**Introduction by the Scientific Commettee**

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*Plans (IMPs) for Mountain Forests"*
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# INTRODUCTION

by the Scientific Committee

## Why « integrated » management plans for mountain forests ?

Mountain forests provide many benefits to the society, and these are of increasing utility to the public.

They contribute to the protection of the soils, infrastructure and areas of habitation, at the same time directly providing the economic production of timber together with non timber products.

Though being indirect, importance of mountain forests for rural activities, especially grazing, and those linked to tourism and recreation, including hunting is quite considerable.

Besides that, their landscape, associated fauna and flora, and traditional uses, comprise an essential element of shared cultural heritage in the mountain.

The issues addressed by managing the mountain forests do not differ from those related to any other type of forest, but the fragility of the mountainous ecosystems, together with an increasing pressure for competing uses, usually make the problems more acute and urgent to be solved comparing to those in the case of lowlands.

### A need for changes in the framework for management plans

Over the course of the past two decades, the context of mountain forestry has changed greatly.

Economic competition and difficulties related to the local conditions have produced a notable degradation in the profitability of timber production, often leading to a slack management of some forests, with a real risk of increase of fragility.

In addition, there were increasing needs of consumers for recreation (for example the provision of ski slopes and also hiking activities in summertime). Historically formed common rights to the forest use have for a good part become obsolete with modernisation and structural change of agriculture, but partly there is new interest in agricultural forest uses through new EU funding (eg. of Alpine pasture).

Last but not least, recent mountain disasters, such as avalanches, have reminded of the importance of trees and forests in protecting the people.

Silvicultural methods practiced in the previous years (plantations of introduced species etc) often lead to the presently unstable forest condition.

All these needs, sometimes complementary, sometimes competing, are exerting strong influences on forest owners and managers, and are required to be dealt with urgently and rigorously.

In the meantime, the international debate on sustainable forest management, initiated by the Rio earth summit in 1992, and developed through various international declarations and agreements, including those of the Helsinki process, has led to the reconsidering of the concepts and procedures for both mountain forest policy and management. A special focus is brought to the local decisions, the involvement of stakeholders, and the linkage of public measures with the market aspects (on the example of certification). Forest programmes are encouraged at national and local levels.

As a result of this evolution of the needs, expectations and pressures, a different orientation of forest management is required in order to provide further sustainability of mountain forests. A more rigorous search of a better stability of the ecosystems (resistance, resilience) through adapted management techniques is required, together with a stronger involvement of actors in the management processes. This entails integrating economic, ecological and social considerations into management.

The usual separation of areas under protection from the areas intended for production is to be discussed and probably reconsidered to ensure better sustainability. In both private and public forests, a new style of management plans at different scales should focus on the promotion of the multifunctional use of forests, with consultation of all those involved in the forestry-related decisions.

A multi-beneficiaries approach is needed combining the managers' expectations with the ecological necessities and close attention to the mountain people.

## But what to be changed in the management plans?

Programmes may first be defined at various levels depending upon the issues to be treated, especially at the national and regional levels.

The level of the management unit itself, involving only one owner or manager (decider) is not the only one relevant in this perspective. The forest management planning may concern the local level as defined to address issues related to ecosystem and watershed management.

This scaling brings many stakeholders and actors into the process of formulation and implementation of such management plans. Each of them has proper views and interests, and the planning process needs to take into consideration these various positions, and transform them into a common consensual perspective. A conventional vision where there is only one decider is becoming completely obsolete. But how to integrate the people's opinions on different aspects and the technical prescriptions? It is evident that the social aspects are gaining more and more importance in the new management plans and programmes.

If there appears to be a need for changes in the objectives, contents and even finalities of management plans, some key questions may be asked:

What should be concretely changed, and why and how, especially concerning the objectives of management, the modalities of management, the means and measures and the impact, or the methods and concepts?

Is this change to be conceptualised, or should it be defined only through an empirical way, case by case depending on the local context only?

More probably, what changes should be brought in the methods and approaches for management planning at the local level, in order to make the adaptation to the context easier, and a case by case solution possible?

As a preliminary step in resolving these questions, an in depth evaluation on the way the present management plans are being implemented is needed, in order to bring useful changes whilst conserving the strong elements of the actual situation.

This preliminary phase is needed in order to pass from a conventional planning (based on the knowledge of what exist in order to define then what is possible to be done) to a new logical framework (focusing first on what is wanted before constructing how to achieve the related goals).

## Expertise *versus* negotiation: is it possible to find a balance?

The conventional forest management plans are based only on expertise from specialists.

Is it still the case at a broader level than the management unit?

In theory, integration of various objectives and means may be realised through a rationalist process by additive methods or, more rigorously, through optimisation of various variables. Are the experts equipped with all the techniques for acting this way? Is it always possible to formalise in a normative way the aspects to be taken into consideration in order to reach the optimal solution(s)? What can be optimised in a rather "objective" way, and what cannot?

More concretely, can a technical document, written by foresters on their own, be legitimated by all concerned parties, without any discussion or negotiation of some objectives and means?

How can the participation of the direct and indirect stakeholders bring more knowledge into the process of formulation of a common programme? How to act in the case of abstention to participation?

A communicative process is usually considered as needed for defining programmes at a broader level than the management unit. The decisions to be taken at this level have to be derived from a negotiation procedure of all topics where various actors are engaged.

At the opposite, some elements are known only from expertise.

As examples of these, the bio-diversity principles and the benefits procured by mountain forest as externalities or amenities (especially in relation with the environmental services) are usually not taken into consideration by direct users involved in a participatory process. Participation alone cannot resolve this question, without any assistance from the specialists. Thus, a needed expertise should at least provide with norms, principles and framework conditions, and give the technical elements of the tools to be implemented.

But expertise may also be useful to guide negotiation avoiding from hidden agendas, and may finally be needed in case no consensus is reached through communica-

tive methods. One major challenge is the necessary disconnection between expertise and power.

Is there any other expertise (especially related to ecological or socio-economic topics) also needed, in addition to the traditional technical and juridical ones provided by the forest services? What could be the points of common interest between the forestry scientists and managers?

In case both approaches are useful, how can the part of each of them be defined in the process of decision making?

## Integration: what to integrate and how?

The key word in formulating and implementing a new style of management plans at local level is certainly "integration".

Integration is not a scientific concern, but is referred to the way of how various utilities may be reached through concrete management practices.

The conceptualisation of integration leads to some basic questions to be asked by both theoretical and empirical studies which need to be carried out concomitantly.

Can all the utilities be integrated? Are there some limits in the integration process? How to achieve the differentiation in the integration of goals, interests, values and perspectives of all societal groups? How to link together scientific/expert (from a broad spectrum of both social and natural disciplines) and indigenous/local/practical knowledge (with a large number of actors)?

At which scale of space and time may the integration work? Are there different types of integration, depending upon the utilities, the interests and the actions? How to reach the integration at the policy level and the local level?

Is it possible to realise the integration, starting from the forest? An integrated forest management is to be considered in relation with broader issues such as environmental considerations and rural development.

And how to promote a necessary integration, when the legal framework is opposed to this?

Such questions cannot be answered only by theories, as it is obvious that the situations, and also the concrete issues to be addressed, may change completely from a place to another one, depending upon both ecological and socio-economic conditions.

A progress in resolving the problems met will mainly proceed from a close cooperation between scientists (discussing conceptual frameworks, and identifying and explaining common issues), and practitioners (presenting their experiences and evaluating the way how to adapt day-to-day action to general considerations).

It will also come from the comparison between different situations, including those in the countries under a permanent transition, where they are forced to be a little bit faster with the introduction of new theories.

This was the main goal of this research course, organised by the European Observatory of Mountain Forests (EOMF) and the University of Torino, to meet the best specialists from various countries in order to initiate a rigorous dialogue on what to do in order to promote the development of these "integrated forest management plans", especially in the case of the mountainous regions.

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