



Management of fire affected areas. Beyond the environmental question

Paulo Pereira

Mykolas Romeris University, Environmental Management Centre, Vilnius, Lithuania (paulo@mruni.eu)

Fire is considered a natural element of the ecosystems. With exception of the polar areas, fire visited with more or less frequency all the earth biomes, determining the ecosystems characteristics, to the point that several species are fire-dependent to survive and are very resilient to their impact. Fire was a fundamental element for human evolution, which allowed us to cook, manipulation of metals, hunt, protect from predators and clear fields for agriculture. In some extension, we are only humans because of fire. In the last millennium fire was used to shape the landscape as we know today. One good example of this is the Mediterranean environment, a landscape where the ecology is not understood without the presence of fire. Until the end of the first half of the last century, fire was used frequently by farmers to landscape management. However, due to rural abandonment, change of life styles, disconnection with rural environment and lack of understanding of fire role in the ecosystems. The perception of fire changed and nowadays is understood by the population as a threat to the ecosystems, rather than a tool that helped to manage the landscape and help us in our evolution. This change of vision promoted the idea that fire has negative impacts in the ecosystems and should be banned from the nature. Something that is impossible. All these perceptions facilitated the implementation of fire-suppression policies, which today are recognized by science as one of the causes of the occurrence of frequent high-severity wildfires, with important impacts on the ecosystems, economy and society. However, most of the ecosystems can regenerate sooner or later, depending of the fire severity and the ecosystem affected. Thus, fire is not an ecological, but social and economic problem, due to lives loss and the temporary destruction of ecosystems, which local communities depend on. In this context, when we are managing fire affected areas, it goes much beyond environmental questions, and our actions aim more to reduce the social and economic impacts of fire.