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► **To cite this version:**

R. Castellini. The Model Forest : a new tool for governance -. Forêt Méditerranéenne, 2011, XXXII (4), pp.487-490. hal-03556124

HAL Id: hal-03556124

<https://hal.science/hal-03556124v1>

Submitted on 3 Feb 2022

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The Model Forest: a new tool for governance

by Riccardo CASTELLINI

Created in Canada, in the early 1990s, Model Forests are voluntary associative initiatives linking forestry, research, agriculture, recreation and other values and interests in a landscape. Today, the Model Forest program comprises one International and one, more specific, Mediterranean Network. Both are voluntary associations of partners working toward a common goal: the sustainable management of forest-based landscapes and natural resources.

In the early 1990s, one of Canada's responses to the challenge of integrating the principles of sustainable development into forestry — a practice now known as sustainable forest management — was the creation of the Model Forest Program. The aim of the program was to bring diverse organizations and people together to develop innovative local, landscape-scale approaches to integrating forest management policy, with on-the-ground implementation supported by sound science.

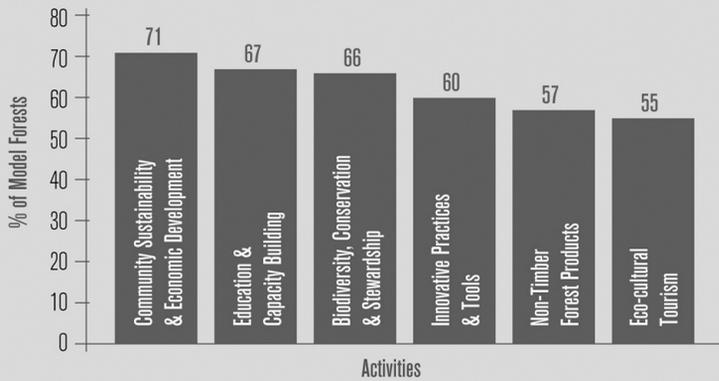
In creating a Model Forest, individuals and groups supporting a wide range of forest values agree to collaborate to devise and demonstrate ways to manage forest-based landscapes and natural resources, using approaches that are both locally acceptable and nationally relevant.

A Model Forest is a voluntary association of people that live in a particular territory, and are interested in discovering, defining, enhancing and guarantying its sustainability; and in sharing their experiences and their knowledge to contribute to global environmental goals.

In a Model Forest different people form a partnership to achieve the following goal: manage their own natural resources in the most logical way for them, considering their history, their economic situation and their identity.

The partnership defines the meaning of the term “sustainability” in its own context, sets a common purpose, establishes a governance structure and provides a strategic plan: members work together to achieve the objectives set out in the plan.

Distribution of Most Frequently Occurring Model Forest Activities (2010)



Sharing ideas and knowledge, incorporating multiple values into management, and enhancing local capacities for engaging in sustainable management practices are all fundamental principles of Model Forests. Through research, tools and approaches to sustainable landscape management are also developed and transferred to practitioners.

Governance of a Model Forest is based on consensus, allowing for participants to have a say in the issues to be addressed and activities undertaken. The governance structure is highly flexible and is designed to reflect the cultural, social, political and economic realities of the area within which a Model Forest operates.

Model Forest objectives focus on education, research, protection of biodiversity and the development of local needs. In addition, the

Model Forest partnerships are particularly effective in the search for economic opportunities. From this perspective, a Model Forest is more a process than a long-term project.

Geographically, the Model Forest should represent the diversity of uses and values of a large landscape.

Model Forests set their own priorities for the conservation of biodiversity, cultural awareness, economic diversification and public education.

From an initial 10 Model Forests in Canada in 1992, the IMFN has grown to include more than 55 sites in over 24 countries on five continents, with thousands of partner organizations – and the numbers continue to grow.

Together, all of the Model Forests and their regional networks make up the IMFN, a global community of practice whose flexible shared framework facilitates the exchange of lessons learned across the regions and with other organizations.

For nearly 20 years now, forest-dependent stakeholders around the world have been voluntarily translating sustainable natural resource management priorities and policies into action on the ground through the Model Forest approach.

Model Forests around the world are as unique and diverse as the countries and cultures they belong to. While each Model Forest sets its own programming priorities and governance structure, on a global scale Model Forests are linked through a common philosophy. All Model Forests share a core set of six principles that give the IMFN coherence and provide the basis for networking and knowledge sharing:

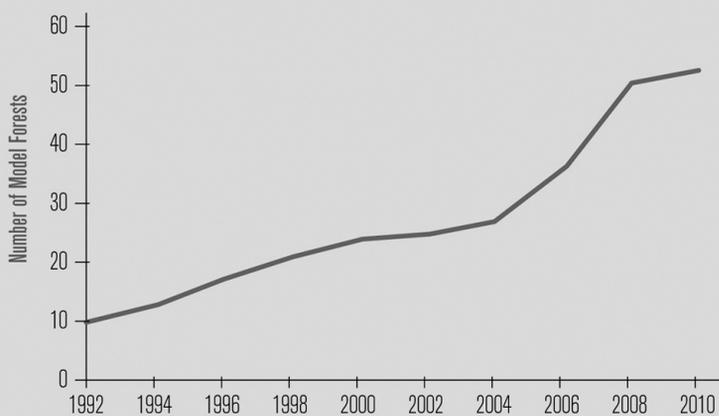
1. *Broad-based partnership*: each Model Forest is a neutral forum that welcomes voluntary participation of representatives of stakeholder interests and values on the landscape.

2. *Large landscape*: each Model Forest is a large biophysical area representing a broad range of forest values, including social, cultural, economic and environmental concerns.

3. *Commitment to sustainability*: stakeholders are committed to the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources and the forested landscape.

4. *Good governance*: the Model Forest management process is representative, participatory, transparent and accountable, and

IMFN Growth (1992–2010)



promotes collaborative work among stakeholders.

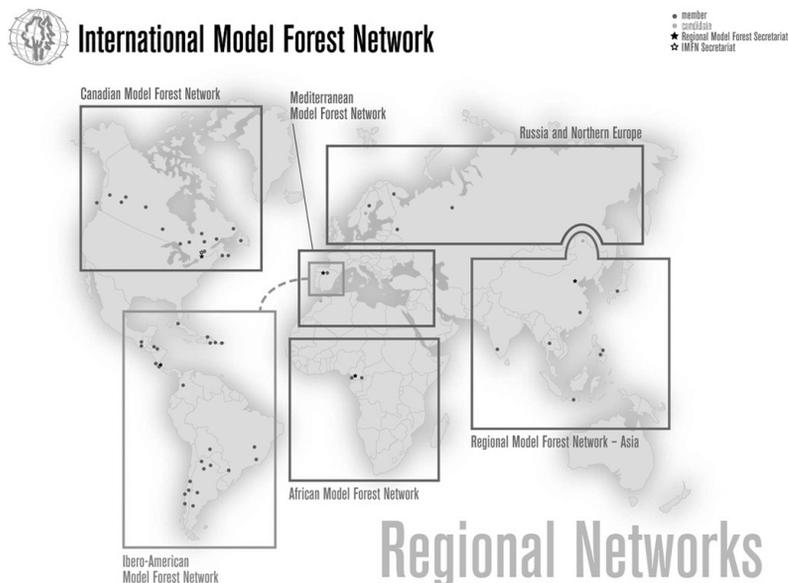
5. *Broad program of activities*: activities undertaken by a Model Forest reflect the Model Forests' vision and stakeholder needs, values and management challenges.

6. *Commitment to knowledge sharing, capacity building and networking*: a Model Forest builds stakeholder capacity to engage in the sustainable management of natural resources, collaborate, and share results and lessons learned through networking.

The International and the Mediterranean Model Forest Network (IMFN and MMFN) are voluntary associations of partners working toward a common goal: the sustainable management of forest-based landscapes and natural resources.

In the Mediterranean Model Forest Network we study the particularities of the Mediterranean region. We develop common objectives, we generate dynamic work environments, and we establish patterns of collaboration between members. We promote the exchange of knowledge, cooperate in common interest areas, and collectively develop innovative capacities.

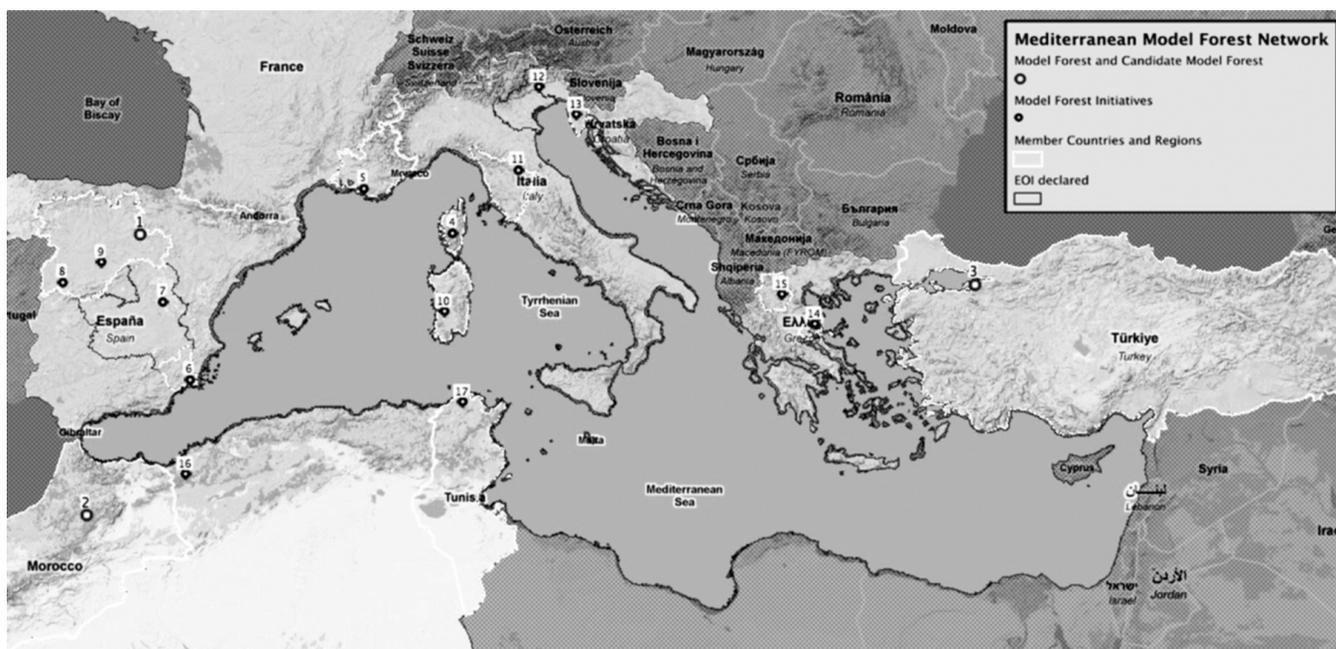
The Network and its Model Forest cooperate in the development of their activity programs. They are in permanent communication to avoid environmental conflicts and they aim to promote global sustainable development opportunities, in the frame-



work of international commitments and agreements.

Our objectives are to promote the Model Forest concept, to promote and support the development of Model Forest in the Mediterranean region and to take advantage of the opportunities that networking provides, to share knowledge, to promote innovative initiatives and to join efforts to work in the development of a more sustainable world.

Our goals are to ensure that each Model Forest fully represents the environmental, social and economic characteristics of each



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territory or landscape on which it is developed, to ensure a balance between the concepts of territorial sustainability and global scale sustainability and to promote teamwork, cultural and knowledge exchange and the development of new ways of learning and collaboration among Network members.

We integrate the specificities of each territory without losing the overall focus that is reflected by the Principles and Attributes of the International Model Forest Network. Networking contributes to Model Forests being able to share knowledge that in turn helps to achieve global environmental objectives.

The members of the Mediterranean Model Forest Network are the regions in the European Union and candidate countries and, in other countries, national government bodies having competencies over forest-based development, and the Model Forests in the Mediterranean region.

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Summary

Model Forests are voluntary associative initiatives linking forestry, research, agriculture, recreation and other values and interests in a landscape. They are based on an innovative approach that combines the social, cultural and economic local and long-term sustainability of vast landscapes in which forests are an important part.

In a Model Forest different people form a partnership to achieve the following goal: manage their own natural resources in the most logical way for them, considering their history, their economic situation and their identity.

The partnership defines the meaning of the term "sustainability" in its own context, sets a common purpose, establishes a governance structure and provides a strategic plan: members work together to achieve the objectives set out in the plan.

Model Forest objectives focus on education, research, protection of biodiversity and the development of local needs. In addition, the Model Forest partnerships are particularly effective in the search for economic opportunities. From this perspective, a Model Forest is more a process than a long-term project.

Geographically, the Model Forest should represent the diversity of uses and values of a large landscape. Model Forests set their own priorities for the conservation of biodiversity, cultural awareness, economic diversification and public education.

The International and the Mediterranean Model Forest Network (IMFN and MMFN) are voluntary associations of partners working toward a common goal: the sustainable management of forest-based landscapes and natural resources.