

**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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The EVS is a Working Group of the International Association for Vegetation Science.

Cover design by SABAT - STUDIO GRAFICZNE

Printed by SABAT - STUDIO GRAFICZNE

ISBN: 978-83-950944-0-8

Prinrun: 200 pieces

Wrocław, Poland 2018



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***Alnus glutinosa* woodlands in Sicily:
an example of paleo-temperate vegetation
at the southernmost limit of its distribution range**

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In the frame of phytosociological investigations focused on the riparian woody vegetation of Sicily, the meso-hygrophilous plant communities belonging to the alliance *Osmundo-Alnion glutinosae* are surveyed. In Sicily, this vegetation represents an outstanding example of paleo-temperate vegetation, mainly circumscribed to the mountain riparian environments featured by a very humid and fresh micro-climate, and floristically characterized by a pool of hygrophilous-calcifuge ferns, e.g. *Polystichum setiferum*, *Dryopteris affinis*, *Anthyrium filix-foemina*, *Osmunda regalis*, etc.

This vegetation, exclusively found on the Peloritani Mts., occurs along the rivers of more or less recessed deep valleys, but also along less steep watercourses where the bed widens into large pebble beds (locally called “fiumara”). The paleo-temperate floristic elements reached the southernmost Mediterranean territories during the last glacial maximum (LGM), thus getting in contact with the already established Mediterranean flora. As a consequence of the penetration of these species, the riparian vegetation of Sicily is also characterized by plant communities belonging to the *Osmundo-Alnion glutinosae* alliance and currently found on the metamorphic substrates of north-eastern Sicily.

These tree plant communities are included (as priority habitat) in the Annex I of the European Habitat Directive 92/43/ECC. Their relevance is linked both to their ecological features representing the climatic vegetation of the riparian environments with running oligotrophic waters and to the intrinsic vulnerability of the peripheral *Alnus glutinosa* populations being at the southern limit of their distribution range.

Our study is aiming at (1) delimiting the *Alnus glutinosa* populations in Sicily, (2) analysing structure and composition of the surveyed plant communities, (3) evaluating demographic trends of the *Alnus glutinosa*-dominated woodlands, (4) assessing the *Alnus glutinosa*-dominated plant communities at national level, and (5) finally, to provide more insights on the ecology of *Alnus glutinosa* woodlands in order to improve protection and management policies.