

## **Preface**

By way of contrast to the original concept of protected areas, dating back to the early twentieth century, according to which the functionality of these areas consisted in the preservation of nature in the purest possible state, free from any type of human intervention, the Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) and the 4th World Park and Protected Area Congress (Caracas, 1992), have contributed a new vision to the conservation scene. On the one hand, no area can be any longer conceived without man, who has created the characteristic landscapes defining the territory, and human activities have become vitally important to conservation policies. On the other hand, the international community is being faced with the need to integrate protected areas, terrestrial as well as marine, into conservation networks or systems, by means of the establishment of landscape linkages enabling the ecological and social sustainability of the territory.

Within the scope of the Mediterranean Basin the majority of protected territories have landscapes being very closely linked with centuries-old human activity. We are not referring to pristine areas, but to preserved ones. We are not talking about natural landscapes, but about cultural landscapes. Landscapes which have been the origin and, at the same time, are the result of a cultural evolution which has created and kept what we today deem to be “natural habitats”.

In such a context, the application of the traditional conservationist model to our protected areas has given rise to numerous social conflicts, specially with certain sectors: cattle - raisers, hunters..., who up to this moment in time, one century later, is becoming to be solved.

This very fact, together with the evolution of ecological theories and, mainly, to the acknowledgement of the dynamic equilibrium to which ecological systems are subject, have been the main catalysers of the conceptual change in the traditionally static vision of nature conservation. It is now acknowledged that in the context of global climatic changes, the exchanges between areas of ecological interest are decisive for the survival of the populations and indispensable for the re-colonization of degraded habitats, and that the integration of the human element into the protected areas is fundamental for the preservation of Mediterranean landscapes.

From this point of view, the Mediterranean protected areas are not, nor can they be, islands in the territory or in the landscape. They are inexorably associated with the uses of the territory, the ecological processes and the social, economic and cultural reality of the ecologically non-neuter matrix into which they are integrated.

This reality brings a new challenge to the scenario of the management aimed at the conservation: it is necessary to evolve, moving from the unitary management of each area towards the management of functional networks as being parts of an ecological and economic system. In this sense, the new management models which will become established in the short and medium term, must refer to networks or systems of interconnected protected areas and not to isolated natural protected areas, where a greater degree of connectivity of the protected areas in the territory can contribute to the conservation of the biological diversity and the natural resources, and improve the leisure and enjoyment opportunities as well as the social and cultural cohesion among local communities.

In this context, the publication which the reader is holding now intends to be a support document for the devising and the implementation of functional connectivity models in cultural landscapes. For that purpose, the authors analyse the conceptual bases and the initiatives undertaken at an international level in the devising of networks and systems of natural protected areas. From the standpoint of the Mediterranean singularity, the main opportunities and restrictions to achieve the ecological connectivity in the territory are dealt with and, accordingly, a series of guidelines are put forward for the design of efficacious conservation networks.

We hope that the findings and the recommendations included in this document can foster the debate on the need to promote the establishment of linkages in the landscape on order to achieve the ecological and social sustainability of the territory, and that they contribute to the devising of conservation strategies in keeping with Mediterranean reality.

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