



## *The Role of Culture in Sustaining Today's Forests*

### **Culture Shapes Forest Landscapes**

Long relationships between human and natural activities are reflected across a woodland landscape. The activities of people are influenced by their culture, which establishes how they deal with one another and their environments.

In Europe and other parts of the World, the forest and agricultural practices of people merge with the introduction of species to create mosaics of wooded landscapes. From these places, people have long sought economic, social, aesthetic, and spiritual values. Their approach to managing these forest environments reflects traditional forest-related knowledge and culturally based perceptions. The outcome is distinct and dynamic landscapes distinguishable by biological diversity, ecological function, aesthetic qualities, and the culture of local communities.

### **Importance of Cultural Values Recognized**

Increasingly scientists, forest managers, planners, and policy makers recognize that by incorporating cultural values into forest management decisions, local products can be better promoted, tourism development encouraged, a higher quality of life promoted for local populations, and diversity of cultural landscapes increased for current and future generations. For such incorporation, cultural values need to be part of many aspects of forest management and policy including the valuation of forests and concepts of sustainable forest management.

During the Fourth Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Vienna, 2003, a step was taken to include social and cultural values in sustainable forest management with the adoption of the Vienna Resolution 3. To further understand these values, the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) with other partners convened scientific conferences including in Sunne, Sweden, 2005, and in Florence, Italy, 2006.

### **Guidelines Drafted to Preserve Social and Cultural Dimensions**

As suggested in Sweden and Italy, a group of international experts was asked by IUFRO to help implement the Vienna Resolution 3 by developing guidelines to preserve and enhance social and cultural dimensions of sustainable forest management in Europe and considering additional Pan-European indicators for sustainable forest management. These guidelines have recently been drafted and include strategies for national forest programmes and rural development plans.

Some of the draft strategies for **national forest programmes** are accepted definition of cultural values, recognition of cultural values of forest as elements of national cultural heritage, and policies for cultural values protection. Draft strategies for **rural development** include diversifying local economies and improving competitiveness, improving the landscape and countryside, and improving the quality of life in rural areas. Actions are identified to ensure that opportunities for preserving and enhancing cultural values are understood and rooted in policies and decisions at the local level. Potential **Pan-European indicators** were also provided on social and cultural aspects of forests within three categories: significance, integrity, and vulnerability.

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