

ELISABETH JOHANN, JÜRGEN KUSMIN, JIŘÍ WOITSCH (Eds.):
European Forests. Our Cultural Heritage
*Pelhřimov – Prague: Nová tiskárna Pelhřimov & Institute of Ethnology
of the Czech Academy of Sciences, 2021, 276 p.*

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Environmental protection and sustainable forest management are topics that are currently receiving considerable attention from an increasing number of experts in various fields of study. In particular, natural science experts such as foresters, dendrologists, botanists, biologists, ecologists and environmentalists are focusing on this topic. However, this increasingly includes experts from the social sciences and the humanities, who study the social, historical and cultural values of forests as reflected in people's knowledge and understanding of forests. They focus on exploring human interactions with the natural environment and resources, as well as the impacts of the natural environment on the people which live in them. Therefore, social scientists and humanities scholars have also begun to play an important role in exploring and identifying values that need to be considered in forest management.

According to the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003), it is important to preserve cultural and natural diversity, which for researchers also means studying knowledge about cultural landscapes and the use of natural resources. Preserving knowledge about skills, crafts and other knowledge about nature can contribute to creating the potential for sustainable and effective protection of the environment and the daily lives of people living around that environment. This cultural and natural diversity includes forests as part of Europe's bio-cultural heritage.

The thematisation of this topic in international social discourse has also led to the emergence, in the early 21st century, of efforts to manage forests in a way that identifies and later incorporates the social and cultural values of forests into the planning of policies for their permanent and sustainable management. An important event in this regard was the adoption of the Vienna Resolution 3 in 2003 in Vienna (FOREST EUROPE, 2003), from which terms such as forest heritage or cultural forests, which are part of bio-cultural heritage and include social and cultural values for sustainable forest management in Europe, started to be more widely discussed in the scientific discourse (Agnoletti, Piras, Venturi, Santoro, 2022).

The International Year of Forests in 2011 was also an important occasion to highlight the socio-cultural meanings of forests in societies around the world and the importance of preserving them for future generations (Johann, Kusmin, Woitsch, *Eds.*, 2021: 7–8), and many other conferences and initiatives have also been held over the years that have contributed to the international societal debate on environmental protection in the context of the sustainable management of Europe's forests.

The proceedings entitled *European Forests. Our Cultural Heritage* (Johann, Kusmin, Woitsch, *Eds.*, 2021) is based on a collection of studies from the international conference European Forest – Our Cultural Heritage, which took place on 4–7 December 2018 in St. Georgen am Längsee, Austria. This conference was organized by the Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences and the non-profit organization International Union of

Forest Research Organizations IUFRO (Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, 2021). A total of 37 participants from 16 European countries, such as England, Estonia, Finland, Austria, Slovenia, Poland, Romania, Italy and Spain, took part in the conference. The contributions came from different scientific fields of natural sciences, humanities and social sciences, contributing to the interdisciplinary diversity of experts' perspectives on the topic of bio-cultural heritage in Europe (IUFRO, 2019). The editors of the resulting proceedings, inspired by this conference, are Elisabeth Johann, Jürgen Kusmin and Jiří Woitsch.

The main objective of this conference, which led to the creation of this proceedings, was to thematise the social and economic significance of cultural heritage in Europe, which encompasses cultural resources of tangible and intangible heritage, which also includes knowledge of nature and natural resources, specifically forests, which are part of the bio-cultural heritage in Europe. This theme required a professional interdisciplinary overlap, in which experts and scientists from the natural sciences, such as biologists, botanists, dendrochronologists, landscape ecologists or forest engineers, in collaboration with experts from the social sciences and humanities, such as ethnologists, archaeologists or experts in environmental policy and social history, and others.

The proceedings consists of fourteen studies from a variety of interdisciplinary experts, offering a wide range of interesting contributions from different perspectives on how to reflect on the social, historical and cultural values of forests in Europe, which are part of the cultural or bio-cultural heritage. In a study entitled *Forest & Wood as Historic Archives of People, Place & Past*, author Ian D. Rotherham discusses the theme of eco-cultural landscapes that reflect the relationship between people and natural resources in the natural environment in which they live, based on archaeological finds or the collection of traditional knowledge about forests. It reflects forests and woods as living historical archives of human activity over the centuries, revealing long-standing processes of forest management that have gradually disappeared as a result of the changes brought about by the industrialisation of forestry and the abandonment of the landscape by people.

Historical insights into past human-landscape linkages are also provided by a study *Forest management activity in prehistoric Hallstatt, Austria* by the team of authors Michael Grabner, Elisabeth Wächter, Konrad Mayer et. al. It presents archaeological findings of organic materials in which wooden elements were preserved on the basis of prehistoric salt from a mine in Hallstatt, Austria, through which knowledge of prehistoric forest management was gained. A similar topic, but from a different scientific perspective, is also addressed in the paper *Dendro-provenancing: New Insights for Wooden Cultural Heritage* by Sandra Karanitsch-Ackerl, Elisabeth Wächter, Konrad Mayer et. al., who write about dendrochronological research on roofs and building structures in Vienna. A historical perspective is also provided by a study by Maria Soler-Sala, Marta Sancho i Planas and Rosa Lluch-Bramon entitled *The Mediterranean Forest as a Resource in the Eleventh-Fourteenth Centuries: Mapping Medieval Catalan Forests*. The study analyses data from textual, archaeological, geographical, iconographic and ethnological sources that capture the role of forests in medieval Catalonia in terms of the exploitation of natural resources. The study *Human-forest relationship in Finland* by Tuulikki Halla, Reetta Karhunkorva, Jaana Laine et al. reflects not only the past but also the present relationship and attitude of people towards the forest in Finland.

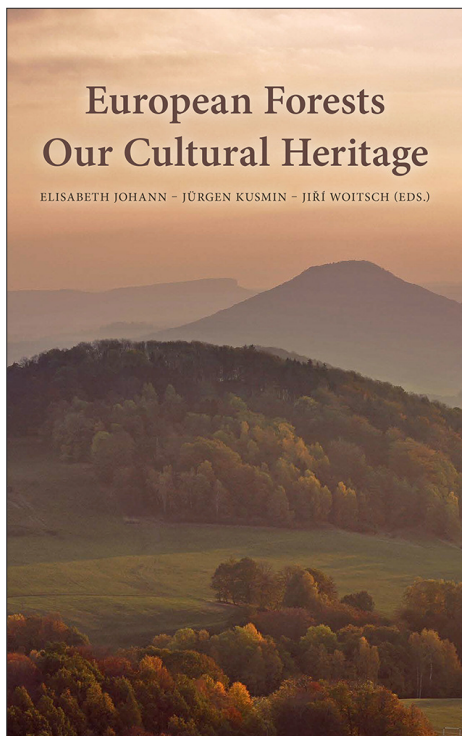
Among the papers related to expressing the need for identification and subsequent appropriate safeguarding of bio-cultural heritage and heritage objects in the landscape was a study from Slovenia *Close-To-Nature Forest Structure in the Vicinity of the Žiže Charterhouse*

as an Indispensable Pattern Criterion of a Heritage Landscape by authors Janez Pirnat and Milan Kobal. They also included Jürgen Kusmin and Triin Kusmin with their paper *Mapping and Preserving Cultural Heritage in Estonia: Best Practices in Presenting Cultural Heritage Sites in Estonia's State Forest*, in which they write about the value of objects of cultural heritage, located in the territory of forests in Estonia, which are currently not nationally protected and about the possibility of their protection and preservation. Elisabeth Johann's chapter *Forgotten Heritage* also discusses the links between sustainable forest management and safe-guarding of cultural heritage in Austria, focusing on the identification of traditional crafts and knowledge about forests and reflecting on which of these are still relevant today.

Forestry from the perspective of forest policy is reflected in the studies *Afforestation: UK Forestry Policy in Response to Changing Resource Needs* by Susanne Raum, *The Politics of Trees: the Logging of Białowieża Forest and the Debate Over Poland's Political Identity* by Tatyana Bakhmetyeva and the study *Common Forest Ownership in Austria* by Peter Herbst. In these papers, the authors describe the political and legislative limits in the forest management process. They examine the historical context related to forest management and also discuss the implications of past forest policies on the current state of the forest in the context of the application of legislative norms and regulations related to forest management in the present.

From the perspective of art is an interesting contribution from authors Nina Luostarinen, and Minna Hautio *Put Yourself in the Picture: Art Interpretation as a Tool for Forging Deeper Connections to the Forest*, which describe an experiment conducted in 2014 in Finland, where research participants were tasked with creating visual reinterpretations of certain works of art in the natural environment. An artistic dimension is also introduced by the study *Historical wood craft techniques and documentary film: A way to safeguard knowledge* by Sebastian Nemestothy, Michael Grabner, Rosa von Suess et. al., who describe a documentary film depicting the selection and storage of wood and woodworking techniques in recent centuries, which have been preserved mainly through oral tradition. From an artistic-literary point of view, the relationship between humans and the forest is also described by Dorin-Ion Rus in *Animals and Forests in Transylvania Fairy Tales*.

The aim of the authors of the proceedings *European Forests. Our Cultural Heritage* was to raise awareness of the bio-cultural heritage of Europe's forests, in terms of their cultural and social importance, and to contribute to the professional and public debate on how to achieve environmental protection and sustainable forest management in Europe in the most effective and sustainable way, also with a view to future generations. With their interdisciplinary and wide-ranging dimension, the authors of the studies in the proceedings have shown different



approaches to collecting data or exploring knowledge that has significant potential in the future and can help to put many beneficial activities into practice.

Personally, I consider this proceedings to be a very valuable publication, which thematises the issue of biocultural heritage in Europe and thus makes a significant contribution to both the scientific and the public debate on the social, historical and cultural values of forests in Europe. It offers broadly interdisciplinary contributions that provide insights into how the relationship between humans and nature can also be explored by identifying and reflecting on the biocultural values of landscapes and forests from different perspectives. Based on the content of their studies, the authors of the studies in the proceedings have shown the importance and the need for cooperation between the natural sciences and the socio-humanities, which are able to use different applied research methods not only to gather people's knowledge and understanding of forests and forestry, but also to analyse and discuss it with each other in collaboration with other experts, which could bring about many significant and positive changes, not only to facilitate the development of public policies in the localities concerned, but also to the daily lives of people living around European forest areas.

KATARÍNA BARAČKOVÁ,

Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology of SAS in Bratislava

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