8TH INTERNATIONAL WILDLAND FIRE CONFERENCE | GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES: Towards an International Framework

What can we learn from community-based wildfire initiatives?

A case for more situated approaches towards Living with Wildfire

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

Isabeau Ottolini
PhD Candidate
E-mail:
iottolini@uoc.edu
Twitter:
@IsabeauOttolini

PyroLife

The PyroLife project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme MSCA-ITN-2019 – Innovative Training Networks under grant agreement Nº 860787

Today's program:

1. Introduction
2. Wildfires & Communication
3. Insights from a Community-based Wildfire initiative
4. Conclusions

Photo: I. Ottolini

Core question

How can community-based wildfire initiatives contribute to, and transform,

Wildfire Communication practices and knowledge?

Photo: I. Ottolini

Core question

How can community-based wildfire initiatives contribute to, and transform, Wildfire Communication practices and knowledge?

Methodology

- Literature review on wildfire (risk) communication
- Interviews with wildfire communication practitioners & scientists
- In-depth case study with a citizen association in Spain

Photo: I. Ottolini

Wildfire Risk Communication

Some examples →

Cal Fire, 2020 (USA)

National Fire Chiefs Council, 2020 (UK)

Brandweer, 2020 (Netherlands)

NSW Rural Fire Service, 2020 (Australia)

Generalitat Valenciana, 2020 (Spain)

Get Ready Queensland, 2020 (Australia)

CONAF, 2022 (Chile)

Western Cape Government, 2022 (South Africa)

AGIF, 2022 (Portugal)

Greenpeace Spain (2020)

Wildfire Risk Communication

- Aim: change citizen's behaviour for risk prevention & preparedness
- Approach: technocratic

  "specialized knowledge delivered by experts to the public" to *"nudge exposed populations"*
- Citizens: isolated, unknowledgeable individuals at wildfire risk

Cal Fire, 2020 (USA)

National Fire Chiefs Council, 2020 (UK)

Brandweer, 2020 (Netherlands)

NSW Rural Fire Service, 2020 (Australia)

Generalitat Valenciana, 2020 (Spain)

Get Ready Queensland, 2020 (Australia)

CONAF, 2022 (Chile)

Western Cape Government, 2022 (South Africa)

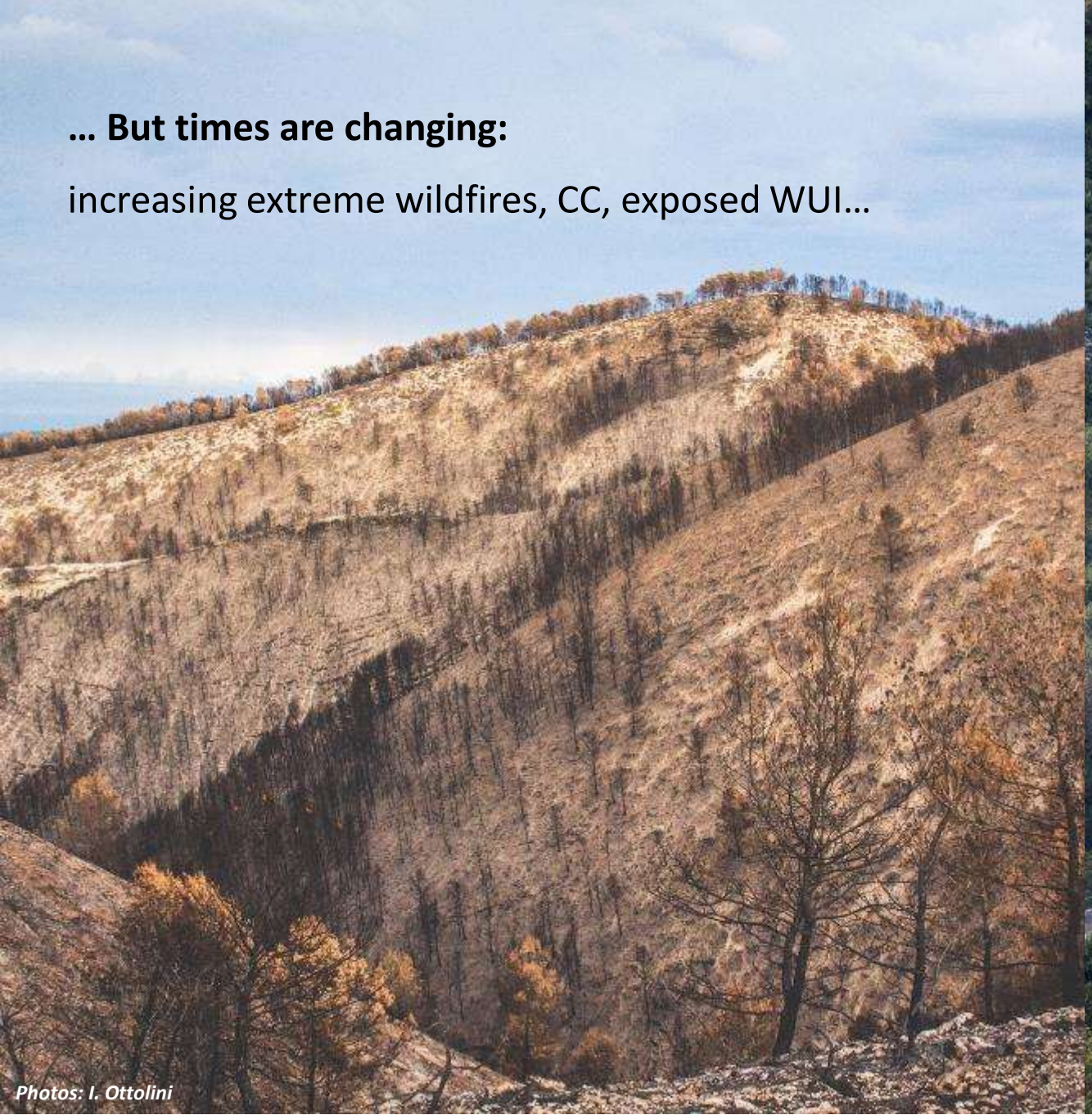
AGIF, 2022 (Portugal)

Greenpeace Spain (2020)

Literature: *Paveglio et al., 2009,* Coates, 2019, Ottolini (forthcoming)

… But times are changing:

increasing extreme wildfires, CC, exposed WUI…



Photos: I. Ottolini

Source: https://agroambient.gva.es/va/web/prevencion-de-incendios/informacion-y-comunicacion

Limitations (I)

- Top-down, expert-driven, unidirectional
- Generic & simple messages on RISK

Literature: *Christianson, McGee & Jardine (2011); Coates (2019); González-Hidalgo, Otero & Kallis (2014), Kim & Dutta (2009), Silva et al, (2019)*

Limitations (II)

- Problematic framings:
  - Disasters = events
  - Wildfires = *natural* disasters
  - Individual responsibility

Literature: *Coates (2019); Enríquez-Loya & Léon (2020); Lloro-Bidart & Finewood (2018)*

Photo: I. Ottolini

Consequences:

- Insufficient recognising & addressing **underlying** and **long-term processes** leading up to wildfires
- Overlooks other wildfire dimensions beyond **risk**
- Not embedded within **local contexts**
- **Excludes** voices, knowledge & expertise of 'non-experts'

Literature: *Coates (2019); Enríquez-Loya & Léon (2020); González-Hidalgo et al.(2014), Ottolini (forthcoming)*

Photo: I. Ottolini

Consequences:

- Insufficient recognising & addressing **underlying** and **long-term processes** leading up to wildfires
- Overlooks other wildfire dimensions beyond **risk**
- Not embedded within **local contexts**
- **Excludes** voices, knowledge & expertise of 'non-experts'

In response: **emergence of community-based initiatives**

Literature: *Coates (2019); Enríquez-Loya & Léon (2020); González-Hidalgo et al.(2014), Ottolini (forthcoming)*

Photo: I. Ottolini

Consequences:

- Insufficient recognising & addressing **underlying** and **long-term processes** leading up to wildfires
- Overlooks other wildfire dimensions beyond **risk**
- Not embedded within **local contexts**
- **Excludes** voices, knowledge & expertise of 'non-experts'

In response: **emergence of community-based initiatives**

e.g:

PEGOVIU

ABAI

PROJECTE FENIX

A.C.I.F. MARINA ALTA

Literature: *Coates (2019); Enríquez-Loya & Léon (2020); González-Hidalgo et al.(2014), Ottolini (forthcoming)*

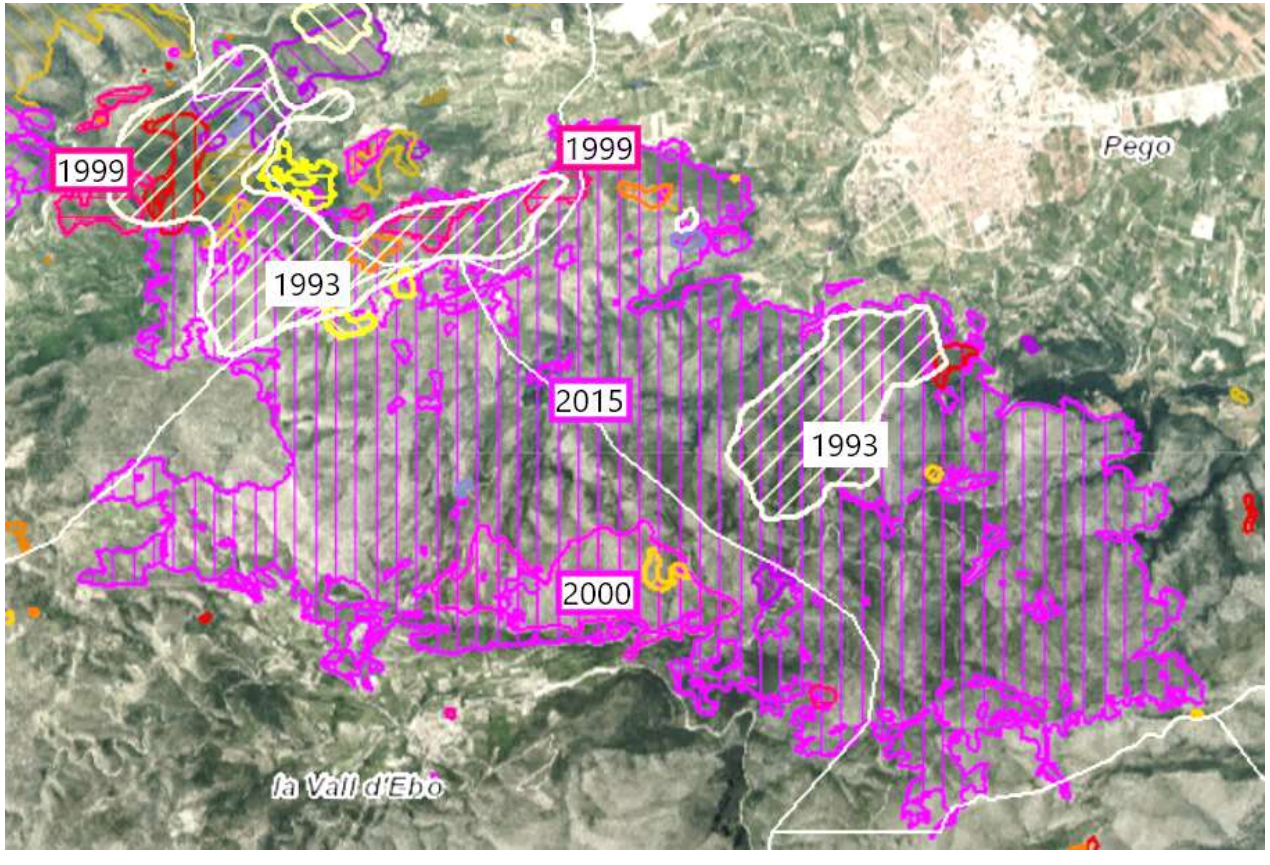
Photo: I. Ottolini

Case study background

- *Location:* Pego, Southeast Spain

Case study background

- *A fire landscape:* many recurrent wildfires



Source: Visor cartogràfic de la Generalitat

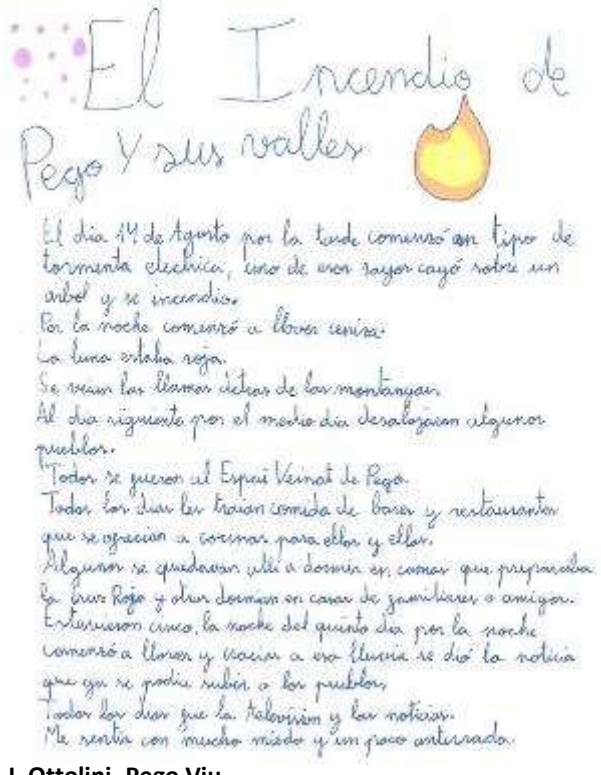
Case study background

- *2015 Vall d'Ebo wildfire:* catalyst for creating the citizen initiative

Photo: Pego Viu

Case study background

- *Activities:* land stewardship, advocacy, education…linked to wildfires and beyond (e.g. local traditional knowledge, sustainability…)

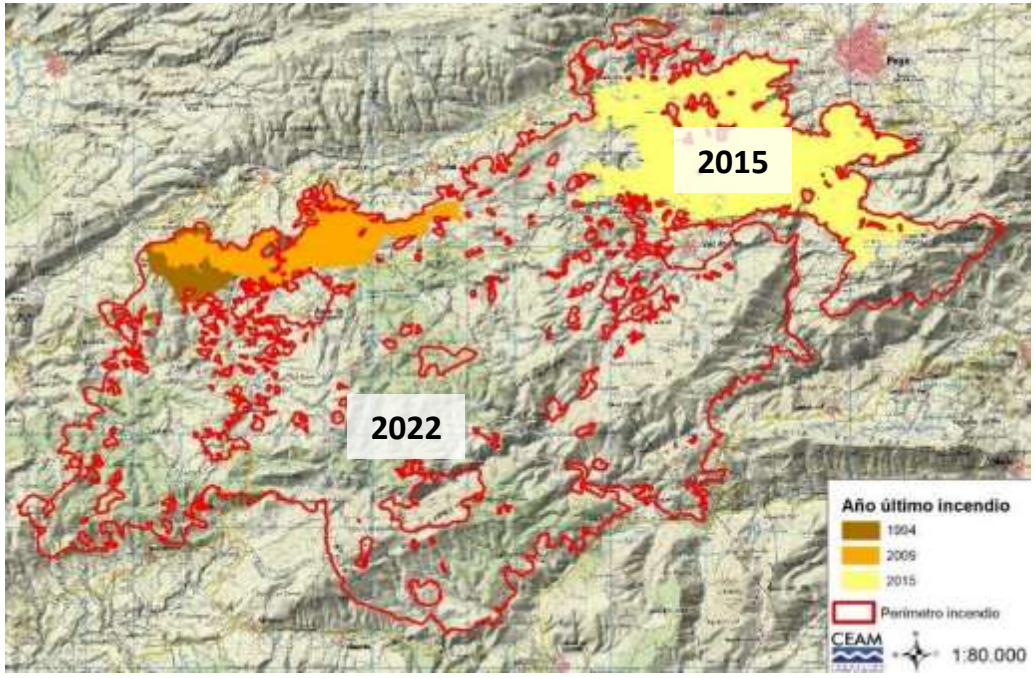

El Incendio de Pego y sus valles

El día 14 de Agosto por la tarde comenzó un tipo de tormenta electrica, uno de esos rayos cayó sobre un arbol y se incendio.
Por la noche comenzó a llover ceniza.
La luna estaba roja.
Se oian las llamas desde las montañas.
Al dia siguiente por el medio dia desalojaron algunos pueblos.
Todos se fueron al Espai Veinat de Pego.
Todos los dias les traian comida de bares y restaurantes que se ofrecian a cocinar para ellos y ellas.
Algunos se quedaron allí a dormir en camas que prepararon la Creu Roja y otros durmieron en casas de familiares o amigos.
Estuvieron cinco. La noche del quinto dia por la noche comenzó a llover y vacia a esa lluvia se dió la noticia que ya se podia subir a los pueblos.
Todos los dias que la televisión y las noticias.
Me sentia con mucho miedo y un poco asustada.

Photos: I. Ottolini, Pego Viu

Case study background

- *2022 wildfire*. Big socioenvironmental impact… but also a catalyst for:
  - Further consolidation of Pego Viu as a community-based initiative
  - New / increased collaborations, projects & activities (+ volunteers, knowledges, expertise…)



Source: CEAM, I.Ottolini

Case study background – communication during and after the 2022 wildfire

2022 Vall d'Ebo Wildfire

13 August	…	27 August

- **Emergency communication**
  (where's the fire, evacuations, offering/ asking help...)

- **'Reflective' communication**
  (why 2 big wildfires in 7 years? root causes wildfire, how to prevent future disasters…)

Case study background – communication during and after the 2022 wildfire

2022 Vall d'Ebo Wildfire

13 August	…	27 August	Post wildfire

Reflect and brainstorm: *Now what?*

Citizen meetings

Improve communication

Consolidation Comms team Pego Viu

Visits from universities, experts…

Create networks & collabs

Aplec del Territori

Create networks & foster local governance

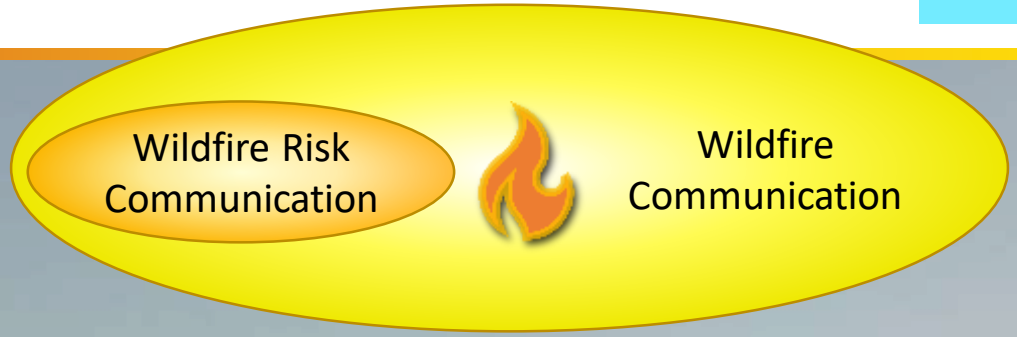
- **Emergency communication** (where's the fire, evacuations, offering/ asking help...)
- **'Reflective' communication** (why 2 big wildfires in 7 years? root causes wildfire, how to prevent future disasters…)

Photos: I. Ottolini

What can we learn from these **community-based wildfire initiatives** on communicating about wildfires?

Photo: I. Ottolini

Going **beyond wildfire RISK**



What can we learn from these **community-based wildfire initiatives** on communicating about wildfires?

Going **beyond wildfire RISK** → … or even beyond wildfires

What can we learn from these **community-based wildfire initiatives** on communicating about wildfires?

Going **beyond wildfire RISK** → … or even beyond wildfires → Deliberating on the **root causes of wildfires**

What can we learn from these **community-based wildfire initiatives** on communicating about wildfires?

'we've had 2 extreme wildfires in 7 years!'

Illustration: I. Ottolini

Going **beyond wildfire RISK** → … or even beyond wildfires → Deliberating on the **root causes of wildfires**

What can we learn from these **community-based wildfire initiatives** on communicating about wildfires?

→ Citizens as part of **(in)formal social networks**

Photo: I. Ottolini

Going **beyond wildfire RISK** → … or even beyond wildfires → Deliberating on the **root causes of wildfires**

What can we learn from these **community-based wildfire initiatives** on communicating about wildfires?

Citizens as part of **(in)formal social networks** → Enables **social learning**

Photo: I. Ottolini

Going **beyond wildfire RISK** → … or even beyond wildfires → Deliberating on the **root causes of wildfires**

What can we learn from these **community-based wildfire initiatives** on communicating about wildfires?

Citizens as part of **(in)formal social networks** → Enables **social learning**

Local knowledges, expertise & needs as starting point

Photo: Pego Viu

Going **beyond wildfire RISK** → … or even beyond wildfires → Deliberating on the **root causes of wildfires**

What can we learn from these **community-based wildfire initiatives** on communicating about wildfires?

Citizens as part of **(in)formal social networks** → Enables **social learning**

Local knowledges, expertise & needs as starting point

Processes of shared & negotiated meaning-making, collaborations…

Source: https://socdepoble.net/

Going **beyond wildfire RISK** → … or even beyond wildfires → Deliberating on the **root causes of wildfires**

What can we learn from these **community-based wildfire initiatives** on communicating about wildfires?

Citizens as part of **(in)formal social networks**

Enables **social learning**

Local knowledges, expertise & needs as starting point

Processes of shared & negotiated meaning-making, collaborations…

Deciding together:
What future do we want?
How can we achieve it?

Source: https://www.fvmp.es/iii-jornadas-de-radio-al-carrer-a-pego

Conclusions

Going beyond Wildfire Risk Communication implies considering:

- **Wildfires** are not just risks to manage, but **inherently part of our socioenvironmental systems**: a much broader communicative field!
- **Communities** are not unknowledgeable, isolated individuals, but **part of social networks**, where **social learning** takes place - through a diversity of knowledges and experiences

Photo: I. Ottolini

Conclusions

Going beyond Wildfire Risk Communication implies considering:

- **Wildfires** are not just risks to manage, but **inherently part of our socioenvironmental systems**: a much broader communicative field!
- **Communities** are not unknowledgeable, isolated individuals, but **part of social networks**, where **social learning** takes place - through a diversity of knowledges and experiences

Community-based wildfire initiatives are:

- A specific way of **co-creating more situated** ways of **Living with Wildfires**
- Center local peoples' **experiences, knowledges**, **interests** and **needs**
- **Goes beyond wildfire (risk)**, to work on the self-identified root causes of disaster

Conclusions

Going beyond Wildfire Risk Communication implies considering:

- **Wildfires** are not just risks to manage, but **inherently part of our socioenvironmental systems**: a much broader communicative field!
- **Communities** are not unknowledgeable, isolated individuals, but **part of social networks**, where **social learning** takes place - through a diversity of knowledges and experiences

Community-based wildfire initiatives are:

- A specific way of **co-creating more situated** ways of **Living with Wildfires**
- Center local peoples' **experiences, knowledges**, **interests** and **needs**
- **Goes beyond wildfire (risk)**, to work on the self-identified root causes of disaster

How can we (scientists, communicators, fire practitioners, policy-makers) support and engage with Community-based wildfire initiatives?

8th INTERNATIONAL WILDLAND FIRE CONFERENCE

Thank you!

Questions or comments?

iottolini@uoc.edu

The PyroLife project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme MSCA-ITN-2019 – Innovative Training Networks under grant agreement Nº 860787