

# Features

## EuroCoppice

### A new approach to influence policy to support woodland management

**Debbie Bartlett** introduces an international project for exchanging knowledge on coppice management.

The official title of this project is 'COST ACTION FP1301 Innovative management and multifunctional utilization of traditional coppice forests - an answer to future ecological, economic and social challenges in the European forestry sector'. It began in October 2013 and will run till May 2017 involving representatives from over 30 countries to exchange knowledge about traditional coppice woodland management and to explore and develop innovative concepts and techniques for future multifunctional coppice systems, with the ultimate aim of formulating European policy for the industry. This represents a significant opportunity and, despite the tendency for 'eurospeak', if you are involved in this sector please read on.

The COST programme was created in 1971 and is based on a European intergovernmental framework for Co-operation in Science and Technology and has made a significant contribution to closing the gap between science, policy makers and society throughout Europe and beyond.



*A visit to see processing of chestnut poles, firewood and mixed timber production during the first EuroCoppice conference.*

This is done by connecting scientific communities throughout Europe and worldwide; providing networking opportunities and so increasing the impact of research on policy makers, regulatory bodies and national decision makers as well as the private sector. There is a large 'family' of COST Actions with the Forest; their Products and Services strand including topics ranging from setting up a European network on Non-Timber Forest Products (COST 1203), mapping change in ownership (COST 1201) to enhancing mechanical properties of timber (COST 1004). If you are interested in any of these, the names and contact details of the active participants, including those in the UK, will be on the website.

This particular action, of which I am pleased to be the UK Steering Committee member, developed from an earlier collaboration on this subject, 'Coppice for South East Europe - the multi-functional management of coppice forests', which involved partners from Austria, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and ran from 2007-2013. The rationale is, to quote from the official documentation, as follows:

"Coppicing is a very traditional way of forest management. It benefits from the natural (vegetative) regeneration of mostly broadleaf species and their fast growth in the first decades. In most cases situated close to settlements this silvicultural regime provided among others firewood, bark, fruits and grazing and by this supported the livelihood of the rural population. Until the middle of the 20th century, coppice forests were very common in most parts of Europe. With increase in use of non-renewable raw materials, coppice lost importance and was neglected or converted. Only recently coppice has been re-discovered because of its adaptive ecology, its stability and multiple benefits, notably its protection function, contribution to biodiversity and as a source of renewable bioenergy. Traditional coppice

management is often combined with special ownership and user rights regimes (e.g. commons) and this governance regime may be also an interesting alternative for small scale forestry and/or modern short rotation coppice (SRC) which is established on former agriculture land. The Action aims to bring together European scientists, experts and young scholars to exchange knowledge about coppice forestry and to start developing innovative management and utilization concepts/techniques for future modern multifunctional coppice management systems”.

So, this Action has been accepted and is moving forward – but what might it mean for those of us working with the coppice industry here? Briefly, the action has several strands, and after the kick off meeting in Brussels in October, the structures of information sharing and networking being facilitated are becoming clear. These are outlined below.

## Working Groups

There are five Working Groups focusing on the following areas:

WG1: Definitions, history, typology

Leader D. Lazdina, Latvian State Forest Research Institute; UK member Rob Jarman

WG2: Ecology and silvicultural management

Leader V.N. Nicolescu, University of Brasov

WG3: Utilization and products

Leader N. Magagnotti, CNR-Ivalsa;  
UK member David Rossney

WG4: Services, protection and nature conservation

Leader Dr Peter Buckley, University of London

WG5: Coppice forests ownership and governance

Leader Dr Debbie Bartlett, University of Greenwich

These are ongoing with members working on the topics in their own countries and communicating by email and skype. The leaders will be contributing to meetings and conferences as well as to the annual progress report submitted to Brussels. Membership is open and if you have a particular interest in any of the topics please do get in touch – particularly if you are engaged in research. It is the intention that the website will be advertising both invitations from hosts and requests for opportunities in the near future

## Training Opportunities

The emphasis of a COST Action is to facilitate sharing of information and individuals can take advantage of specific Training Schools. These are offered on a particular topic and

the dates and locations and maximum number of delegates advertised on the website. Travel costs and a daily allowance are funded and applications are made to a deadline and selection made on the basis of set criteria, with preference given to early career researchers all other things being equal. The first training school will take place shortly hosted by the Faculty of Forestry in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## Short Term Scientific Missions (STSMs)

These are individual study opportunities set up by agreement with a host organisation and a researcher, both of which must be in member countries. The application process is relatively simple requiring a letter of invitation from the host, an agreed itinerary showing how the proposal relates to the overall aim of the Action, the researcher's CV and a budget. If successful, travel costs and a daily allowance will be funded and in the first year there is provision for 19 STSMs to be supported. So far these have included a post-graduate from Germany studying machinery and harvesting techniques in Italy and storage of woodchip from short rotation coppice.

## Conferences

The first conference was hosted by the National Research Centre (CNR) IVALSA Trees and Timber Research Institute in Florence. Delegates from 31 different countries arrived on Sunday 23rd February and began to get to know each other over a buffet supper in a hotel in central Florence. The next day we all boarded coaches and travelled up into the mountains near Pistoia to see harvesting operations and timber processing. As always with these fieldtrips it's a rush to fit everything in but we covered local supply chain issues,



*A 'cable yarding' system used to drag coppice poles up steep slopes in Italy.*



*Coppice poles being chipped and fed directly into lorry for delivery.*

visiting the Dynamo Camp in San Marcello, (funded by Paul Newman) and the boiler system fuelling a swimming pool. We visited three processing yards, specialising in chestnut poles, firewood and mixed timber production (see photo page 198). The site that attracted most attention was the 'cable yarding' using a tower crane as a mount for a cable dragging the coppice poles up the steep slopes that are a feature of the countryside here (see photo). These poles were then fed straight into a chipper and delivered onto a lorry (see above) to supply the swimming pool we'd visited in the morning. Lunch in the village hall was organised by one of the contractors and included delicious pancakes made from chestnut flour.

The formal conference was held in the centre of Florence on Wednesday 26th February. This included an introduction to the COST Action EuroCoppice by Professor Gero Becker (University of Freiburg) and continued with a review of the global (W. Kollert, FAO) and Mediterranean perspectives on coppice (D.Travaglini, University of Florence). This was followed by presentations by each of the Working Group leaders. The fact that the presentations had been requested by the organisers in advance although the first meetings of the groups had not happened until the previous day meant that this was limited to a review of the scope of each topic as set out in the documentation with examples from the leader's experience.

The posters presented during the breaks provided a fascinating insight into the level of research into coppice woodlands and their management that is going on in Europe. There were two from the UK (Rob Jarman's work on the origins of sweet chestnut in England; using genetics to

supplement archaeological and historical evidence for the date and source of its first introduction and Debbie Bartlett's on socio-economic aspects of coppice in the South East). The range and quality of the posters further confirmed that, in contrast to the situation here, where the day-to-day work of the coppice sector is seemingly below the radar and largely ignored at a policy level, it is considered seriously in other parts of Europe. Hopefully this COST Action will change this and serve to remind decision makers firstly that coppice is important, secondly that a commercial coppice industry still exists and finally that policy should be aiming to support, rather than disadvantage, those involved in this traditional activity that has so many wider benefits.

The next conference will be held in November at the University of Greenwich, Chatham Campus, and if you are interested in attending or require any further information please see the website or contact me direct.

## Website

[http://www.cost.eu/domains\\_actions/fps/Actions/](http://www.cost.eu/domains_actions/fps/Actions/)

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