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Creation of a Model Forest in the Istrian Region in Croatia

by Marina BERTON

The Model Forest concept is a governance tool that offers a participatory approach to the sustainable management of forest landscapes and natural resources of a given forest area. Although born in Canada, it has been adapted to the Mediterranean context, taking into account in particular the multifunctional character of Mediterranean forest areas and the necessary participation of all stakeholders in building sustainable development. This article tells the story of the creation of the Model Forest of Mirna River Basin in the region of Istria in Croatia.

Background

What is a Model Forest?

A Model Forest is both a large area where the forest represents an important stake, and a collaborative approach for sustainable management of forested landscapes and natural resources.

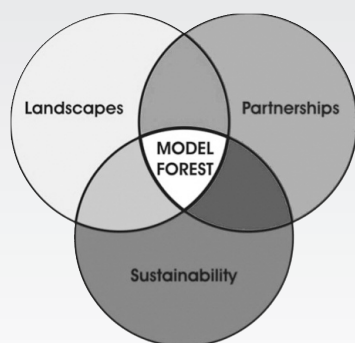
The Model Forest approach is primarily a partnership-based process for sustainable development, which can be defined as « *a collaborative process through which individuals and groups, representing a diversity of values, work together towards a common vision of sustainable development for a landscape in which forests are an important feature* ».

In a Model Forest, people representing a diversity of interests and opinions, form a neutral partnership with a view to achieve the following goal: to manage their own natural resources in the most logical way for them, taking into account their history, economic situation, cultural identity and also future generations. The partnership first defines what « sustainability » means in its own context, develops a common vision to promote it and, on this basis establishes its governance structure and elaborates a strategic plan. Consequently, partners work together to achieve its goals, through the implementation of concrete actions.

Fundamental principles of the Model Forest

All Model Forests share the same fundamental principles which ensure the consistency of the international Network and favor networking and knowledge-sharing. These principles are the followings:

1. **Partnership:** each Model Forest is a neutral and open forum welcoming the voluntary participation of representatives of the interests and values associated to the landscape.
2. **Landscape:** a large scale biophysical area representing a wide range of social, cultural, economic and environmental forest values and problems.
3. **Sustainability:** stakeholders are committed to the conservation and sustainable management of the natural resources and forested landscape.
4. **Governance:** the Model Forest management process is representative, participative, transparent and accountable, and promotes collaborative work among stakeholders.
5. **Program of activities:** activities undertaken through a Model Forest reflect the



Key Model Forest principles.

common vision, needs, values and challenges of participants in relation to natural resources and forests management, taking also into account the needs of the community as a whole.

6. **Knowledge-sharing, capacity building and Networking:** Model Forests reinforce stakeholders' capacity to commit themselves towards the sustainable management of natural resources, collaborate and share results and lessons learned through networking.

International Model Forest Network (IMFN)

The « Model Forest » concept was born at the beginning of the 90s in Canada and it was first presented in 1992 on the United Nations Conference for the Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro. Today, more than 60 Model Forests are active all over the world and together they form the International Model Forest Network and their six regional networks.

Mediterranean Model Forest Network (MMFN)

The Mediterranean Model Forest Network (MMFN) was created in 2008 on the initiative of the Region of Castilla-y-Leon from Spain, and it involves countries and regions from the two rims of the Mediterranean.

With its Model Forest Urbion, the Region of Castilla-y-Leon has been the first to

implement the Model Forest approach in the Mediterranean.

The MMFN Secretariat is located in Valladolid and it coordinates the activities and manages the whole network.

The main role of the Mediterranean secretariat is to provide technical assistance for Model Forest creation and development in the Mediterranean.

The regions and partners of the MMFN have signed a memorandum of understanding, open to the signature of any country or region willing to join the Network.

The aim of the MMFN is to promote the creation and development of new Model Forests on the territory of both North and South Mediterranean, and therefore they have created the five step methodology.

Fundamental principles of the Model Forest

Regardless of the specific ecosystems or tenures involved, the Model Forests principles (see insert) have the following effects:

- facilitate experiments in sustainable development,
- maintain broad program coherence,
- create a clear link between landscape-level applications and national and international policy issues,
- help each Model Forest maintain its conceptual focus and program integrity throughout its development,
- ensure that each Model Forest has the autonomy to design an initiative that reflects local priorities,
- create a foundation for networking at the local, national, regional and international levels.

The originality of the Model Forest, compared to other governance instruments which exist in Europe, is its flexibility: the future model forest partners are from the beginning invited to define by themselves what their Model Forest and what their strategic priorities will be. It is on the partners to define the governance structure, as well as, their common vision.

The elaboration of the common vision between partners is a very important step for the success and sustainability of each Model Forest process. It defines the “Model Forest”: it is the image of the future landscape towards which the population of the

territory wants to go, reflecting more generally the aspirations of the society as a whole.

A strategic plan is an essential governance tool within a Model Forest; it clearly defines the objectives and a concrete plan of activities, as well as a financial plan. The strategic plan is a tool for achieving a common vision.

The shareholders of the Model forest generally know which activities they want to pursue and which direction they want to follow. The process of preparing a strategic plan explains the stakeholders' roles, allows participation to all interested parties, promotes the responsibilities towards the stakeholders and puts the focus onto their needs.

While defining its program of activities the partnership of a Model Forest must take care of well reflecting the values and needs related to the management of the territory at the local, regional or national level. This guarantees the transferability of the experience: in order for the Model Forest to serve precisely as a reference "model" for the region, or the country in which it is located.

The Med *Forêt Modèle* project

The Med *Forêt Modèle* project's aim was to establish a new method for improved coordination of regional policies in relation to forest and territorial governance, through testing and adapting the implementation of the Model Forest concept in the Mediterranean context.

The Model Forest concept appeared as a new and original instrument for « territorial governance », well adapted to address the recurrent challenges of the Mediterranean forest, which requires a large and multifunctional approach.

With the Urbion Model Forest in Castilla-y-Leon, Spain was the first to implement the Model Forest approach in the Mediterranean.

The activities of the Med *Forêt Modèle* project

1. Definition of conceptual and methodological bases for the implementation of the Model Forest concept in the Mediterranean.

Partners of the Med *Forêt Modèle* Project

Office of Agricultural and Rural Development of Corsica-ODARC (France)
 Region of Provence-Alpes-Côte- d'Azur (France)
 Region of Murcia (Spain)
 Region of Castilla-y-Leon (Spain)
 Region of Sardinia (Italy)
 Region of Western Macedonia (Greece)
 Region of Thessaly / Prefecture of Magnesia (Greece)
 Region of Istria (Croatia)

2. Creation of a Model Forest in every Partner region in order to test the relevance of the Model Forest tool as a new way of territorial governance.

3. Analysis of the contribution of the Model forest to the improvement of regional policies through the creation of a new territorial governance instrument.

The Med *Forêt Modèle* project in the Region of Istria

In a three year time during the implementation of the Med *Forêt Modèle* project, different activities were implemented with a main objective: creation of a Model Forest in the Istrian Region. The Croatian partner, Administrative department for agriculture and forestry mobilised forestry experts from the Croatian Forest Research Institute, specifically, its regional department settled in Istria to implement main activities of the project on the field. With such cooperation in the process of creation of the Model Forest the partnership involved territorial units (cities and municipalities) and other expert institution such as Croatian forests Ltd., Natura Histrica, Nature Park Učka and several institutions dealing with nature protection in the region.

Main activities of the project

Main activities implemented within this project were information, communication and capacity building of potential stakeholders on the chosen territory for the model forest. Local meetings and workshops were organised and they resulted with the creation of a mailing list of potential stakehold-



Pictures 1 & 2:

The "Mirna River basin" Model Forest in the Region of Istria (Croatia).

Picture 3:

Activities of partnership elaboration: regulation of property rights of the Community forests in the Mountain area of Cicarija.



ers, drafting of several documents and translation of the tool kit for the creation of the model forest which were essential activities in rising knowledge and awareness of the model forest concept and about the definition of strategic objectives. The organised activities had a very important aim of identifying good potential representatives of the territory which would be able to create a future functioning of the model forest according to all good governance principles required. The biggest challenge was how to attract motivated and enthusiastic stakeholders representing various sectors which needed to be involved in the fundamental committee, from the public, private and civil sector.

The Region of Istria has participated in the process of partnership elaboration by gradually creating conditions for the establishment of the model forest.

Several meetings were organised on the territory of the Model Forest in Istria with a purpose to inform, motivate and gather representatives of the territory.

First partners on this area were administrative territorial units, regional departments and expert institutions. These representatives of the regional and local government are tightly linked to regional development, natural resources and forest management and they have founded an organisation committee in March 2011 which consisted of 23 members and a president. Such committee is representative of the whole territory of the model forest, i.e. 12 Municipalities and 5 Cities which have signed the Letter of Intent on the 16th of June 2011 in Motovun in Istria. The signatories included all above mentioned representatives as well as several expert institutions from the domain of research in forestry, forest management, nature protection and the hunter associations.

This was the biggest challenge in the last year of the project implementation-to involve private and civil stakeholders in the model forest governance bodies. They were invited to all the meetings organized in the model forest area and were constantly kept informed by the electronic means of the performed activities.

Finally, private enterprises involved in our model forest are honey producers, mushroom and truffle collectors, one charcoal production, cattle-breeders, decorative plants cultivator, vine producers and one truffle process-

ing plant etc. The partnership of the Model forest includes two mushroom associations, hunters' associations, speleological associations, beekeepers, a mountaineer association, etc.

After a three years of capacity building several working groups are constituted representing different fields of activities; forestry and renewable energy resources; agriculture, cattle-breeding and sustainable development; rural and cultural tourism; non-wood forest products; education, information, nature protection. Working groups are comprised of interested and nominated representatives according to the principles of sector and gender equality and they have worked on the definition of the strategic plan of the Model Forest "River Mirna Basin" and they will continue to work on efficiently implementing the strategic activities.

Results of the project

Results of the actions are obvious and evident on the territory of the Model Forest "River Mirna Basin". Inhabitants of the territory, representatives of different sectors (agriculture, forestry, food production, and forest products reproduction), associations, officers in territorial units, experts managing natural resources in the area are all well informed and today familiar with the concept of the model forest creation and governance. 12 local meetings, 1 workshop, a mailing list, 300 leaflets and 100 brochures on Mediterranean model forest network have successfully been used in the performance of the activities necessary for the local communication and information of the stakeholders and the public, as well as, for the elaboration of the partnership and creation of the model forest. The model forest site was selected on a consensus based meeting on which occasion new territorial units wanted to join the model forest. The Model forest territory has at that time been enlarged.

Thanks to the local communication, people from the territory are able to see in the Model Forest a possibility for sustainable development; a development of the local economies, as well as, of social groups, a possibility to get further funding for the activities in the field of natural resources and for networking on the Mediterranean and with other international organizations. The local media, such as the newspaper "Glas Istre",



the national and local radio stations and the Istrian television reported on our local meetings and their objectives in the media.

Activities on partnership elaboration have positive results and have achieved a set objective; 32 representatives have committed themselves to the governance structure of the model forest.

The brochure "All rights of the forest owners" was published with an intention to inform both community forest and private forest owners on their possibilities to get funds. It provides explanation of the Model forest network and some notes on private forest management issues. With this publication, the lack of private forestry management literature in the Region of Istria, as well as in Croatia, has been changed. It was

Pictures 4 & 5:

The Organisation committee of the MF was established in 2011, having representatives from 17 municipalities and towns, 4 public institutions and the Hunters association unit. "Letter of Intention" for creation of the model forest signed by all the representatives of the Organisation committee in June 2011 in Motovun.

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written by experts from Croatian Forests Ltd. and printed in 1000 copies. The brochure is trilingual (Croatian, English, Italian).

“Methodological guide” (Technical brochure), a document obtained from the Mediterranean Model Forest Network was translated to Croatian and printed in 500 pieces.

It was also distributed in the electronic form to all the members of the governing bodies and local communities at meetings, in schools and territorial unit offices on visits.

contribute to the increase of resources exploitation and finally even develop new resources.

The relationship between institutions, associations, individuals and companies on the territory of the future Model forest has been highly successful and effective. The final beneficiaries have during the project implementation showed good cooperation, provided information and participated in all activities which announced self-sustainability of the Model forest concept in Istria even after the end of the project.

The Model forest “River Mirna Basin” created in the framework of the MED project has gone on working and implementing its further activities for sustainable management of the forested landscapes. It applied as a candidate for recognition as the Model Forest by the International Model Forest Network and consequently it will be part of the Mediterranean Model Forest Network and participate in its networking activities (exchange of experiences, study visits, cooperation projects, etc.).

M.B.

Conclusion

The Model forest “River Mirna Basin” was established with an objective of networking between the partnership in order to consolidate the knowledge and information, all in order to facilitate all partners to participate in the decision and solution making process. By developing a Model Forest the idea is to improve the territory, to consolidate economic and non-economic priorities which will

Summary

A Model Forest is both a large area where the forest represents an important stake, and a collaborative approach for sustainable management of forested landscapes and natural resources.

The Model Forest approach is primarily a partnership-based process for sustainable development, which can be defined as « *a collaborative process through which individuals and groups, representing a diversity of values, work together towards a common vision of sustainable development for a landscape in which forests are an important feature* ». This article traces the steps of the creation of the Model Forest River Mirna Basin in the region of Istria in Croatia.

Résumé

Une Forêt Modèle est à la fois une vaste zone où la forêt représente un enjeu important, et une approche collaborative pour la gestion durable des paysages forestiers et des ressources naturelles.

L'approche Forêt Modèle est avant tout un processus fondé sur le partenariat pour le développement durable, qui peut être défini comme « *un processus de collaboration par lequel les individus et les groupes, représentant une diversité de valeurs, sont soucieux de travailler ensemble vers une vision commune du développement durable des paysages dans lesquels la forêt est un élément important* ». Cet article retrace les différentes étapes de la création de la Forêt Modèle du bassin versant de la rivière Mirna dans la région d'Istrie en Croatie.