

1. INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean basin is one of the world's top biodiversity hotspots, home to cultural landscapes of high ecological value that have been shaped by land use practices over millennia. These practices provide food and other goods, support essential ecosystem services, and sustain biodiversity and livelihoods. However, the region is facing significant environmental, social and economic challenges, including climate change, desertification, rural emigration, and abandonment of cultural practices all of which negatively affect these landscapes and the communities that depend on them.

In response, a number of NGOs started working together in 2017 to document and support cultural land use and management practices as a means of revitalizing endangered cultural landscapes. And in 2021, this joint effort became the Alliance for Mediterranean Nature & Culture (AMNC), a partnership of 14 NGOs collaborating with practitioners, decision-makers and key stakeholders across the region to build understanding and knowledge about cultural landscapes, advocate for the practices that maintain them, and sustain the benefits they provide for biodiversity and local communities.

OBJECTIVES

- Support Mediterranean landscapes, biodiversity, and climate action through the promotion of nature-positive cultural practices and innovative approaches.
- Empower local communities who follow those practices and enhance their livelihoods.
- Create replicable models that maintain and scale beneficial practices across landscapes.
- Support and advocate policies and governance frameworks that promote cultural landscapes and beneficial practices.
- Increase awareness about the importance of cultural landscapes for biodiversity, climate and livelihoods with the public, decision-makers and consumers.
- Build an effective and lasting regional partnership for cultural landscapes.

BUDGET ENGAGED

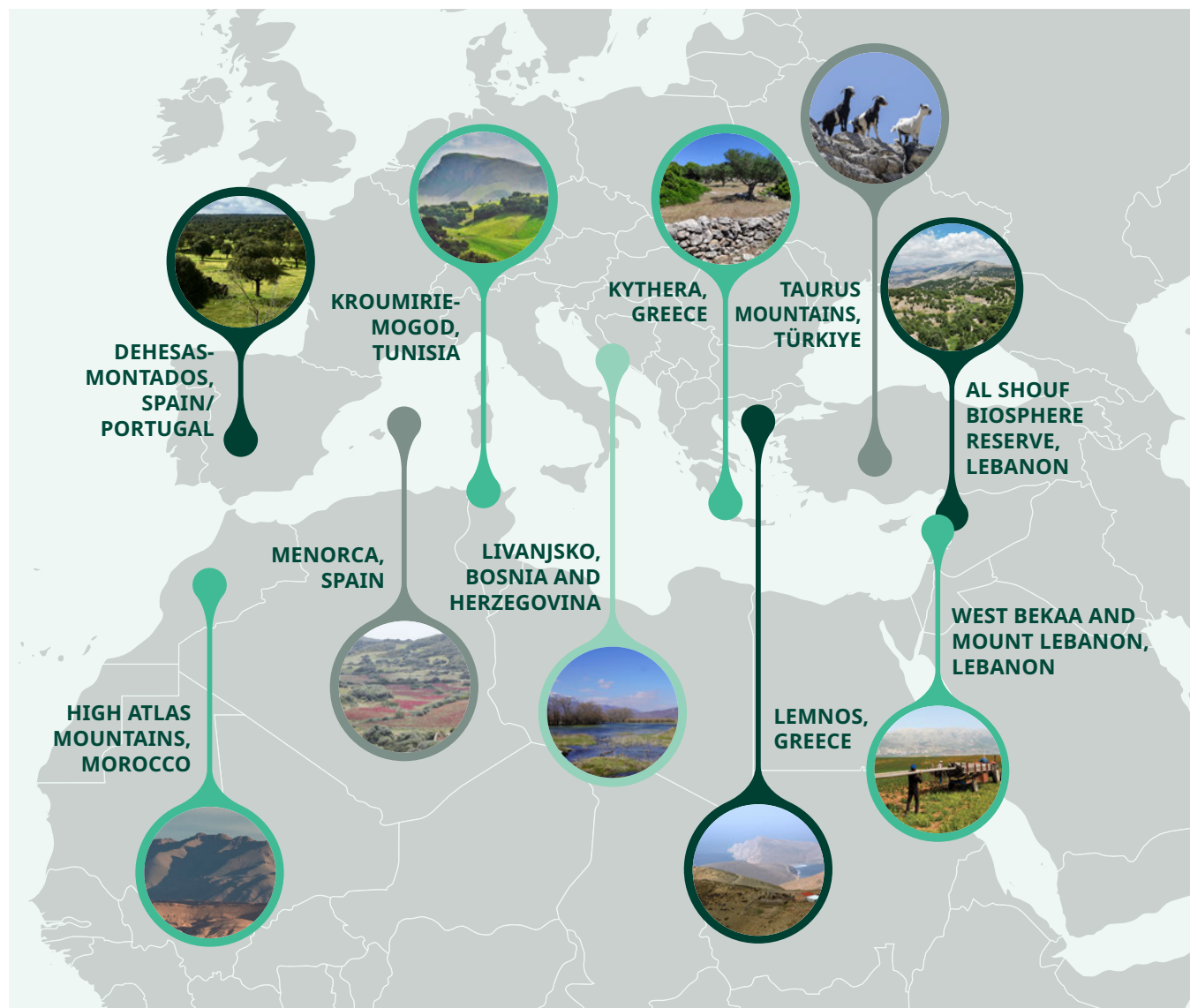
€12,637,000

BUDGET PER STRATEGY

- Partnership 5%
- Knowledge 15%
- Communications and Promotion 16%
- Economics and Finance: 17%
- Policy 11%
- Governance 11%
- Local Capacity and Management 12%
- Scaling Up 13%



FIELD SITES

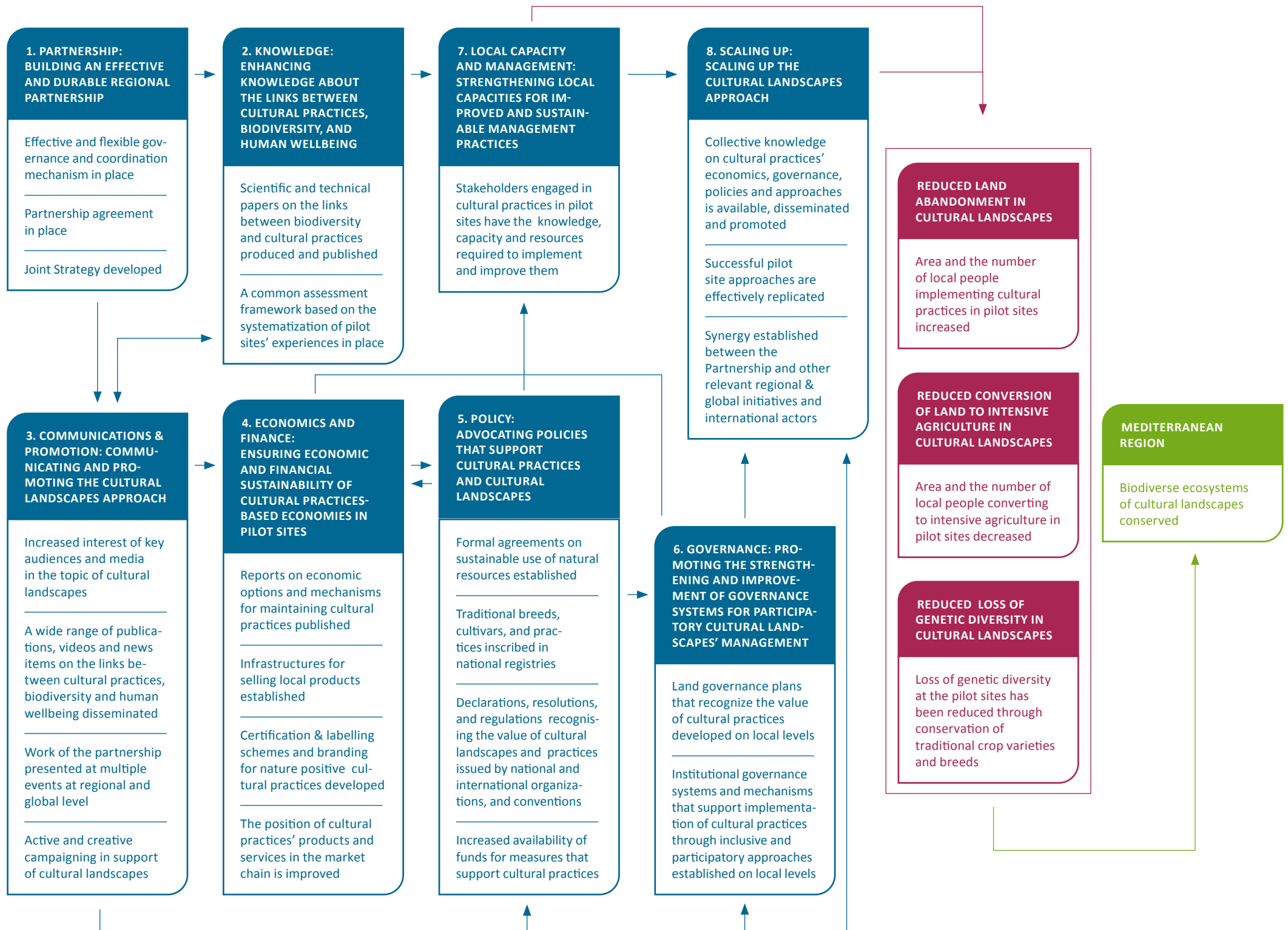


THE PARTNERSHIP



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2. PROGRESS AND ACTIVITIES

With the objective of sustaining biodiversity, climate, economy, and human welfare in cultural landscapes, we implemented strategies across diverse systems in Mediterranean mountain ranges, lowland areas, and islands, we enhanced nature-positive cultural practices that support local livelihoods, strengthened local capacity, advocated for cultural practices, promoted participatory governance and landscape management, and encouraged the replication of successful methods across target sites and beyond.

Joint implementation of cross-cutting approaches – including advocacy for improved regional policies in support of cultural landscapes and beneficial practices, promoting exchange of methodologies and expertise, and communicating the value and visibility of cultural landscapes to decision-makers and wider society – allowed partners to develop an effective and lasting regional alliance for nature and culture.

STRATEGY 1: PARTNERSHIP

To build an effective and lasting regional partnership, a consortium of 14 NGOs across the Mediterranean dedicated to the promotion and protection of cultural landscapes established the AMNC. The AMNC then:

- developed and adopted a Partnership Agreement based on a shared vision, mission and identity;
- designed and applied a governance framework to enable it to operate effectively and flexibly;
- deployed a joint institutional, technical and fundraising strategy to sustain work at both collective and individual member levels beyond 2022.

STRATEGY 2: KNOWLEDGE

To demonstrate the links between cultural practices and biodiversity, and how such practices support human well-being and climate resilience, AMNC gathered, generated, and disseminated knowledge about them. Main activities included:

- assessing the prevalence of cultural practices and the status and extent of cultural landscapes;
- monitoring soil, flora, and fauna in relation to cultural practices sustaining them;
- compiling and disseminating knowledge on links between cultural practices, biodiversity, climate, and human well-being;
- developing a methodological framework for assessing the links between biodiversity, cultural practices, and community well-being, based on systematizing experiences in pilot sites.

STRATEGY 3: COMMUNICATION AND PROMOTION

To promote the cultural landscapes approach at national and international levels, the AMNC developed common messages for key audiences, produced promotional material, and ran campaigns to raise awareness amongst policy makers and the wider public. Our main activities included:

- using communication tools such as a new website for the AMNC partnership, three films on cultural practices, online platforms such as the Common Land Network, and conducting outreach at local and international levels;
- organising festivals such as the Harvest Festival in Morocco, the Transhumance Festival in Spain, and the celebration of the Green Heart of Cork in Portugal;
- launching social media campaigns targeting key United Nations policy processes on biodiversity, climate, pastoralism, food systems;
- increasing the profile of the partnership and its work with key stakeholders through creative social media campaigns, podcasts and other tools;
- engaging key stakeholders in actions supportive of cultural landscapes in the Mediterranean, such as local governments, through meetings and direct contact.

STRATEGY 4: ECONOMICS AND FINANCE

To contribute to the economic and financial sustainability of cultural practices-based economies and the resilience of cultural landscapes, AMNC improved and disseminated knowledge about them and promoted changes in production systems and value chains that supported the profitability and resilience of such systems. Our main activities included:

- identifying, assessing, and applying economic mechanisms for maintaining and expanding cultural practices in pilot sites, including certification and labelling systems, new market-based tools such as payments for ecosystem services, and the creation or expansion of niche markets;
- improving the market position of the products and services of beneficial practices;
- exploring and promoting the establishment of mechanisms for encouraging public and private investment to support cultural practices.

STRATEGY 5: POLICY

To advocate for international, national, and subnational policies in key sectors (agriculture, land use and land governance, water, economic and fiscal policy) that support the maintenance of cultural practices, AMNC engaged in policymaking processes and promoted changes in legal frameworks. Our main activities included:

- developing and/or joining alliances with other stakeholders for joint policy actions, such as the European Good Food Good Farming network and others;
- publishing policy briefs on topics like extensive grazing and pastoralism, case studies and other related materials, including provision of technical know-how for public administration and policy makers;
- engaging in dialogue with decision-makers and authorities at various levels to influence their positions on policy processes.

STRATEGY 6: GOVERNANCE

To increase recognition of participatory cultural landscape management and improve it, AMNC developed land governance and land-use plans at national, sub-national, and/or local levels. Our main activities included:

- enhancing participatory cultural landscapes management, building on traditional governance systems such as *Agdals*¹ and *Himas*², and the practices of traditional communities, including nomadic pastoralists and transhumants;
- developing land stewardship schemes with farmers, land owners, practitioners, local governments and resource users.

STRATEGY 7: LOCAL CAPACITY AND MANAGEMENT

To strengthen local stakeholders' administrative, legal, socio-economic and technical capacities, AMNC engaged with local communities in multiple ways. Our main activities included:

- providing expert advice and support to help sustain the use of cultural practices over the long-term, for example on cultivation and food processing in Hima communities, innovations in terrace agriculture in the Shouf landscape, improved water management techniques in Menorca;
- producing and providing practical materials such as seeds and fencing and creating community plant nurseries to improve implementation of the practices;
- facilitating knowledge transfer and networking opportunities, such as exchanges between farmers in the Iberian Peninsula on the dehesas and montados experiences.

STRATEGY 8: SCALING UP THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPES APPROACH

To scale up the cultural landscapes approach, AMNC compiled and disseminated major approaches, tools and methods to stakeholders and institutions at local, national, and international levels. Our main activities included:

- replicating successful approaches and experiences in other areas and landscapes, including Menorca, Kythera, Livanjsko polje, and additional areas in High Atlas and West Bekaa;
- developing synergies between our programme and other global initiatives and international actors, such as the process for the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists and the International Land Coalition.

¹ Found across the Maghreb, *Agdal* is a traditional land management practice that governs access to communal pastoral lands and resources, mainly by setting opening and closing dates.

² *Hima* is a traditional governance system for organizing, maintaining, regulating, and utilizing natural pasture and rangelands that has existed in Arab countries for more than 1,500 years.

KEY LESSONS

Partners supported and protected cultural landscapes of high ecological value in the Mediterranean, delivering significant benefits in numerous areas. Here are several of our key learnings.

1. Increasing scientific knowledge and providing evidence of the benefits of cultural practices for biodiversity and human well-being was essential. Translating this knowledge into action in the field is now critical.
2. Employing diverse tools to share knowledge with different interest groups, practitioners and decision-makers created significant impact. Collecting regular feedback from the field was also essential.
3. Exploring the themes of cultural landscapes and cultural practices provided great opportunities to communicate and address global environmental, social and economic challenges.
4. Working on policy proved to be difficult because we had to adapt our approach in different geopolitical contexts. However, efforts in pilot sites have high transformative potential.
5. Working in pilot sites, regardless of size, allowed us to prove the validity of our approach and helped us to scale impact significantly.
6. The MAVA Foundation's flexible approach to funding was key for successful project implementation that took into account local, political, and geopolitical contexts.
7. Community-based approaches such as land stewardship, Himas, and Agdals proved to be essential for successful governance, and sharing these approaches amongst partners was a critical part of building capacity.

3. ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACTS

The joint work of the partnership has led to increased knowledge of how cultural landscapes and practices benefit biodiversity and the livelihoods of communities. For example, we have demonstrated how mobile pastoralism increases biodiversity in rangelands, and the combined biodiversity and livelihood benefits of sustainable plant harvesting by communities.

Our efforts have made a real impact on the ground, through the establishment of five networks and 123 land stewardship agreements with local farmers in Spain, Greece, and Lebanon; and the development of participatory governance and management plans in Lebanon (4 new Himas) and Morocco (2 Agdals). Across the sites, 46,000 people are implementing a diversity of cultural practices, the area under sustainable landscape management has reached 50,000 ha, and local producers have increased their capacity.

On-farm conservation has resulted in 115 bio-indicator species being recorded and monitored, 127 native crop varieties conserved in situ, and 43 livestock breeds supported. Monitoring systems have been developed in all sites, and a joint strategy for further application and promotion of the cultural landscapes approach has been agreed.

AMNC members have created and applied five certification and labelling systems, achieving better positioning for 97 selected products from beneficial practices in markets. In parallel, AMNC has improved the image of products through branding and marketing, and also supported direct sales in nine project sites, involving for example 26 communities in the High Atlas, 37 farms in Menorca, 44 farms in Lemnos and Kythera.

The results of scientific research have been used for advocacy, with significant impacts. At the global level, 2026 was designated by the United Nations as International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, with substantial input from AMNC. In the EU, the Common Agricultural Policy will dedicate around 25% of its direct payments and additional specific rural development measures to the support of cultural landscapes – a decision that was actively advocated by AMNC members. At the national level, several notable results have been achieved by AMNC, including the allocation of more than €2 bn per year for maintaining cultural practices in Spain and Portugal, the adoption of a new law for protected areas in Lebanon, and the recognition of land stewardship as a cultural practice in Balearic agrarian law.

CASE STUDY 1: LAND STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENTS IN THE SHOUF MOUNTAIN REGION OF LEBANON

Building on previous work on water-saving terrace agriculture, our land stewardship actions in the Shouf Mountain region of Lebanon consisted in restoring agricultural lands and rebuilding stonewall terraces (a traditional practice), and developing formal agreements with land owners (as well as municipalities and mayors representing those no longer living in villages). We supported implementation of traditional practices such as no-tilling, multi-cropping, use of native species, water management, and stonewall agricultural terraces.

Our innovative approach encouraged self-assessments for sustainable practices and biodiversity monitoring, as well as business development, marketing, and networking. A community-based approach that improves livelihoods has had real impact on ecosystem sustainability through 47 agreements covering 60 ha. The Al Shouf Cedar Society (ACS) has also created links and exchanged lessons and experiences with similar farmer groups in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Mediterranean, including El Rincón de los Cerezos in Spain and Cinque Terre in Italy.



Land stewardship agreements have contributed to restoring large areas of the landscape in the Shouf. Stonewall terraces, a cultural practice applied for restoration, help mitigate threats like fires and soil erosion and further local economic development.

CASE STUDY 2: MENORCA: ACCOMPANYING FARMERS ON THEIR JOURNEY TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

The aim of the “Custòdia Agrària” (Land Stewardship) programme of the Balearic Group of Ornithology and Defense of Nature - Menorca (GOB Menorca) is to drive a shift to more sustainable agriculture on the island of Menorca. We support farmers’ transition to sustainable agricultural practices by encouraging the use of locally-adapted breeds and varieties, and the responsible use of water and natural resources, and by strengthening product market appeal.

Becoming a sustainable farmer is not always easy, especially at the beginning of the process, and we believe that those who decide to embark on this challenging journey should be supported and recognized. As consumers, as politicians, as landowners, and together as a society, we share responsibility for making sustainable agriculture economically profitable. As a facilitator, synergist, and catalyst, GOB has helped 37 farms covering 2,700 ha, or 4% of the total surface of Menorca, to change their production practices.



With the accompaniment of GOB, Joan has shifted from Frisson cow to local Menorcan cow, has successfully started to do direct selling, shortening the value chain, and is able now to provide the water for its cattle just from the rain.

KEY LESSONS ON IMPACTS

Supporting cultural practices has proven to be a powerful holistic approach for the sustainable management of cultural landscapes in pilot sites, offering significant potential for replication across the region. The approach allows creativity and innovation to flourish, offers practical and effective solutions, and nurtures a sense of pride amongst communities. Here are some of our key lessons.

1. Working closely with local communities is crucial for delivering impact on the ground.
2. Establishing a solid scientific base and field-testing different approaches is a demanding yet necessary process for designing and implementing effective solutions.
3. Creating strong local networks increases ownership at the community level and helps secure lasting results.
4. Building local capacity by combining traditional knowledge and innovative approaches helps maintain and enhance cultural practices and adapt them to meet modern-day needs.
5. Participating in international and regional networks is necessary for achieving policy impact.
6. Mechanisms such as certification systems and product branding add value to products, underpin financial sustainability, and stimulate farmer and practitioner engagement. But these mechanisms must be adapted to meet varying needs and realities across different landscapes and communities.
7. Working in a strategic partnership added significant value by scaling impact to a level beyond that achievable by any individual partner working alone, and by connecting our work at local, national and international levels.
8. Addressing economic and financial sustainability proved to be crucial for achieving impact. This included developing mechanisms and infrastructure to support the momentum we created around cultural landscapes, such as the creation of physical and digital marketplaces for sustainable products from project sites.

4. WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT

The AMNC will continue its efforts to preserve cultural landscapes and practices, and help Mediterranean communities address biodiversity loss and climate change. We will do this by supporting sustainable agri-food systems, stewardship for economically viable cultural landscapes, landscape scale climate change mitigation and adaptation, and community-based conservation. In order to do this, funding has been secured to continue work in all field sites, but funding for AMNC coordination and transversal work remains to be obtained.

The partnership will foster regional and international **collaboration** to mobilize funds and broaden the network of partners working on cultural land use practices that support the sustainability and climate resilience of biodiversity-rich cultural landscapes and seascapes. It will also **enhance knowledge** about links and interdependencies between cultural practices, biodiversity, climate, and human welfare, exchanging methodologies and innovative ideas.

AMNC members will contribute to **sustainable economies based on cultural practices** by promoting local solutions, including sustainable production and consumption, certification and labelling, food security and sovereignty, economic inclusion, agricultural transition, and circular economy. The partnership will also continue to **advocate policies** that support beneficial practices and cultural landscapes at local, national, and international levels. And strengthening **governance systems** and local capacity will be combined with encouraging **community-based conservation**. Finally, scaling up the cultural landscapes approach will enhance heritage-based learning and extend the reach and impact of our work.

“The AMNC partnership is a unique opportunity to share experiences from across multiple Mediterranean landscapes and ensure their preservation as a living heritage for generations to come.”

Pierre Carret, Grant Director, Mediterranean Hotspot Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund

“To conserve the land, the production system should be self-sufficient and external inputs minimized. This has required adapting the livestock number to the land’s capacity.”

Maria Tudurí, Farmer from Menorca “Custòdia Agrària” Programme

