

KROUMIRIE MOGOD (TUNISIA)

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THE KROUMIRIE MOGOD TERRITORY COVERS AN AREA OF 3000 KM² OFF THE NORTHWEST TUNISIAN COAST, AND IS THE WESTERN EXTENSION OF THE ALGERIAN TELL AND THE MOROCCAN RIF.

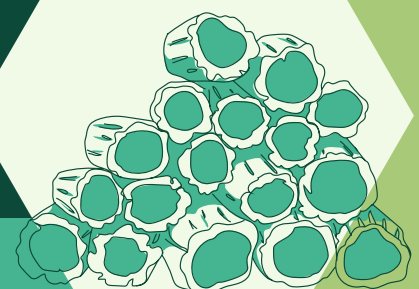


It is a non-administrative region, but is rather considered an ecological and orographic region. The territory extends from the region of Ghardiamou at the Tunisian-Algerian border to the region of Sajnen in Bizerte. The relief of the territory is rugged and strong, and the climate is characterised by high annual rainfall.

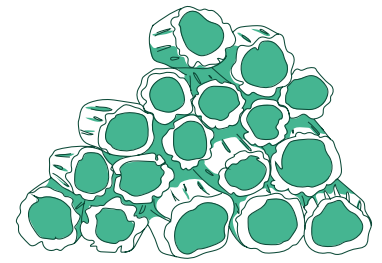
The landscape is characterized predominantly by cork oak natural forests, with traditional farming and pastoralism. According to the last the National Forest and Pastoral Inventory (2005), the cork oak (*Quercus suber*) occupies an area of 90 423 ha of which 70 208 ha in pure state and 20 215 ha mixed mainly with zean oak (*Quercus canariensis*), followed by pines. On a global scale, the cork oak is a rare forest species characteristic to the Mediterranean region.

The Kroumirie Mogod territory is inhabited by approximately 62% of the forest communities in Tunisia and 45% of those living 5km from the forest. It is estimated that the density national average of forest inhabitants is around 85 inhabitants/km². Over the centuries, a relationship has been developed between these forest communities and the cork oak forest, leading to the use of cork oak in their daily activities.

WWF North Africa aims, through its People and Cork project, to promote the cultural practices of these cork oak forest communities, and put in place a strategy to enhance the cultural landscape potential of the Kroumirie Mogod region through communication, advocacy for policies supporting cultural practices, research and promotion of innovative sustainable economic initiatives.



Bee Hive made from Cork Bark



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CURRENT CHALLENGES

The cork oak landscape currently faces several pressures, including climatic change, erosion and other human caused pressures. In balance with the environment, the local communities have developed cultural practices that were passed down from generation to generation. Nowadays, the cork oak forests are being abandoned and the knowledge is being lost. Since 1950, the surface of cork oak forest in the territory has decreased from 127.000 to 70.000 ha. By promoting and restoring the cultural practices, there is a possibility to maintain ecosystem balance and biodiversity. For example, the agroforestry in this region contributes to the conservation of biodiversity and fights against soil erosion and illegal logging.

The Kroumirie Mogod territory is a region rich with natural resources, but with a low standard of living and development. However, cork oak forests provide high value economic benefits, mainly from the selling of the cork and the acorns as feed. With the changed new post-revolution national context, there is an emergence of development associations in rural areas of Tunisia. These associations could help towards strengthening the collective action capacity of the rural communities. Local communities, cork industries, universities and the civil society will collaborate through the People and Cork project and focus on implementing actions to improve the living standards of the local population and the conservation of biodiversity.

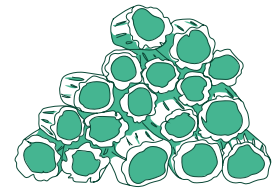
NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON BIODIVERSITY

The Kroumirie Mogod territory is a complex anthroposystem going back centuries, characterised by pure and mixed forests of zean and cork oak (*Quercus canariensis*, *Q. suber*). The wooded areas of Kroumirie Mogod are endemic to nearly 8.5% of the Tunisian flora, in total 180 species. The forests are considered as one of the last strongholds for the Barbary stag (*Cervus elaphus barbarus*), a subspecies of the red deer that was once widespread in North Africa.

Many of the threats to the biodiversity in this landscape are the result of socio-spatial dynamics and intensive management techniques that have replaced the traditional cultural practices. The cultural practices related to the sustainable use of cork oak forests allow, in an indirect and direct way, the conservation of nature and biodiversity and the conservation of the cultural components of the populations and inhabitants of those forests. The People and Cork project brings together partners with various experiences in the field of research and conservation of cork oak, its ecosystem and biodiversity.



Drying cork bark © WWF North Africa

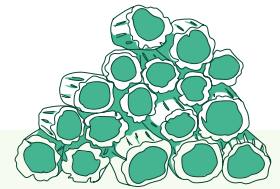


Cork oak forest © WWF North Africa

CULTURAL SUSTAINABLE LAND-USE PRACTICES

The cork oak forest landscape in Tunisia is an inhabited landscape. The local population has long lived in harmony and in balance with its environment. Besides the cork harvesting, there are three main agricultural practices mainly utilized by the local population:

1. **Agroforestry** is practiced on the edges of the transitional forest areas. Other species of semi-forest trees, fruit trees (fig, olive, pomegranate, etc.) and grains (wheat, barley, etc.) accompany the cork oak trees. This provides the families living in these forested areas with their daily needs. It also provides natural fertilizer for the soil and helps in avoiding soil erosion.
2. **Animal husbandry** is practiced in the forested areas, by allowing the livestock to graze in the areas of the cork oaks. It is practiced with moderation by the local population take notice of solely the palatable species and without harming the balance of the cork oak forest. The acorns of the cork oaks are also an important fodder unit for the livestock.
3. **Apiculture** or beekeeping is practiced by local communities in the cork oak forests. Bee populations even live in cork barrels, that are made from the first harvest of the male cork. This so-called "lower quality" cork, because of the its black colour, irregular structure and hardness, is in this way recycled for another purpose.



BENEFITS OF KROUMIRIE MOGOD AS A CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The cork oak is a forest species carrying identity, symbolism and history for the local community in Kroumirie Mogod. The tree and the cultural practices related to it, are considered as heritage inherited from previous generations and there is a need to preserved an passed on to future generations. The tree is a symbol of the region and there are several stories, songs and myths surrounding it. According to legend, there are holy trees that guide and provide advice for tribal decisions or in case of conflicts.

The local population has developed know-how related to the use of cork oak in their activities daily. Cork is not the only product used, but also the acorns, the litter under oak and the tannin are heavily used. The local population uses the products of the cork oak in several sectors, including:

- **Culinary:** The acorns of the cork oak are consumed roasted or transformed into flour. They have a high nutritional value, and provide an important alternative for people allergic to gluten.

- **Artisanal fishing:** the fishermen in the Tabarka region use the corks in various artisanal fishing activities, such as the creation of cork floats. The use of cork in fishing is more sustainable than plastics.
- **Arts and crafts:** The tannin that is extracted from the bark of the cork oak is used for dyeing wool of the Berber carpets and clothes. However, this practice could be harmful as the trees are scarred and more susceptible to diseases and insects. The hard and irregular male cork is also used for the creation of planting pots, weaving tool, and decorative items.
- **Construction:** Cork is used by the local population for construction and insulation of stables.

In the region of Ain Drahem, cultural practices linked to gastronomy, crafts and construction are more popular, while in Tabarka practices related to traditional fishing are recognized. These products of the territory require special attention to provide support for territorial marketing and for the promotion of the Kroumirie Mogod region. The production of maps and the study of the cork value chain will give us an overview of the tools and ways of enhancing its products.



Cork floats for traditional fishing
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