



# IDENTIFYING, ADVANCING AND REPORTING

## OECMs



The case of Sacred Sites as potential OECMs  
in North Africa and Lebanon





# Before we start...



- DiversEarth/Mava funded project
- A study of Sacred Sites that benefit nature in the Mediterranean (underway – initial report for CBD CoP)
- Impact / mapping; typology; understanding – not all OECMs
- In this presentation: variety of examples to show scope and potential in this region and beyond



# SITE DETAILS

*What is the name and location of the 'potential OECM'?*

- Name: Variety of names, unknown number
- Location: Sacred Sites occur in various forms in all countries of North Africa, and Lebanon
- Governance authority: Religious authorities / community governance

## *Typology in brief*

- Sacred groves, mountains, water sources etc. (natural elements with religious significance)
- Religious buildings with surrounding lands and waters
- Burial sites / cemeteries
- Sacred landscapes (often valleys), containing several sacred sites and other special natural elements





Two isolated sacred groves with closed tree canopy on small ridges in mid-slope position within short to medium distance to scattered settlements (Area of the Beni Ider tribe, landscape section D1, NW Morocco). (Jäckle et al., 2012)



# Sacred sites and conservation



- From the CBD decision document (annex 3):

*“Areas conserved for cultural and spiritual values, and governance and management that respect and are informed by cultural and spiritual values, often result in positive biodiversity outcomes.”*



# Sacred sites and conservation



- Sacred sites (or Sacred Natural Sites) are of conservation value:
  - Protected because of beliefs and spiritual values
  - Actively governed / managed
  - Effective – but threats exist
  - Refuges for organisms
  - Remnants of near-natural biotopes in heavily transformed landscapes
  - Connectivity
  - Protectors of old individual species, e.g. veteran trees
  - Connect communities with nature

## Criterion A: NOT A PROTECTED AREA

*Is the area recognized as a protected area?*

- Sacred Sites as original areas of protection
- Sacred Sites within PAs
- PAs within Sacred Landscapes
- OECMs – potential of celebrating real/historical custodians



Monastery of Our Lady of Kaftoun, Lebanon





Ouadi Qadisha (the Holy Valley) and the Forest of the Cedars of God (Horsh Arz el-Rab) (Lebanon) © Limes.Media/Tim Schnarr

- Sacred Landscape (Maronite Christian)
- Many sacred sites
- Includes forest reserve
- Active governance
- UNESCO





# Criterion B: Governance and Management

## B1. GEOGRAPHICALLY DEFINED



*What are the area's boundaries, or  
How will you ascertain the area's boundaries?*

- Custodians in general know boundaries
- Cultural/spiritual boundaries, not ecological boundaries (although they often overlap because of their *de-facto* conservation)
- Respect custodian boundaries!





Sacred grove with over aged  
Cork Oak (*Quercus suber*)  
(near landscape section C2,  
NW Morocco)

(Jäckle et al., 2012)



## Criterion B: Governance and Management

### B2. GOVERNED



*Who are the governance authorities? Are they government, private or Indigenous peoples/local communities?*

*Do they have rights to govern the area, or are the governance, land and/or natural resource rights contested?*

*Is the area equitably managed? Are any rightful governance authorities being marginalized?*

- Context-specific
- E.g. in Lebanon religious tenure is often clear
- Marabout sites / sacred groves etc. community governance, rarely tenure







Monastery of Tibhirine, Roman Catholic Monastery of Trappists, nr. Médéa, Algeria, 8ha / 374ha surrounding forests







## Criterion B: Governance and Management

### B3. MANAGED



*What are the management objectives?*

*How are the management objectives contributing to the conservation of biodiversity?*

- 1st - Preserve values of why it is sacred
- Pilgrimage and other visitation is often managed (in Morocco, estimated 750-1000 pilgrimages to Marabouts every year (*Berriane*))
- Longevity – generational protection
- Community service (baraka)
- Resulting biodiversity conservation





Saydet el Nourieh,  
(Greek Orthodox),  
Hamat, Lebanon

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*How will you assess the biodiversity values of the area?*

*What kinds of biodiversity values does the area have? (Please see next page)*

- Marabouts, Tunisia (initial study)
- Tangier peninsula, northern Morocco (University of Freiburg)

### Marabout Sidi Ibrahim El Bouzidi

Lors de cette prospection sommaire nous avons pu dresser la liste floristique suivante (en 2 colonnes) :

<i>Acacia mearnsii</i> De Wild	<i>Lavatera arborea</i> L.
<i>Acacia saligna</i> (Labill.) Wendl. f.	<i>Lonicera implexa</i> Aiton
<i>Ajuga iva</i> (L.) Schreb.	<i>Lotus cytisoides</i> L.
<i>Alnus glutinosa</i> (L.) Gaertn.	<i>Lotus edulis</i> L.
<i>Ampelodesmos mauritanicus</i> (Poir.) T. Durand & Schinz	<i>Marrubium vulgare</i> L.
<i>Anthemis maritima</i> L.	<i>Medicago polymorpha</i> L.,
<i>Anthyllis barba-jovis</i> L.	<i>Mentha pulegium</i> L.
<i>Arisarum vulgare</i> Targ. Tozz.	<i>Myrtus communis</i> L.
<i>Arum italicum</i> Mill.	<i>Olea europaea</i> L.
<i>Arundo donax</i> L.	<i>Ornithogalum umbellatum</i> L.
<i>Asphodelus microcarpus</i> Viv.	<i>Oryzopsis miliacea</i> (L.) Benth. & Hook. f. ex Asch. & Schweinf.
<i>Asplenium adiantum-nigrum</i> L.	<i>Phillyrea latifolia</i> L.



## Criterion C: Effective and sustained conservation

### C2,3,4. Effective Conservation

*How are internal threats addressed?*

*How are external threats addressed?*

**Context specific** (remember these are not PAs – spontaneity)

*Is the management regime intended to sustained over the long-term, or subject to change? **definitely long-term***

*Is the management regime in place year-round, or on another basis? **Usually year round***

*Is the biodiversity outcome being monitored? **Almost never***

*Is the area large enough on its own, or as part of an established and integrated conservation network, to conserve biodiversity in-situ over the long term?*



Sacred sites can be small in size but frequent in number. Could networks be considered? Important for connectivity.





207	Moulay Idress and Sidi Chhbib	in a subhumid coastal plain .Cr	Morocco	Islam	7446 m2	Closed forest cov
208	Cimtière Oulad-el-Arbi	in a subhumid coastal plain. Cr	Morocco	Islam	15165 m2	Dominated by shi
209	Sidi Fraj	in a subhumid coastal plain. Cr	Morocco	Islam	10036 m2	Dominated by shi
210	Sidi Berrisoul	In a subhumid coastal plain. Cr	Morocco	Islam	15686 m2	Dominated by shi
211	Sidi el Mokhfi	in subhumid marly hills, arable	Morocco	Islam	11164 m2	Dominated by shi
212	Sidi Sabir	in subhumid marly hills arable l	Morocco	Islam	1927 m2	Dominated by shi
213	Sidi el Mansour	in subhumid marly hill arable la	Morocco	Islam	1751 m2	Dominated by shi
214	Sidi Ahmed	in subhumid marly hills arable l	Morocco	Islam	13813 m2	Dominated by shi
215	Sidi Amour al Hadi	in subhumid marly hills arable l	Morocco	Islam	46469 m2	Tree cover arounc
216	Sidi Aamer	in subhumid marly hills arable l	Morocco	Islam	2870 m2	Dominated by shi
217	Sidi Boubkar Al Majdoub	in subhumid marly hills arable l	Morocco	Islam	10961 m2	Dominated by shi
218	Sidi Mohamed Ben Ali	in subhumid marly hills arable l	Morocco	Islam	11542 m2	Dominated by shi
219	Sidi Sidaafy	in subhumid marly hills arable l	Morocco	Islam	500 m2	Dominated by shi
220	Sidi Laarbi Imsbahi	in subhumid marly hills arable l	Morocco	Islam	13633 m2	Dominated by shi
221	Sidi Salhi	Humid Mountain chain / sands	Morocco	Islam	4511 m2	Around 25% of th
222	Sidi Zhayri	Humid Mountain chain / sands	Morocco	Islam	1571 m2	Dominated by shi

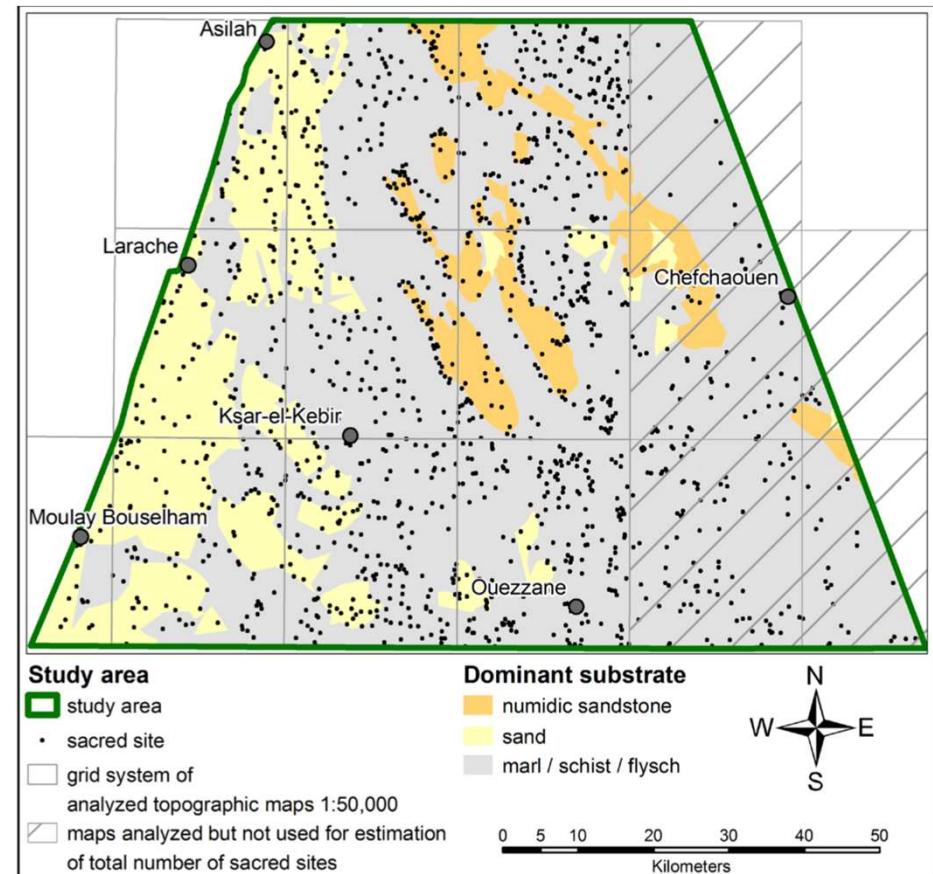


Figure 5: Distribution of SaS in the study area (dominant substrate as background information taken from Ministère de l'Énergie et des Mines 1980).



## Criterion D: Effective and sustained conservation

### D1. Associated Functions



*Are there any associated ecosystem functions and services?*

*Are there any spiritual, socio-economic or other values associated with the area?*

- Many ecosystem functions and services including climate change mitigation, watersheds, soil stabilisation and so on – the same as protected areas
- Culture, spirituality, community, tourism/recreation





Marabout site,  
with Veteran tree,  
Cap Bon, Tunisia



## Mount Sinai and St. Catherine's Monastery, Egypt



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## To be discussed...



- Risk: Not a Protected Area! We shouldn't try to emulate PAs
- Great care and sensitivity must be taken when considering sacred sites as potential OECMs (non-discrimination; custodians are often busy; different timelines...)
- Be mindful about we expect/require from custodians (management measures, monitoring, etc...)
- A shift in conservation paradigm – responsibility – not conservation business as usual (room for more conservation mistakes...)



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