

European Non-Wood Forest Products (NWFPs) Network COST Action FP1203

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The importance of resin production in Maritime pine value chain by: protecting against forest fires and producing a natural product that enhances sustainable forest management

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One of the main forest tree species in Portugal is maritime pine (*Pinus pinaster*). Until recently this was the first tree species in terms of area and, according to the latest National Forest Inventory, has been relegated to 3rd behind *Eucalyptus globulus* 812,000 ha - 26% and *Quercus suber* 736,000 - 23%; *Pinus pinaster*: 714 000 ha - 23%. Besides wood, maritime pine supports various non-timber resources, including resin.

In Portugal, resin production had great economic and social importance until the 1980s mainly for maritime uses. However, in recent decades, there has been a progressive decline in demand, as a result of unfavourable market prices for resin resulting from competition mainly from China and Brazil and with natural and synthetic resins as well as the exodus of rural populations to urban centres and the progressive increase of forest fires. In the 70s and 80s, the area under resin extraction peaked at 600,000 hectares with an average annual production of 112,000 tons /year which made Portugal the third largest exporter of resinous products. Currently, the Portuguese production is about 5,500 tons / year.

Maritime pine forests profitability is currently very low, timber prices have been declining and are now very low. This together with the pine wilt nematode attacks and the recurrence of forest fires lead to forest producers to abandon pine for more profitable forest tree species and replacement by eucalyptus.

The environmental and social benefits that maritime pine, and resin production in particular, can generate, is an incentive to promote its use. With the current increase of international prices, attributed to the lack of raw material from the largest resin producers – China and Brazil – who are currently also being large consumers, resin appears to be regaining economic interest. Additionally, the Portuguese resin industry is less interested in being so dependent on resin imports.

The revival of interest in the resin extraction is related to the following key aspects:

- additional income generated for forest owners;
- to the west of the Iberian Peninsula, and in particular for Portugal, territorial strategic importance to help control the current issue of forest fires, since forestry practices associated with resin production lead to an intense human presence in the forest during the summer period. Therefore this practice can also be seen as a set of services for fire protection with value for the prevention, detection and suppression of fires;
- a choice for a natural product that promotes sustainable forest management (unlike the systems for production in China and Brazil, in the first case the cost of extraction to death in natural forest, in the 2nd case, by using intensive short-cycle plantations);

The Project SustForest (multifunctional forestry, conservation and rural employment in the territory of southern Europe by extracting the resin), which involved Spanish, French and Portuguese partners (Sudoe program), had as a major objective, bringing an awareness of the environmental, social and economic benefits from resin production so that it can be an activity supported in the next PDR 2014 - 2020, supporting the maritime pine value chain.