

## Safeguarding the livelihood of rural communities and the environment in the Mediterranean through Nature-based Solutions



### Mara-Mediterra as inspirational example to the EU CAP Network

Our Project Manager Ms Eleanna Pana, was invited as a keynote speaker in the session entitled “Inspirational examples on circular water management” at the EU CAP Network Workshop. Organized with the theme ‘Circular water management’, the event took place in Seville, Spain on 12 and 13 March 2024. In her presentation, Eleanna provided insights about Nature-based Solutions for circular water management, including wetland-aquaponics and micro-ecosystem-based afforestation in the Mara-Mediterra case studies, while sharing the experience of working with local communities and stakeholders.



Figure 1 Ms Eleanna Pana delivers keynote address



Figure 2 Participants at the EU CAP Network Workshop in Seville, Spain

Joined by more than 100 participants, the event was dedicated to uniting innovation actors to share approaches and practices, and to disseminate and exchange knowledge on circular water management with a focus on water reuse and recycling for agricultural production.

The key-note presentations of the workshop were followed by roundtables in which stakeholders and experts from around Europe explored practical aspects of replicability and knowledge transfer at the operational level.

The event actively promoted networking towards future collaboration. Participants seized the opportunity to share innovative approaches and practices from Operational Groups, Horizon 2020, Life and PRIMA funded projects, and other relevant initiatives. The roundtables identified methods and techniques for circular water management tailored to various farm types, new water sources from small agri-food industries, socio-economic benefits of implementing these systems, challenges, knowledge needs, and research needs from practice.



Figure 3 Sharing innovative approaches and practices on the “Inspirational Wall”

## Exploring the Botanical Garden of Hamma in Algiers, Algeria

Nature-based Solutions are strongly related to ecosystem services and biodiversity. In this perspective, the botanical garden of Hamma, which is known as the Test Garden, is of particular interest for the study of plant communities and their ecological adaptations in changing environments. For this reason, the botanical garden was our first stop during the field trip to Djelfa on 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2024 in the framework of the fourth Mara-Mediterra project meeting which took place in Algiers, Algeria during 29-30 April 2024.

Our guide, Mr. Ammour Mhana, explained that already since its inception in 1832, the garden served as an experimental site for the growing of plant and tree species that were brought in from all around the world. We learn that a staggering over 6000 different species were brought in already well before the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Amazingly, records show that over 90% of the species survived in their new setting. Ammour further explained that the gardens were originally a marshland that was drained and are wedged between the Mediterranean Sea which brings in moist air that remains trapped due to the mountain ridge to the south. Over time, the garden continued to expand from an initial 5 hectares to 38 hectares of gardens and 20 hectares of arboretum which are overseen by the Algerian National Institute of Agronomical Research.

We started our visit from the French Garden, where the landscaping is based on the principles of symmetry and of imposing order on nature. We walk along pathways that are lined with bushes and trees that are trimmed into strictly geometric shapes. The alleyways that interlace the different sections of the French Garden are straight and named after the tree types, such as the dragon tree and bamboo, planted in straight lines along both sides of the respective alleyways.



*Figure 4 Dragon tree alleyway (left) and bamboo alleyway*

The dominant role of architecture in gardens did not change until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when inspiration started coming not from architecture but from romantic painting, which became known as the English garden. A constructed wetland, complete with a wooden bridge and a fountain with a nymph provide for a truly idyllic setting. As we walk through the English garden, we can sense it is much cooler and enables one to feel one with Nature. No surprise then that it provided the ideal setting for the shooting of Tarzan the Ape Man in 1932!



*Figure 5 A nymph and a wooden bridge in the constructed wetland add to an idyllic setting*

Snippets from the Mara-Mediterra Partnership visit to the Botanical Garden, and of the fourth project meeting including the field trip to Djelfa, can be accessed from [this link](#).

## Mara-Mediterra booth in Florence, Italy draws the crowds

Mara-Mediterra was not going to miss out on joining the centennial celebration of the International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS). The event, which marked 100 years of soil science, was held in Florence, Italy during 19 to 21 May 2024, and was joined by over 1500 participants. A dedicated Mara-Mediterra booth was set up by the Italian research team in the partnership, UNIFI, led by Anna Dalla Marta. She also convened the Special session on “Nature-based Solutions for sustainable soil and water management”, in which the scientific paper ‘Fuzzy cognitive mapping of stakeholders’ perception of Nature-based Solutions for soil and water resources management’



Figure 6 IUSS Centennial celebration in Firenze, Italy drew the crowds



Figure 7 Mert Can Günaçtı presenting research findings on farmers’ perspectives on NbSs

by DEU DESUM was presented by Mert Can Günaçtı. This study focuses on farmers’ perspectives on NbSs, which were collected through a Value-Attitude-Perception survey on the occasion of the First Series of Roundtables in Mara-Mediterra’s 5 case studies. The general themes covered by the IUSS Conference and the abstract of the presentation by DEU DESUM during the special session can be accessed from [this link](#).

## Mara-Mediterra Aegean Living Lab crowned as EU Soil Mission Living Lab

We are thrilled that the Island of Lesbos has been established as one of the 100 EU Soil Mission Living Labs. Our project coordinator, Dr. Vasileios Takavakoglou, proudly presented the interconnections of the Mara-Mediterra project and the Horizon Europe funded GOV4ALL project which led to this major achievement at the Greek National Event entitled “Soil Mission and Living Labs Calls 2024”, which was organized as part of the NATI00NS project in Thessaloniki, Greece on 21 May 2024.



Figure 8 Dr. Vasileios Takavakoglou presents synergies between Mara-Mediterra and GOV4ALL projects

## Upcoming Activities and Events

**Do not miss out on taking part in our survey:** Make your voice heard in a European wide Mara-Mediterra survey with the theme: “**How can you help the agricultural transition?**”. Its aim is to better understand public opinion about the challenges faced by the agricultural sector and to find out how you would be willing to act. The survey, which should only take around 5 minutes to complete can be accessed through [this link](#).

**July 2024:** Following on their successful organization in Algeria, Egypt and Lebanon, also the participants in Greece and Turkey will be invited to express their views on the decision-criteria to arrive at optimum action plans for the wider uptake of agro-ecological practices.

**Throughout summer 2024:** Short video clips will be collected in each of our Living Labs, documenting farmers’ testimonies on their trialling of our array of agro-ecological practices as well as on their adaptation to local conditions.

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