property over silvo-pastoral lands. Local development is seen as working by local natural resources, earlier through a wide variety of wood and non-wood products, later through wood manufacturing and currently by tourism and biodiversity values. The social cohesion in the region is shown by statistics on forest fires: the area is climatically very exposed to fires during several months, but no major fire event has ever taken place in Pinares due to the monitoring, and solidarity, of local people over their resources.

### **Mountain communities and their trends**

Before drawing some lessons from the examples given and found across Europe, three points will be highlighted: interdependencies between mountain and lowland populations, conflicts which has been raising from such interdependencies and some emerging issues in Europe. This part of the contribution is mainly taken from the fore-coming IUFRO Report on Forests and Sustainable Mountain Development (Price & Butt, 2000), in particular from the article by Zingari entitled 'Sustainably Balancing Downstream and Upstream Benefits in European Mountain Forest Communities'.

Interdependencies between mountain and lowland populations are particularly relevant when considering forest as sources of downstream water and soil erosion control, market goods and socio-cultural diversity. Important and unfolding relationships to the lowlands, and at the state level, demonstrates that mountain forest communities, along with any rural community, can not be considered or understood in purely local terms (Cole & Wolf, 1993). Feedback however, is mostly unbalanced: when considering the interdependencies between mountain and lowland populations worldwide, the magnitude in the outflows of forests goods and services is incomparable with upstream benefits. Pratt & Preston (1998) provide a clear overview of this issue.

Forest use and misuse have been at the centre of conflicting interests between the state administration and the local communities in Europe since the emergence of national forestry policies. Facing forest clearings and deforestation, soil erosion and instability produced by an overwhelming demographic increase, devastating wars and intensive industrial demand, legislation issued from the second half of the 19th century in many states met harsh opposition from local communities and their silvo-pastoral practices. Laws were coming from and for the lowlands and the encroachments they produced largely contributed to the process of economic and cultural marginalization of local mountain communities.

Historically, settlements in mountain regions of Europe have been experiencing poverty, migration, peddling, and forms of early autonomy and democracy, and, at the same time, a rather limited cultural and economic marginalization until the raising of state-centered policies when rights of access, use, control, management and ownership of resources came across institutional and juridical walls.

Mountain forest peoples and communities, under the current pressure of global external economic and mainstream cultural forces, are submitted to further steps of marginalization which can be viewed under many aspects: the collapsing of their demographic systems (depopulation

and increase in age of most residents), the structural weaknesses of political representativity (less than 15% of Europeans live actually in these areas), the loss of adaptative (1) mixed-production patterns (agro-silvo-pastoral activities and local know-how), the increasing juridical protection of areas and habitats where most local practices are submitted to limitations or banned, the colonial-like forms of resorts and recreation economies, the gaps in the native cultural models continuity (influence of a growing number of external inputs). Mountain forestry itself, providing a large variety of downstreaming extra-market assets, has been lacking of a true political recognition which has been given extensively nationally and at the European union level, to mountain agriculture.

### **Lessons from Europe**

Lessons from Europe may be useful in re-orientating policies and research in sustainable development worldwide, although a suitable recognition of economic and cultural assets of mountain areas is still largely to be politically achieved.

Many countries outside Europe are facing marginalization processes of local mountain forest communities, through inadequate policies, increasing pressures on resources, desertification of watersheds, demographic trends and military conflicts with unbearable consequences. The recent success of the Electronic Conference organized by The Mountain Forum on “Mountain People, Forests, and Trees: Strategies for Balancing Local Management and Outside Interests“, (Mountain Forum, 2000) reflects further efforts required in balancing downstream and upstream benefits sustainably. Deforestation rates are high in tropical mountain areas, possibly the highest worldwide (FAO, 1995) and non-participatory policies are still implemented whenever any specific policy is identified at all. Considering the disappointing results of natural resource conservation policies in tropical countries, interest has shifted from state policies towards solutions at the local level (Becker & Gibson, 1996). Such trends are partially comparable to the chaining up of events that has been leading to most of the mountain forest situations found across Europe.

### **Research needs**

National-level examples in Europe could be further provided to argue that although no general rule in balancing upland and lowland interests in mountain ecosystem management can be applied, socio-economic and environmental trends can be sustainably improved by drawing lessons from the study of local forest communities. The diversity of situations which marks the mountain environments is a cradle and a shelter of successful adaptative solutions for both biological and human communities. Both are fragile and both deserve a special consideration.

If the number of cases in Europe and lessons to be drawn are significant and are currently focusing the interest of research groups (see for example Koch & Rasmussen, 1998 and Carlsson, 1995) as well as that of stakeholder groups (e.g. European Federation of Local Forest Communities), the task of an indepth analysis of major issues and challenges in the future of mountain forest communities is a scientific and political priority. Such a task has been identified in two recent comprehensive works (Revue Forestière Française, 1998 and European Observatory of Mountain Forests, 2000). Given the growing interdependencies between upland

and lowland populations in Europe, the identification of options for mountain forest sustainability can be structured into four main factors: i. cultural, ii. social, iii. economic and iv. political.

i. Cultural factors. Mountain forest resource contributes to three interdependent levels of culture. Locally, the diversified, habitat-adapted communities deserve special attention as matrices and driving forces of technical and economic sustainable strategies, tested empirically over generations and integrated into the local cultural patterns. Nationally, the central institutions will keep a leading role and responsibility in re-shaping and reducing cultural marginality of mountain communities by rehabilitating a positive and dynamic image. Globally, the awareness raised on mountain forests by international negotiations (e.g.IFF III) is a milestone in considering sustainability as an interplay between natural and cultural assets. Research priorities should be reconsidered from those cultural options and provide further indepth comparative studies on the human dimension of mountain forest conservation and sustainable management.

ii. Social factors. Much of the societal conflicts raising over mountain forest resources are produced by external, sectoral, non-adaptative and unrespectful forces applied by groups and stakeholders. Strategies for sustainable management of natural resources are increasingly becoming priorities for society. The general and strategic interest of benefits coming from mountain forests should be further communicated. Mechanisms of and institutional supply for recognition of ownership's rights and responsibilities, participation in key-objectives identification, concertation on means and methods, and integrated decision-making about those benefits should be the object of research schemes.

iii. Economic factors. Valuation of non-market downstream benefits from mountain forests is the first step in providing sustainable options of economic and social cohesion of upland regions worldwide. Inherent difficulties in valuation could be first approached by a national-level framework recognising the upland/lowland interdependencies, incorporating cultural and social options mentioned above, and identifying investments, incentives and other means (e.g.fiscal, banking, sponsoring) to maintain benefits to global population upstream and downstream.

iv. Political factors. The evolution of policies for mountain forests in Europe, including their lacks and failures, shows some key-factors for successful outputs: respect of local cultures, ownership rights and responsibilities, increased participation and empowerment, communication and training as an interplay between central and local, lowland and upland decisions. While conditions and situations of mountain forest resources are progressively assessed, more stress should be given to future trends and retrospective evidences: mountain resources need long-term policies, sharing the fragility of all environmental and human sensitive areas. More research and actions are needed to balance the political representitivity of mountain people on the environmental and socio-economic representitivity of the flow of benefits provided downstream.

Comparative studies and data on the diversity of situations found in and options provided for mountain forest sustainability are essential means in the flexibility required by the policies and management of those fragile ecosystems.



Comparisons could further be promoted not only within Europe but also between temperate or tropical mountain areas in view of sharing knowledge and respect between uplands and lowlands, and improving the overall sustainable future of larger portions of society.

### **Networking the local and the global: the case of the Ministerial Conference's Resolution S4**

Europe took in 1990 an important step in the political commitment over mountain forests: 25 countries signed the *ad hoc* Resolution on 'Adapting the Management of Mountain Forests to new Environmental Conditions', called Resolution S4 of the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe. This permanent Conference provided in Helsinki, 1993, and Lisbon, 1998, a vision on forests which integrate the socio-economic dimension of forest management, including a clear view on forest ownership.

The work over the Resolution S4 is currently carried within an Action Plan which include an assessment of mountain forest issues by means of a White Book (EOMF, 2000), a monitoring system through the participation of countries in the identification of mountain features, namely property regimes and ecosystems typology, and a set of training activities to build a better capacity of local mountain communities in linking their local actions with global issues.

The experience of the S4 is providing comparative elements for strengthening the knowledge on mountain forest systems (dynamics in ecosystems, populations and livelihood mechanisms) and for providing new opportunities in local development.

### **Conclusions**

The global importance of mountains can be summarized in three statistics (Mountain Agenda, 2000):

- they cover nearly a quarter of the Earth's land surface;
- they are home to about a tenth of the global population;
- they provide goods and services to at least half of humankind.

Of the world's forests, about a quarter are in mountain regions. With regard to the diverse values of mountains to the global population, mountain forests play many key roles.

In mountain regions worldwide, natural resources are often held in common or nominally by the state rather than privately owned (TMI, FAO, 1997). Europe provides retrospectively and currently a large set of patterns of mountain resources held and/or commonly managed. Those patterns are often successful today in a deeply changing society.

The study of the common property in mountain regions has a wide field of implementation which could provide a better understanding of societal and cultural mechanisms in sustainable ecosystem management, and open mountain communities to a more equitable recognition of benefits provided to a large part of humankind.

Mountains have been defined as “*shelters of democracies and peasants republics ...steep places have always been cradles of freedom*“ (Braudel in Netting, 1981): their common property systems deserve special attention. Three main axes may be relevant in this context:

— societal and cultural links between patterns of ownership and current successful patterns of resources management;

— historical links between retrospective and current patterns of ownership through a diachronic approach, and current links between existing patterns inside and outside Europe through a synchronic approach;

— political, institutional and economic role of ownership arrangements for the sustainable future of mountain forests in Europe and worldwide.

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