

Improving community land management through association arrangements in Portugal

In Portugal, several initiatives are working to improve community management of the land and forests in order to mitigate the risk of forest fires, improve forest management and upgrade legislative frameworks.

By **ISA - University of Lisbon** - June 22, 2022



Photo: BALADI

The Center for Applied Ecology Baeta Neves (CEABN) is currently conducting a research project called SAFER-LANDS, which is focused on exploring an innovative management model for community forests. These lands, normally called Baldio, are owned by rural communities and managed either directly by them or in collaboration with the State Forest Services.

In 2017, an innovative model of community land governance was pointed by Law nº. 75/2017 proposing that Baldios start to work in association, named Baldio's Group. This governance arrangement aimed to increase the value and to defend the existence of these kind of land property.

The first Baldio's Group was formally created in 2020. Contracts were signed between the Forest Services and two forest federations – FORESTIS and BALADI – that are focused on forests and baldios' management¹. Each federation was responsible for the creation, management, and support of 10 Baldio's Group. On June 10th and 11th, BALADI held a seminar to share previous main results of their work, developed and supported in the last three years.

As a result, the total Group area created exceeds 56 thousand hectares and includes 55 units of baldios with different management models (autonomous management by owners or in cooperation with Forest Services and/or parishes). To support the management and achieve the ambitious project indicators in a so extensive area, BALADI has hired forest and environmental engineers, as well as administrative assistants.

During the years of this pilot project, several important goals were achieved that underline the effectiveness of this model. Main results show that a total of 62% of the Baldio's Groups prepared their Forest Management Plans, 93% of them finished their forest inventories and 53% formalized management partnerships with the local levels of public administration. As for fuel management to

control the risk of wildfire, the area treated exceeded what was initially planned. Land and fiscal regularization activities were also carried out.

The project revealed some fragilities, and different procedures were found in same government institutions, but in different regions of the country. However, in terms of difficulties and constraints, the pandemic was identified as one of the biggest challenges, along with the ones related with the payment of the hired staff. Also, the approval of baldios' Forest Management Plans by Forest Services, especially in the central region of the country.

According to Armando Carvalho, BALADI's president, the Portuguese National Forest Strategy pushes for 80% of the baldios to be managed through association, therefore more efforts are needed to enhance these arrangements. In this sense, in the next two years, the SAFER-LANDS project will study how to improve this management model. In addition, special attention will be given to wildfires and their control in Baldio Groups areas. For more information on this topic, please consult the project's website at CEABN².

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1. **Skulska I. Gomes P. 2019 Good news from Portugal: 3.6 million euros to strengthen community-based forestry. EFI Network News.**
 2. **SAFER-LANDS: Desbloquear a gestão colaborativa do risco de incêndio e melhorar o quadro legislativo para terrenos comunitários (baldios) mais seguros.**

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