

Woodland Cultures in Time and Space

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Summary

The conference '*Woodland Cultures in Time and Space: tales from the past, messages for the future*' took place 3 - 7 September 2007, in Thessaloniki, Greece. The event provided a stimulating environment for academic debate and discussion. Its international character was well embodied by approximately 150 delegates and 24 countries in attendance. The theme and title were effectively interpreted by the diverse papers that covered broad historical and geographical areas and sufficiently demonstrated their relevance to future woodland management.

Context and key issues

Under the umbrella of the *IUFRO research unit 6.07.00 – Forest and Woodland History* the first conference on Forest History to be held in Greece took place on the 3 - 7 September 2007. The event was hosted in Thessaloniki, a city with long intellectual connections with forest research.¹ With over 150 delegates from 24 countries the occasion was highly international in scope and character. There was strong representation from North, Eastern and South Europe and participants from North and South America, Australia, India, Korea and Japan. The theme and title of the conference '*Woodland Cultures in Time and Space: tales from the past, messages for the future*' was effectively interpreted by the diverse papers presented at the event which not only covered broad historical and geographical areas but also demonstrated very effectively their relevance to future woodland management. The interdisciplinary nature of the conference was also strong with papers covering five broad areas: Conflicting Cultures in Forest management; Cultural Wooded Landscapes; Landscape Change and planning; Environmental History and Evolution of Forest Ecosystems; Woodlands as Places of Meaning. All different themes were adequately explored by excellent presentations.

The conference was opened with a keynote presentation by the director of the *IUFRO Research unit 6.07.00* Prof. Mauro Agnoletti who presented the '*Guidelines for the Implementation of Social and Cultural Values in Sustainable Forest Management (SFM)*'. This work has been submitted for discussion in the next work programme of the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE). Its basis is that cultural values related to forests and forestry are often based on long historical experience

¹ The overall responsibility for the organisation was undertaken by the *IUFRO research sub-unit 6.07.04 – Ecological History*. The event was executed in collaboration with the *Faculty of Forestry and Natural Environment, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki*, and the *General Directorate of Development and Protection of Forests and Natural Environment, Ministry of Rural Development and Food, Greece*, who coordinated effectively all local arrangements.

and embrace deep insights into the dynamics of forest ecosystems, and therefore, their consideration into management and conservation is often indispensable.

The rationale of the opening presentation was followed well during the wider proceedings of the event. There were many outstanding presentations that explored the role of traditional management practices in the creation and management of cultural landscapes. Examples included work presented by Matthias Bürgi et al. illustrating the importance of traditional knowledge in the management of Switzerland's forests, the account of Jiří Woitsch regarding the evolution of charcoal making in Bohemia; and the papers of several participants whose work reflected on different aspects of the management and cultural values of the traditional Satoyama landscape in Japan. On the theme of conflicting cultures notable presentations were those of Adrián Zarrilli illustrating the history of deforestation of the Argentinean forest resources during 1890 – 1950, and the account of Kuang-chi Hung that described vividly the complex history of attempts to apply German forestry techniques by Japanese authorities on Taiwan forests in the early twentieth century.

The poster sessions included 18 presentations amongst which we distinguish the poster by Anastasia Pantera et al., about the distribution and cultural relations of the *Valonia* oak forest in Greece, and the historical and cultural values of *The Bent Fir Tree* in Slovenia by Mateja Šmid. The field trip on Mount Paiko was educative and enjoyable for all participants. The diversity of the topography, the rich ecosystems and the evidence of past and current human intervention with the landscape were all explained effectively by Prof Ispikoudis during the tour.

The conference provided a stimulating environment for academic debate and discussion. The key conclusions were that there are several fields of conflicts, different functions and interpretations of wooded landscapes thus our understanding about the past and our targets for future conservation should be guided by cultural but also temporal dimensions. The event attracted the interest of the Greek Media and was covered by regional and national news papers and television. The proceedings of the conference will be published in 2008.

Pictures



Conference participants during the field trip to Mount Paiko
(Photo provided by Seçil Yurdakul Erol)



Prof. Charles Watkins interviewed by the Greek media on Mount Paiko
(Photo by Robert Fish)