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“Coppice forests: past, present and future”

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Preface:

“Is there a place for coppicing as a silvicultural system in the 21st century?”

Coppice forest management is an ancient silvicultural system that was practiced in Europe as early as neolithic times, and was described in both early Roman and medieval literature, as well as German records going back 5000 years. This silvicultural system was very common in the past but suffered a decline in the 19th and 20th century, at least in the more developed countries, due to the widespread use of fossil fuels, and a general perception among professional foresters that coppicing often results in lower quality timber production. In several European jurisdictions (*e.g.*, Germany and Italy), such views within the forestry profession have promoted laws and regulations against converting high forest into coppice forests. However, a renewed interest in coppicing has been observed in the last 10-15 years in Europe. New evidence indicates that coppiced stands have important roles in biodiversity conservation, maintenance of habitat (*e.g.*, NATURA 2000 in Europe), restoration of difficult-to-manage sites, wood and bioenergy production, and other products and ecological services. Furthermore, in many agricultural areas, beech and oak coppice forests were important sources of forage and bedding for domestic animals. Coppice systems could also provide an effective and sustainable way to tackle the impacts of climate change and drought stress on forest stands, especially in Mediterranean and semi-arid regions.

This special issue considers a selected set of papers based on oral presentations presented at the IUFRO International Conference “Coppice forests: past, present and future” held in Brno, 9-11 April 2015. Authors from 23 countries presented 51 original lectures focusing on themes such as forest ecology, ecophysiology, production ecology, silviculture, inventory and planning, monitoring, harvesting, landscape ecology and the historical heritage of coppice systems. We present 12 papers focused mainly on the silviculture and ecophysiology of coppice forests. A second group of 8 selected papers focused on the vegetation ecology and history of coppice forests are presented in a special issue of *Folia Geobotanica – A Journal of Plant Ecology and Systematics* (<http://link.springer.com/journal/12224>).

Issues and concerns with coppice forestry is an important topic of current European forestry policy discussions in the age of climate change and continues to be addressed in the two following projects:

- (1) The LIFE project “Shaping future forestry for sustainable coppices in southern Europe: the legacy of past management trials” - FutureForCoppiceS (LIFE14 ENV/IT/000514) is aimed at enhancing the sustainable management of coppice forests. In spite of the widespread use of coppice forestry in southern European countries, coppice forests are rarely considered in discussions about

sustainable forest management. This project, coordinated by CREA – Forestry Research Centre, pursues the aim of demonstrating how different management options have enhanced/limited both sustainability and efficiency of coppice forests. To learn more, please visit the website <http://www.futureforcoppices.eu/>.

- (2) COST Action FP1301 project “Innovative management and multifunctional utilization of traditional coppice forests – an answer to future ecological, economic and social challenges in the european forestry sector” (EuroCoppice). This Action project aims to bring together European scientists, experts and young scholars to exchange knowledge about coppice forestry and to start developing innovative management and utilization concepts/techniques for future modern multifunctional coppice management systems. To learn more, please visit the action website <https://www.eurocoppice.uni-freiburg.de/>.

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iForest Guest Editors of “Coppice” special issue