27th Congress of the European Vegetation Survey
23-26 May, 2018
Wrocław, Poland

Vegetation survey 90 years after the publication of Braun-Blanquet's textbook – new challenges and concepts

Book of Abstracts

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Botanical Garden
University of Wroclaw
Pl. Uniwersytecki 1
50-137 Wrocław

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Quercus pubescens forests in Italy. A syntaxonomical issue over three vegetation classes

Di Pietro R.[1], Angiolini L.[2], Armiraglio S.[3], Caccianiga M.[4], Ciaschetti G.[5], Gigante D.[6], Rosati L.[7], Terzi M.[8] & Viciani D.[9]

[1]Department of Planning, Design and Architecture Technology, Section of Environment and Landscape Sapienza University of Rome, Rome (Italy)
[2]Department of Life Sciences, University of Siena, Siena (Italy)
[3]Brescia Civic Museum of Natural Sciences, Brescia, (Italy)
[4]Dipartimento di Bioscienze, Università degli Studi di Milano, Milano (Italy)
[5]Ente Parco Nazionale della Majella (Italy)
[6]Department of Chemistry, Biology and Biotechnology, University of Perugia, Perugia (Italy)
[7]School of Agricultural, Forestry and Environmental Sciences, University of Basilicata, Potenza, (Italy)
[8]Institute of Bioscience and BioResources (IBBR), Italian National Council of Research, Bari (Italy)
[9]Department of Biology, University of Florence, Florence (Italy).

Presenting author's name and surname: Romeo Di Pietro
Presenting author's e-mail: romeo.dipietro@uniroma1.it

The Downy Oak (*Quercus pubescens* s.l.) in Italy is a quite common tree species. Although its occurrence in all the Italian administrative regions, and a potential role for forming zonal forest throughout the whole Italian Peninsula it is not easy to find *Q. pubescens* woods covering wide areas or exhibiting a sufficiently high cover degree of the dominant tree layer to not be considered a wooded grassland or shrubland. In fact, the *Quercus pubescens* woods find their coenological optimum within the south facing slopes of the colline and submontane belts where the millenary traditional agricultural land-use practices were carried out by the Italic populations. From a taxonomical point of view the pubescent-oaks are a still open issue. A wide degree of hybridization characterized all the species of white oaks occurring in Italy and hybrids exist even between those oak species seemingly showing very different ecological features (*Q. pubescens, Q. robur, Q. frainetto, Q. petraea*). Nonetheless, in addition to *Quercus pubescens*, the Italian taxonomical and phytosociological literature (especially that concerning the southern Italy) reports a wide range of other pubescent-oak names, some of them of still uncertain taxonomical status (e.g. *Q. virgiliana, Q. dalechampii, Q. leptobalana, Q. apennina, Q. amplifolia, Q. humilis, Q. congesta, Q. ichnusae*) which were widely used as guide species for phytosociological associations or even for the higher rank syntaxa. Owing to the wide ecological amplitude of *Quercus pubescens* s.l., both in terms of bioclimate and bedrock type, the classification of its woods at the class rank is also a highly debated issue. According to some authors (e.g. Brullo & Marcenò 1985; Brullo et al. 2009), the most of the southern Italy pubescent-oak forests are not to be referred to *Quercus pubescens* s.s. but to other pubescent-oak taxa (especially *Q. virgiliana* and *Q. dalechampii*) having a strictly steno-Mediterranean distribution and ecological features pertinent to the Thermo-Mediterranean and Meso-Mediterranean thermotypes. Accordingly their forests were classified within the *Quercetea ilicis* whereas the pubescent-oak associations occurring in the temperate zones of the Italian peninsula were included in the *Querco-Fagetea*. Other authors (e.g. Blasi et al. 2004) disagreed with this position and considered all the pubescent-oak s.l. associations as belonging

to *Quercus-Fagetea* by virtue of the deciduous character of the guide-species. The Eurovegchecklist (Mucina et al. 2016) put forth the proposition that all the pubescent oak forests are to be considered as the evolution (or the remnants) of a previous form of steppe-forests coming from the East and therefore to be classified in the *Quercetea pubescentis*. In this contribution we have statistically analysed all the *Quercus pubescens* s.l. communities described for the Italian Peninsula at present and proposed a syntaxonomic and coenological interpretation on the basis of floristic, ecological and epionthological considerations.