



VALOR Study Visits & their European dimension

VALOR project co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme (2019-2022), aims to structure a multifunctional framework leading to resilience and sustainability in agriculture. The VALOR Alliance is formed by nine participants and a large number of associated partners from seven European countries Italy, Greece, Germany, Romania, Spain, Turkey and Cyprus. The project partners include higher education institutions, enterprises, authorities of European Parks, relevant stakeholders from regional and national authorities and umbrella organisations. The Alliance joins efforts and complementary expertise to the scope of contributing to the improvement of skills in order to to confront successfully the specific requirements of resilient and sustainable farming in Europe. The VALOR Alliance organised 5 staff/researcher study visits in Greece, Italy, Romania, Spain, and Germany that gathered more than 200 representatives of communities of educators, researchers and stakeholders, policy makers and authorities from different disciplines and economic sectors (public/private) from Italy, Greece, Germany, Romania, Spain, Turkey and Cyprus. The events allowed dialogues, close and sustainable exchanges of information and knowledge, as well as best practices and challenges in resilient and sustainable farming, demonstratively applied in protected areas of the Parks allied within VALOR. The five Study Visits were useful for the development of the learning modules for the course for technicians and managers at European level. Furthermore, they implied collaborative work in an international setting to promote mutual development and cross sectoral cooperation to build bridges and share knowledge among the different education and training sectors participating to VALOR. The Study Visits allowed partners' staff to promote and spread the benefits of this experience internally, within their organisations, thus fostering the full understanding of the European dimension of the matters concerned.

Olympus National Park Management Agency (GREECE)

The Study Visit is entitled 'Sustainable agriculture practices in the shadow of mountain Olympus, the house of gods', organized by ONPMA took place on 28 - 30 July 2021. This workshop was attended by a daily average of 49 participants from Italy, Greece, Germany, Romania, Spain, Turkey and Cyprus.

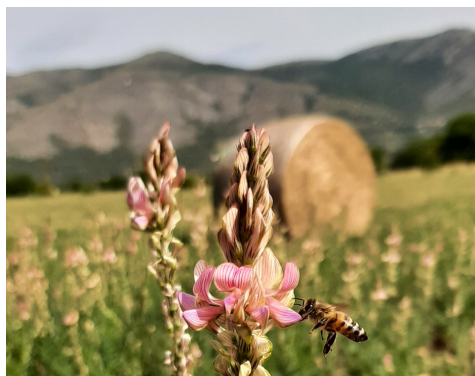
The workshop was based on the development of a local, national and regional information and knowledge sharing network on structuring a multifunctional framework leading to resilience and sustainability in agriculture. Towards this direction the Study Visit contributed with expertise and experience exchange aimed to transfer and capitalize new ideas and knowledge into best practices, through the involvement of all stakeholders (public institutions, research institutes, NGOs, etc.). Moreover, representatives from different sectors (farmers, scientists, policy makers, key stakeholders and environmental experts) had the opportunity to share their knowledge and opinions on challenges and requirements of resilient and sustainable farming. During the three intensive days, experts shared their knowledge on aspects of ancient and sustainable agriculture. The workshop offered to participants the opportunity to interact, discuss and learn different aspects related to sustainable agriculture. Also, they shared novel information regarding ancient farming, biosecurity issues, alternative forms of tourism, greenhouse horticulture, mountain livestock farming, agricultural practices for improving crop production and soil fertility, innovative solutions for the small ruminant sector and certification schemes of products and services. An important achievement was the fact that stakeholders want to be part of the project and to contribute to its success.





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National Park of Gran Sasso and Laga Mountains (ITALY)

On 12-14 July 2021, the 2nd Study Visit took place in the National Park of Gran Sasso and Laga Mountains, in Assergi (AQ) within the Erasmus+ Valor project. The foreign delegation represented by about 45 participants from the project partners from Germany, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Romania and Cyprus was welcomed by the President Avv. Tommaso Navarra and the Director Ing. Alfonso Calzolaio.

During the first day of work, the Park's technicians illustrated the peculiarities of the protected area from a naturalistic and environmental point of view. The main characteristics of the Italian national protected areas in terms of institutional commitment to the protection of biodiversity were then highlighted. The Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga National Park also stands out for its decades-long commitment and sensitivity to the anthropic aspects and human activities traditionally practised in these mountains. In fact, the rural culture and tradition of the protected area were the subject of in-depth study during all the days of the delegation's visit. In fact, through its projects, the Park enhances and preserves, together with the operators themselves, the ancient agricultural and zootechnical practices because these, today more than ever, are compatible with the protection of nature and the reduction of human impacts on it.

A special focus was devoted to the founding concepts of agroecology, a new branch of science that has its origins in the observation of nature but, above all, in the work of farmers and breeders who have practised these agricultural activities over the centuries. The scientific aspects presented by university lecturers were supported by the presentation of concrete experiences and stories relating to the recovery of ancient cultural varieties, the rediscovery of traditional products and forgotten practices to tackle the problems linked to climate change. They then went on to visit wineries that have been able to relaunch forgotten grape varieties on the market, but which were as popular then as now, and then spent a day alongside Abruzzo shepherds on the ancient transhumance routes, discovering dairy products that are indigenous to the very soul of the places.

Lastly, work experiences, memories and the difficulties of practising these activities in the mountains were the subject of particular attention when the focus shifted to beekeeping. Among human activities, beekeeping is undoubtedly the one most in contact with nature and, for this very reason, is the most sensitive to climate change and environmental pollution. The collection of honey and other bee products is intimately linked to the maintenance of biodiversity, and the role of the beekeeper becomes essential for humanity.

There was unanimous appreciation for the role played by the National Park in supporting the maintenance and introduction of the concepts of agroecology in the protected area as a concrete response to compatible development between man and nature, not least to improve the working and living conditions of the populations living in the disadvantaged and mountainous areas.

University Stefan cel Mare of Suceava (ROMANIA)

The 3rd Study Visit was hosted online by Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, Romania, on 15-16-17 September 2021. The agenda offered relevant and various topics developed as video materials and live presentations. The event was attended by an average of 45 participants each day from Germany, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Romania and Cyprus.

The first day was dedicated to synergies triggered by Romanian protected areas and showcased local examples of collaboration that have worked well and that inspired participants. Several presentations were dedicated to Romanian protected areas: Vânători Neamț Natural Park, Maramureșului Mountains Natural Park and Piatra Craiului National Park. The guests showcased their best practices, as well as other landmarks such as the wildlife, local tourist attractions, traditions and crafts, spiritual values and heritage that have been preserved in these regions for centuries. Property rights and nature conservation challenges for protected areas in Romania were also addressed.

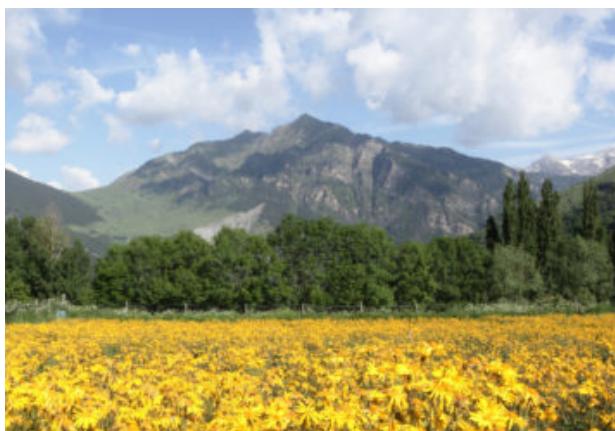
The second day of the Study Visit focused on sustainable and resilient agriculture in Romanian protected areas. The director of Măcinului Mountains National Park talked about their attempts to promote ecological farming beyond the borders of protected areas.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Romania presented policies and strategies regarding payments for environmentally friendly forestry and other subsidies. Furthermore, the director of Agricultural Directorate of Suceava County shared information about the implementation of governmental policies and support for local producers. Farming and rural tourism in the mountain areas of Romania were presented by representatives of dedicated associations and national agencies.

The last day of the event was dedicated to local farmers and their contribution to social resilience. Local farmers showcased concepts such as urban agriculture, new cultivars and challenges posed by climate changes, approaches to vegetable & seedling greenhouses, truffle picking and healthy recipes, etc. The topic of ecologic, organic, and biodynamic farming was presented by academics of the University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest.

Participants engaged in interesting discussions and fruitful debates, Q&A sessions, networking, analysis of causes, and exchange of solutions, which significantly contributed to the impact of the Romanian Study Visit and fostered the its European dimension.





Forest Science and Technology Centre of Catalonia (SPAIN)

From 28th to 30th September, the 4th VALOR Study Visit was organized online by CTFC, who received full support by Parc Nacional d'Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici, and Escola Agrària del Pallars. The visit aimed to show the situation and challenges of the territory close to the national park. The professional discussions between speakers and the public were successful and rewarding. Each day, more than 40 people attended the event who established professional contacts integrated into the VALOR Alliance.

The visit started with the presentation of the CTFC and Silvopastoralism in the Pyrenees of the National Park territory. A case of sustainable high-altitude apple cultivation by Biolord was presented, which intelligently monitors irrigation and other parameters, allowing it to save water. Participants learned about the UNESCO biosphere reserves through two presentations delivered by the International Center for the Mediterranean Biosphere Reserves UNESCO MED, and by the academic program EduBioMed.

The second day focused on the management of protected areas. The visits began with a presentation of the Parc Nacional d'Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici, followed by the Ecomuseu and the Escola de Pastors and Obrador Xisqueta. The PyrosLife project showed the monitoring of bears and wildlife in the Pyrenees. The company Trosdesort presented their experience on the marketing of km 0 in times of pandemic in mountain areas, which allowed a fruitful debate.

The third day was dedicated to Resilient Agriculture in the Pyrenees and was led by The Escola Agrària del Pallars. The presentation of the Alba Association focused on Llavors d'Oportunitat project. The Associació de Productors d'Oli del Pallars presented the recovery of autochthonous varieties of olive trees and their production of high-quality extra virgin olive oil. Finally, the topic of the sustainable cultivation of medicinal herbs in the high mountains and protected areas, specifically arnica and Edelweiss was addressed by the company Taüllorganics. CTFC presented the projects carried out and in progress on medicinal plants.



Naturpark Schwarzwald Mitte/Nord (GERMANY)

The last of the five study visits took place from 4 to 6 October. The host of the online exchange was the Naturpark Schwarzwald Mitte/Nord. On a total of three days, the partners of the VALOR Alliance as well as other interested persons were able to get an idea of special projects in the field of regional marketing in the nature park.

On the first day, the focus was on the presentation of the Black Forest Nature Park Central/North with its tasks, goals and projects. The second German VALOR project partner INTEGRA Filderstadt also presented itself and its main tasks and projects. Furthermore, Prof. Steffen Abele (University of Rottenburg) gave a lecture on the basics of marketing regional products and presented research results from different scientific studies.

The second and third day was dedicated to the presentation of various best practice projects from the nature park, such as the nature park hosts, the nature park markets or the marketing of wild boar meat. The topic of environmental education was also highlighted. INTEGRA presented the Filderstadt region in the area of tension between economic prosperity, mobility, housing needs, agriculture, climate and environmental protection.

On average, 45 participants took part in the study visit each day. Following the presentation of the individual projects, there was the opportunity to exchange ideas and impressions with experts from Germany (hosts, farmers and more) and to ask more in-depth questions. The online conference offered participants a good opportunity to promote the exchange of experience and knowledge between the members of the Alliance.



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