



European Heritage Days, an opportunity to promote farmers' contributions to cultivated plant biodiversity

Summary

The European Heritage Days (EHD), organised by the EU and the European Council, take place in 50 countries every September. Focusing on a different topic every year, the main purpose of this event is to make monuments and sites typically closed to the public the rest of the year widely accessible to citizens. Dematerialized cultural heritage, like the transmission of traditional knowledge and practices, are also celebrated. Through interactions with these spaces, citizens are invited to visit and learn about their built cultural heritage. As part of the Divinfood project, this event has been used as an occasion to promote cultivated plant biodiversity. Partners emphasised a broader understanding of cultural and natural heritage, going beyond an exclusive focus on material structures to include agriculture and crops.

Introduction

While monuments and sites promote and foster learning environments around built heritage, they could offer opportunities for rendering more visible connections with cultivated plant biodiversity. This is particularly important when such spaces may involve food and culinary practices. While some crops, like pulses, are currently being revalued by public actors, they still remain undervalued by citizen-consumers. This is the case for pulses in France. In this type of situation, these spaces can act as potential hubs for engaging with citizens to promote cultivated plant biodiversity, and local farmers' practices. For example, at the *Musée du Lauragais* in Castelnaudary, France, which is a museum devoted to the celebrated local dish of *cassoulet*, an EHD event was organised in September 2023. Coinciding with the museum's exhibition on the history of *cassoulet* - a dish to which citizens and local actors are strongly attached - this event was an occasion for "opening up" the discussion about the key ingredient: the white *lingot* bean. Rather than being considered a mere ingredient for the traditional dish, participants debated the practices around and perceptions of the bean as a stand-alone food. Fostering such dialogue and debate led to a better understanding of citizens' uses and barriers to use of the bean. This is useful information for both experienced and future farmers interested in the crop.

Benefits (and limits) for practitioners or stakeholders

The benefits of organising such an event are:

- Building ties with "intermediary" local actors, such as the cultural service sector, which could be useful for mobilising and engaging with citizen-consumers in the future,
- Developing knowledge about know-how, expertise and good practices rediscovered from formerly common practices; and learning about traditional local knowledge and reviving traditional practices through interactions with local knowledge "gatekeepers".
- Valorisation of neglected or non-utilised varieties of crops in the context of traditional agroecological approaches and culinary heritage.
- Raise awareness of the heritage-based values of neglected and/or underutilised cultivated plant biodiversity.
- Sensitise the public to novel ways of thinking about, eating, and planting such crops.

Practical recommendations

A few practical recommendations to fully benefit from European Heritage Days' opportunity are listed below:

- In accordance with the annual topic of the EHD, identify suitable and locally-adapted content and spatial configurations. For example, valuing the existing infrastructure (buildings, monuments, etc.) that can be suitable for promoting cultivated plant biodiversity or pre-existing locally-anchored relations, acquaintances to foster and facilitate those configurations.
- Get in timely contact with the EHD's National Coordinators and country specific contact points to present the initiative and describe it convincingly in the application form
- Build on existing spaces and monuments/sites that are already identified and esteemed by citizens (museums, associations, etc.)
- Build on existing relations and ties with local farmers and contact them in advance to increase chances that they participate on this day. While it is easy to ensure a minimum engagement/contact with visiting citizens, it is at times difficult to ensure farmers' participation on these days (lack of time, etc.). Building on existing relations can be a way of increasing farmers' participation.
- Design an interactive, participatory format catering to citizen/consumer tastes if possible. For instance, in France, through bite-size tastings of bean-based recipes, citizens were invited to discuss current consumption practices as well as other ways of eating the bean.
- Consider such events as opportunities for collecting data in a more convivial format (avoid using a questionnaire that people are asked to fill out). For instance, by using paper boards with 1 or 2 key questions, ask participants to write out their answers on post-its. It is a way for them to feel included, while also preserving anonymity. Invite a wide range and diversity of actors: citizens, public authorities, farmers, processors, etc. Locate the stand at the site/monument's entrance, in order to increase potential interactions.



European Heritage Days
Journées européennes
du patrimoine

Further information

Weblinks

European Heritage Days website: <https://www.europeanheritagedays.com>

European Heritage Days National coordinators contact points: <https://www.europeanheritagedays.com/contact>

About this practice abstract and DIVINFOOD

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DIVINFOOD - Co-constructing interactive short and mid-tier food chains to value agrobioDiversity IN healthy plant-based FOOD, is running **from March 2022 to Feb 2027**.

The overall goal of DIVINFOOD (a multi-actor, participatory project) is to facilitate the use and increase the value of Neglected and Underutilised Crops (NUCs) in food chains to foster healthier diets and more sustainable food systems.

Project website: www.divinfood.eu

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