

Excursion – The Verdon Regional Nature Park

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First Stop: Educational farm run by the Kokopelli association

Goals

- Ecological education
- Conservation, breeding and exchange of old agricultural species/varieties (ca. 2500)

Facts

- Ca. 80 hectares. 20 ha under cultivation.
- Goats, cheese, bees, vegetables. 5 Farmers (planned)
- Experimental vegetable farming is now in the first year

EU & crops

- Only varieties listed in the EU catalogue are allowed to be commercially used and distributed
- It takes about 15000 € and 5 years to get a variety on the official EU list
- New breeds of big agriculture companies are favoured by this system
- Example corn:
 - Only hybrids (with non fertile seeds) are in the catalogue
 - Catalogue is closed: no further varieties will be added
 - Buying hybrid seeds costs about 20 times more than own seeds
- Example tomatoes: 600 in EU catalogue but only 12 (fertile) non-hybrids

Experimental crop farming

- Relatively poor and compact soil, formerly used for truffle production
- They test the suitability of different crop and vegetable varieties for the production under the local conditions (e.g. short summer season in the mountains)
- Focus plant: corn
 - o Production of own fertile seeds
 - o Cross-breeding with corn of different geographical origins to produce an own variety with good growth properties under the local conditions
 - o It took 5 years to breed a corn with short growing period (45 days).
Now this breed will be optimised by further selection
- They tried sorghum varieties from Africa to find cultivars adapted to a warmer climate

Second stop: Gorge du Verdon, Regional Nature Park

- Founded in 1997 as Regional Natural Park. 45 villages involved.
- Development strategies on a regional level with local people involved.

Five objectives:

- Preserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage
- Develop economic and social activities
- Heighten public awareness on environmental issues
- Develop the territory
- Develop new and experimental activities

Three main missions:

- Water
- Agricultural activities and tourism
- Landscape and natural heritage

Activities:

- Environmental education
- Experiments (e.g. on the Kokopelli farm)
- Tourist projects: attract more people in spring and autumn, bring visitors to the less known parts of the park (80% of the jobs in the area are related to tourism)
- Water project:
 - Development of a management concept for the whole catchment
 - Water quality issues
 - Increasing sensitivity of stake holders towards water problems
- Mediation between climbers and nature conservation