

OC 1.8 How people perceive the ecosystem services provided by Pyrenean oak forests

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The Pyrenean oak (*Quercus pyrenaica*) is an autochthonous tree in Portugal, predominant in the supramediterranean north and center inland. Despite having an extensive potential area in Portugal, the species has a fragmented distribution due to the

long-lasting impact of agriculture and afforestation. The ecological meaning and the vast range of ecosystem services (ES) provided by oak forests are recognized by the scientific community. However, the public's perception of those forests' importance as ES providers, is unknown. We aim to evaluate people's perceptions on Pyrenean oak forests as a source of ES in the CULTIVAR project study area (www.icultivar.pt). An online survey was carried out to assess: a) which ES are assumed to be provided by those forests (provisioning, regulating and maintenance, and cultural services), b) which ES the respondents consider to benefit directly and c) how much they value the ES obtained and how to increase this value. The main perceived provisioning services were: the use of oak as firewood, the use of oak forest as a hunting site, a livestock grazing site, and for wild mushroom collection. Nevertheless, most respondents consider not directly profit from those ES, except for firewood and mushroom picking. In opposition, cultural services seem to be well perceived and enjoyed, being forest oaks considered as a natural heritage that must be preserved, and an important recreation and nature observation area. The ES respondents consider that society and themselves benefit directly from most of the regulation & maintenance ES provided by oak forest. The public's opinion about this forest value and ES are critical in helping policymakers' decisions and fostering more suitable policies for the sector. The perceptions about such forests and their benefits will also help to identify opportunities to improve communication strategies, which might greatly impact society and its various stakeholders.