



EDITORIAL – PORTUGAL AND ASIA SPECIAL ISSUE

Dear IFFN reader: How would you respond if an analysis of the fire situation in your country would state:

- The easy aptitude of forests to burn has always been used as weapon on discord. Recently it is also a weapon of various economical interests.
- Successive burning may be used to force down the forestry profile of land into other uses. This may be the case of urban or tourism interests.
- Changes on the type of the species cover are also part of the economic causes for arson. Despite of the law, which rules that forest land cannot be occupied for other uses during ten years after a fire, this “quarantine” is not dissuading investors from setting fire.
- Despite the legal impediments to cut certain tree species, it is possible to remove them once they are dead, e.g. due to fire. Thus, your forest can be liberated from these species and afforested by the fast-growing ones ...
- Wood traders are profiting from cheap wood harvested post-fire: Properly debarked salvage-logged timber can be sold as non-burned wood – increasing the profit margin...
- Private companies specialized in fire combat are to be added to the horde of the potential beneficiaries of forest fires. Episodes of commanders of fire brigades that simultaneously own business of fire combat equipment are being reported by the media.
- Forest fires are dramatic media events. Fearing electoral punishment any government gives ground to a panoply of cabinets, committees, task forces, seminars, etc. which pace of grow is dictated by the dimension of the forest fires of the previous year.
- The academic lobby is another one to be included in the horde of forest fire beneficiaries: The “fire industry” ends up to be an extra source of financing, especially in universities, that gives justification for cathedra posts and pays for research projects, studies, publication, etc. ...
- In a country with a fragile economy any uncertainty of employment, even temporary jobs, attract sympathy of the common citizen.
- The subtle beneficiaries of the “fire industry”, which honestly and clean is based on fire-created jobs, is finally infecting the society with an imperceptible feeling of indifference upon the fire devastation. To feel in peace requires nothing more than being certain of not having set any fire.
- Indeed like the fire-adapted species, for a part of the society forest fires are not a factor of destruction, rather an active economic sector.
- If wildfires become a rule, a part of the society may become fire-dependent, like some of the forest species ...

What else should be suggested than reading this issue of IFFN, which is giving insight into the underlying causes and driving agents of fire in Southern Europe. Frank reviews of the fire situation at home may help to critically reflect about the interconnectedness between the dramatically changing natural and socio-environmental conditions on the one side, and the changing fire regimes and fire impacts on the other side.

Another cluster of reports is covering mainland South Asia. This region is impacted by rapid rural population growth and poverty – the opposite trend of the rural exodus of Southern European hinterlands. More rural inhabitants, less fuels and more fires sources in South Asia; decreasing land use and populations and more fuels in Southern Europe: the effects of demographic and land-use changes on severity and destructivity of wildfires seems to be increasing similarly.