

The first Oasis Ecomuseum of Morocco, Douiret-Sbâa: a co-creative process to adapt to climate change

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What is an ecomuseum?

- Ecomuseums are **participatory processes** aimed at the recognition, care, and management of local cultural heritage, with the goal of fostering sustainable social, cultural, environmental, and economic development.
- Ecomuseums are **creative and inclusive pathways** for the cultural growth of local communities, founded on the active participation of residents and the collaboration of institutions and associations.

“The Ecomuseum Manifesto” (Milan – ICOM 2016)

Ecomuseums as co-creative processes for:

- Empowering **community-led governance**, transferring authority from institutions to local residents as primary stewards of heritage.
- Functioning as **living laboratories** for interactive projects where communities co-design and test initiatives.
- **Integrating diverse knowledge systems**, blending local and scientific expertise to develop culturally-grounded, **sustainable solutions**.

The goals of an ecomuseum are to:

- Valorize **living and intangible** environmental and cultural heritage
- Promote **sustainable local development**
- Enhance **cultural diversity** and a **sense of place**
- Foster **networking and collaboration** within and among communities



Community well-being , sustainable development and the **defense of the local environment** in the context of the climate challenge are founding themes of ecomuseums activities.

Tools to engage in the co-creation of an ecomuseum

- **Listening Tables**

- Spaces for open dialogue — the community defines objectives and actions collectively to care for the local cultural and environmental heritage.
- These emerge from people's memories, experiences, and expectations, thus fostering shared responsibility.

- **Active Citizenship**

- The ecomuseum acts as a process of active co-creation, involving local authorities, associations, schools, artisans, farmers, and citizens.
- Encourages collaboration beyond bureaucracy and political boundaries.

- **Community Pact**

- A shared commitment among all stakeholders involved.
- Builds trust, defines common goals, and guides sustainable territorial development.

Tools for Knowledge and Collective Vision

- **Community Maps**

- Not static products, but living reflections of how people *see and value* their territory.
- Highlight places, people, memories, and meanings unique to each territory.
- Create emotional and cultural connections between communities and their environment.

- **Permanent Observatories**

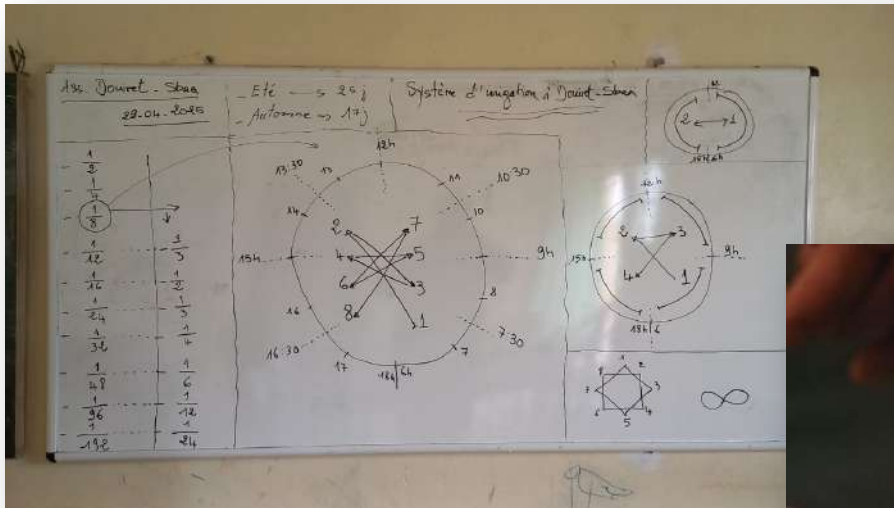
- Dynamic knowledge hubs to document, monitor, and share local heritage.
- Support an ongoing understanding of cultural and environmental aspects.
- Encourage continuous learning and collaboration across generations.

How can ecomuseums facilitate participatory water management and co-creative processes to adapt to climate change?

Douiret-Sbâa and its oasis, Morocco



- **Aïn Sbaâ spring** has sustained the oasis for centuries
- Water flows at night fills the **main reservoir** for irrigation
- Water shared through a **precise wooden measuring system**
- **Irrigation cycles** adjusted seasonally for sustainable aquifer recharge
- **Maintenance tasks shared by draw** — collective responsibility



Each person waters according to their time share:
 $1/2 = 5h$, $1/4 = 2h30$, $1/8 = 1h15$.

The sacred Aïn Sbaâ spring



- Protected by strict ecological and spiritual rules
- Access follows rituals: women collect at dawn/dusk; livestock at set times
- The community takes care of it to maintain its health and functions

- Four elders act as custodians of the spring.
- This governance combines both faith and practicality, supported by ancient technologies.



The irrigation cycle lasts 25 days in summer.

The local development association sustains this heritage by documenting oral histories, training youth, and pursuing UNESCO recognition as intangible cultural heritage.

→ These all elements make the village an ecomuseum unaware of being an ecomuseum!



Douiret-Sbâa: Towards an Ecomuseum

- **WAMU-NET & local partners** collaborating to officially recognize Douiret-Sbâa as an **ecomuseum**
- Goal: **valorize traditional knowledge**, engage community & visitors in a living heritage process
- **Fieldwork and local consultations** already underway
- **Community-led mapping** and heritage documentation in progress
- **Next steps:** expand heritage documentation and formal decision on governance structure
- A **living, evolving process** — protecting Douiret-Sbâa's water system and **inspiring other communities** facing climate and social change

In conclusion, the ecomuseum of Douiret-Sbâa could contribute in:

- Formalizing the existing, equitable water-sharing system as a model of community-led governance.
- Acting as a lab where traditional irrigation techniques are not just displayed but actively practiced, tested, and adapted by the community to address modern challenges like climate change.
- **Bridging generations and disciplines, integrating the community's precise traditional knowledge with modern science to co-create innovative, culturally-grounded strategies for water and oasis sustainability.**
- Finding ways and resources to consolidate the area's heritage to be passed down to future generations so they don't lose their identity and connection with their cultural and environmental roots.

Thank you for your attention!

