

PREFACE

In the Society for Ecological Restoration International Island Press book series on ecological restoration, this book is the second to focus on cultural ecosystems but the first to consider cultural landscapes as such. Unlike *Old Fields: Dynamics and Restoration of Abandoned Farmland* (Cramer and Hobbs, editors), we focus on a particular geographic region: the western Mediterranean. As our title indicates, our subject includes restoration, amelioration, and long-term management of landscapes whose common feature is the extraordinary cork oak tree. This shared feature gives continuity and coherence to the book, but a surprisingly large range of contexts and issues will be covered, which should be of interest to a wide readership within and outside the Mediterranean region. The ancient landscapes and land use systems we present here are richly imbued with traditional and local ecological knowledge and the biophysical consequences of past human activities. In an increasingly homogeneous and globalized world, economically speaking, these landscapes and the socioeconomic systems built around cork oak seem exceptionally pertinent to study and ponder for all those searching for sustainable, equitable, and inspiring approaches to land management in rural areas with a strong cultural and natural heritage.

Genesis and Goals

Scientific research on cork oak and the ecosystems where it thrives is patchy. Results are scattered and usually limited to a single discipline, such as genetics, silviculture, or the physical properties of cork, and the few broad, interregional, multidisciplinary treatments are out of date. The present book is the

result of a 4-year European Commission–funded research program (Conservation and Restoration of European Cork Oak Woodlands [CREOAK], QLKS-CT-2002-01594) that ran from 2002 to 2006. Consortium members included researchers and engineers from Portugal, Spain, France, Algeria, Morocco, and Bulgaria, experts in a wide range of fields, including ecology, economics, genetics, ecophysiology, and silviculture. In addition, foresters, scholars, land managers, and landowners from Iberia, North Africa, Italy, and Germany were asked to consult and review the group’s research activities, and several of them have contributed to this book.

The general objective of CREOAK was to tackle scientific and management obstacles impeding the restoration, natural regeneration, and integrated management of cork oak woodlands and planting in new and appropriate areas of southern Europe. This is a book about ecosystems in cultural landscapes that evolved with history and economy, but it does not dwell solely on the delivery of ecosystem goods or services. The uniqueness of the consortium resides in its holistic, interdisciplinary approach, including disciplines ranging from molecular genetics, microbial ecology, and tree ecophysiology to forestry, economics, landscape ecology, conservation science, and cultural history.

As part of the CREOAK project, we have compiled a large bibliographic database on cork oak, cork oak woodlands, and cork, containing more than 1,100 items. We have also produced a precise, up-to-date digital map of cork oak distribution throughout the tree’s natural distribution area. They are available on the Island Press Web site (www.islandpress.org/).

The present book provides a synthesis of the most up-to-date, practical information for anyone interested in the management of cork oak, and it is the first overview ever produced of the ecology, biogeography, and genetics of cork oak; socioeconomic settings and prospects; and restoration and active management strategies for natural cork oak woodlands and especially for the derived cultural systems. The book includes a large body of previously unpublished scientific information, with the goal of offering a timely synthesis, and novel elements to guide research programs and policy decisions concerning conservation, restoration, and sustainable landscape management.

The book is intended for a broad audience concerned with the future of cultural landscapes and low–energy input land use systems, be they for commercial, environmental, or social objectives. The book is also an example of a multidisciplinary and holistic way to study an ecosystem and manage, conserve, and restore it. We hope it can serve as guide for future studies of this kind in other socioecological systems.

Acknowledgments

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We dedicate this book to all the Mediterranean peoples and to the region itself, for the example it continues to provide that multicultural tolerance, conviviality, and cross-fertilization between cultures are possible and that cohabitation or reconciliation is possible between nonhuman and human processes, resulting in biodiversity, beauty, and productivity. Let us work together for a sustainable and desirable future.

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 October 2008