

Technical field visit to Montserrat Rural Parc

Wednesday, 30 November 2022

Organised in collaboration with, and facilitated by the Barcelona Provincial Council (DIBA)

Context and background

In the Mediterranean region, the co-evolution of societies with their natural environment has led to the transformation of original forests and shrublands into a shifting mosaic of patches, containing forests in different states of maturity, grazing lands and croplands managed in various intensities.

Wildfires in the Mediterranean region in the 21st century are becoming more frequent, bigger and more severe. They are amplified by landscape homogenization and fuel build-up, worsening their frequency, size, and severity.

Changes in Mediterranean forest management over the past century present two relevant issues. **Land abandonment** due to socio-economic conditions and changes in the use of land is becoming prevalent and closed forests are filling the space. Secondly, the **loss of extensive grazing** in northern Mediterranean regions over the past 60 years has led to fuel loading and a higher risk of large and extreme wildfires.

Public administrations realize that wildfire suppression is no longer sustainable, and that the solution must go beyond, with a shift in focus to **landscape management**. Several initiatives with different economic activities and approaches are adopted, all serving the common objectives of wildfire risk reduction.

The Barcelona Provincial Council (DIBA) has been working with private forest owners' association, farmers, producers' associations, Catalan government (Generalitat de Catalunya) and Universities and Research Centers, and entrepreneurs featuring an integrated management approach for the past 20 years. In this technical field visit you will learn about some of DIBA's initiatives in the Monserrat Mountains surroundings.

In the Montserrat area, the Natural Park of Montserrat (managed by the Generalitat de Catalunya and part of the Natural Parks network), focused on conservation, and the Parc Rural del Montserrat (managed by a network of 18 municipalities and the DIBA), which focuses on the revitalization of agricultural activity, sustainable and healthy food production, acting throughout the value chain, from production to marketing.

Programme

08:30 Departure from Barcelona, Recinte Modernista de Sant Pau

09:45 Stop 1- Castellfollit del Boix

What to see:

- Natural regeneration of *Pinus halepensis* after fire and land abandonment
- Forest management in Priority Management Areas for wildfires prevention
- Cow grazing in a dehesa¹
- Timber harvesting and transformation into pellets for local thermal energy uses

How does it work?:

- Bringing technical and economic support to forests owners associations
- Favoring synergies between forest landowners and farmers
- Opening the forest to become a dehesa to be maintained as such by grazing animals.

Take home message:

Positive interaction between landowners, extensive land livestock farming, rejuvenating agriculture sector, promotion of forest products and close circular economy.

11:00 Stop 2 - Marganell

What to see:

- Cooperative butcher house

How does it work?:

- Helps shepherds and herders to process their meat themselves without having to go through a third party.

¹ Dehesa: is a multifunctional, agrosilvopastoral system (a type of agroforestry) and cultural landscape of southern and central Spain and southern Portugal; in Portugal, it is known as a montado. Its name comes from the Latin 'defensa' (fenced) referring to land that was fenced, and usually destined for pasture

- Supports capacity building of shepherds, herders and local butchers
- Organizes events to sell the products and shorten the value chain between producers and consumers.

Take home message:

Supporting shepherds' local initiatives and promoting cooperative work. Empowering producers by providing them with the possibility to sell their own product and negotiate the market price.

12.30 Stop 3 - Parc Rural del Montserrat

What to see:

- Mix of sheep and goat rearing
- Biomass harvesting
- Cheese factory and use of biomass for industrial energy production.

How does it work?:

- Multi actor collaboration: shepherds /herders / cheese makers / forest landowners association / restaurant owners.

Take home message:

Wildfires lead stakeholders to realize the benefits of working together and the importance of pastoralism for forest management. When adequately managed, most types of grazing livestock can give excellent wildfire prevention.