



How to foster a citizen-led 'new fire culture' in the Mediterranean?

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CONTEXT

In line with global trends, the Valencian region (Spain) is experiencing increasingly extreme wildfires, like the 2022 Vall d'Ebo and 2023 Villanueva de Viver wildfires. These are exacerbated by entangled socioenvironmental factors like climate change, increasingly depopulated rural territories, disconnection between humankind and nature, and wildfires managed predominantly through technocratic approaches.

Rural grassroots movements are emerging amid the worsening wildfire scenarios, advocating for local autonomy to build socioenvironmental resilience in wildfire-prone territories. Inspired by these citizen movements, Isabeau Ottolini and her colleagues propose a transformative paradigm – a 'new fire culture' – to elicit critical reflections on current wildfire management and build socioenvironmental just futures.

OUTCOMES



Left: The Maimona River in Castelló (Spain), in August 2021. Right: Same spot, in April of 2023 after the Villanueva de Viver fire.

A paradigm shift towards a new fire culture is more necessary than ever to (re)build more reciprocal relationships with our fiery kin, as well as amongst ourselves.

Initial **guiding principles** for a new fire culture are:

- Acknowledging **fire** as part of the **socioenvironmental system**.
- Strengthening **transdisciplinary collaborations** and **decentralised governance**.
- Moving beyond fire management towards a **holistic socioenvironmental framework**.

IMPACT ON WILDFIRE MANAGEMENT

- **Technocratic wildfire management** approaches are **limited** in addressing the complex socioenvironmental factors driving unprecedented wildfires.
- It is time to **reframe the notion of society** as passive and ignorant individuals to one of a proactive and resilient citizenry who seeks to reclaim local agency and can make valuable contributions to local wildfire management.
- **Transdisciplinary processes** are needed among local inhabitants, academics, and practitioners to **collectively explore and build a new fire culture** adapted to their unique socioenvironmental systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

- Support **rural grassroots movements** and enhance their decision-making power.
- **Acknowledge** and incorporate **diverse ways of knowing** (including experiential and situated knowledges) in wildfire management.
- Take on **holistic perspectives** to co-construct broader **socioenvironmental resilience**.

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Collaborators



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