

The culture of the forest

Piermaria Corona^{1*}

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ABSTRACT Forests represent the largest green infrastructure worldwide, and their protection and enhancement are a responsibility of the whole society, being a common good, linked to history and culture. The future of our planet depends on how we perceive, protect, and manage this heritage. Forests are saved if they are at the center of society's interest. Cultural awareness of the intrinsic value of forests is needed. We must recognize a new dimension of the forest, the cultural dimension, i.e. the culture of the forest as the basis for the alliance between man and nature.

KEYWORDS: Forest management, ecology, economy, ethics.

Forests represent the largest green infrastructure worldwide, and their protection and enhancement are a responsibility of the whole society, being a common good, linked to history and culture, as well as one of the main environmental pillars for the prevention of hydrogeological risk, the fight against climate change, the conservation of biodiversity and water purification and regulation. The future of our planet depends on how we perceive, protect and manage this heritage (Corona 2019), which is also a fundamental renewable natural resource for the social well-being and economic development of many territories.

Forests cover one-third of the global land area. Approximately half the forest area is relatively intact, and more than one-third is primary forest. Deforestation and forest degradation have decreased substantially since the last decade of the last century, but they continue to take place at alarming rates resulting in significant loss of biodiversity (FAO-UNEP 2020).

All people depend upon forests and their biodiversity, some more than others, and forests are an essential component of the areas specifically designated for nature conservation purposes. On the other hand, forests provide more than 86 million green jobs worldwide and support the livelihoods of many more people (FAO-UNEP 2020).

Feeding humanity and conserving and sustainably using ecosystems are complementary and closely interdependent goals. Ensuring positive outcomes for both biodiversity and people requires a careful balance between conservation goals and demands for resources that support livelihoods. Suitable constraints and incentives by the law, community involvement, sound management planning and the adoption of accurate silvicultural practices are the foundation of such a perspective.

The growing interest in goods capable of satisfying responsible consumption with strong links with the territory, if guided by appropriate policy, programming and planning, can support supply chains with low environmental impact, with particular reference to the demand for wood as a renewable natural material for the needs of sustainable building and living, non-wood products and woody biomass for energy.

Solutions that balance conservation and sustainable use of forest biodiversity are critical – and possible – if forest value is recognized in all its complexity. This requires knowledge and, especially, the adoption of a management vision which considers forests as a natural and cultural capital.

In the last years a culture of development based on the “three Es”, Ecology, Economy, Ethics, has been gaining momentum (Nocentini et al. 2021). By overcoming the output-oriented view of the forest there is an opportunity for increasing coherence between society's expectations and forests, favoring the conservation of forest ecosystems as complex ecosystems, rich in values that are not only economic but also environmental, cultural, and social.

Forests are saved if they are at the center of society's interest (Nocentini et al. 2017). Cultural awareness of the intrinsic value of forests is needed (Ciancio 1997). In other words, we must recognize a new dimension of the forest, the cultural dimension, i.e., the culture of the forest as the basis for the alliance between man and nature.

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¹ – CREA - Research Centre for Forestry and Wood - Italy

*Corresponding author: piermaria.corona@crea.gov.it