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SEMINAR REPORT

PLATFORM MEETING NATURA 2000 GOVERNANCE

14 - 15 - 16 OCTOBER 2019
HOSTED BY LIFE BNIP



AGENCY
NATURE & FORESTS



Federal public service
HEALTH, FOOD CHAIN SAFETY
AND ENVIRONMENT



Wallonie

inverde



In cooperation with:

LIFE BNIP

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NEEMO

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1 Introduction

1.1 Context of the LIFE Platform Meeting on Natura 2000 governance

An “Integrated Project” (IP) is a new type of project under the new LIFE Regulation 2014-2020. This Regulation aims at the implementation of strategies or action plans required by European legislation in relation to Natura 2000, water, waste, air, climate change mitigation and adaptation. An Integrated Project enables EU member states to implement environmental and climate legislation. Integrated Projects provide funding for programmes, strategies and plans developed on regional, multi-regional or national level. What makes Integrated Projects unique is that they allow Member States to make use of other EU funding sources, such as agricultural, structural, regional, research funds and also national and private sector funding.

The Platform Meeting took place from 14 till 16 October 2019 in Brussels, Belgium, where it was hosted by the LIFE Belgian Nature Integrated Project (LIFE BNIP). The coordinating beneficiary of LIFE BNIP is the Agency of Nature and Forests of the Government of Flanders. The other partners are: Walloon Public Service, Federal Public Service, Natuurpunt, Natagora, Natagriwal and Natuurinvest.

In total 91 participants attended the Platform Meeting, originating from all 15 currently running LIFE IP nature projects and representing 15 different member states.

The objective of the Platform Meeting is to gather coordinators of Integrated Projects working on Natura 2000 governance to build contacts and network, create an open dialogue for future cooperation, exchange information and give recommendations to Integrated Projects on several topics such as project management, communication and evaluation.

To reach the objectives of the Platform Meeting, several interactive workshops, keynote speakers and plenary sessions were organised. Field visits around Belgium were included in the programme to demonstrate projects which are using complementary funding to implement Natura 2000. The field visits were organised by Natagriwal, Natuurpunt and the Agency of Nature and Forests.

1.2 The themes selected for the Platform Meeting

The LIFE Platform Meeting was organised around seven themes:

- Theme 1: Natura 2000 governance
- Theme 2: Project management
- Theme 3: Funding opportunities and the link with the implementation of Natura 2000
- Theme 4: Stakeholder engagement
- Theme 5: Capacity building
- Theme 6: Communication
- Theme 7: Dynamic habitats in the framework of the Nature Directives

The overall thread throughout the Platform Meeting was to exchange knowledge, to inspire LIFE projects with best practices and to build a network among IPs.

These themes were central to the thematic workshops. One of the themes, ‘funding opportunities and the link with the implementation of Natura 2000’, was the focus for the site visits on the second day of the Platform Meeting. The theme ‘Natura 2000 governance’ was the central focus point during the discussion panel and plenary session of the first day. The outcome of the thematic workshops was also presented in plenary.

1.3 Key topics of the Platform Meeting

During the Platform Meeting information and experience of several key-note speakers, experts, project coordinators and beneficiaries was gathered and an answer was searched to the following questions:

- What difficulties do IPs encounter regarding **project management** and how are they dealt with? What are the suggestions for the future?
- How can we improve the leverage effect of IPs on **Natura 2000 governance**?
- How do we manage **complementary funding** opportunities and how can we discover new strategies to implement Natura 2000 objectives?
- How can we improve **stakeholder engagement**? How can we create value for multiple stakeholders during the negotiation process by using the mutual gains approach?
- What are possible **capacity building** strategies for landowners, private stakeholders and Public authorities?
- What example are there of successful / unsuccessful **communication** strategies? How can we set up communication campaigns with even more impact? How can we select the best approach to measure this impact?
- What are the issues and possible solutions in relation to **dynamics in nature** that conflict with the achievement of the conservation goals that are fixed and legally enforced through the Nature Directives?
- What **recommendations** are there for current and future project beneficiaries, in the project development phase as well as in the project implementation phase?

1.4 Reading guide

Chapter 2 will focus on the plenary session of the first day of the conference. Chapter 3 summarizes the field visits of the second day. Chapter 4 presents the reports from the thematic workshops, including the best practices which have been concluded. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings for project beneficiaries. Chapter 6 presents the concluding speech of the conference. Finally, chapter 7 presents the networking activities of the Platform Meeting: the Natura 2000 movie night and an info market. Annex 1 includes the Platform Meeting programme, annex 2 includes the results of the survey completed by the participants to evaluate the conference and annex 3 provides the list of attendees of the conference.

2 Plenary session: Natura 2000 governance, LIFE as is and SNAPs

The plenary session was opened by Frank Vassen (DG Environment Nature Unit), highlighting the importance of the Platform Meeting and of LIFE IPs.

Evelyn Underwood of the Institute of European Environmental Policy highlighted Natura 2000 governance in all its aspects: what the Natura 2000 network has achieved, what the directives require, what member states do, what stakeholders are involved, what the PAF and EU funding constitutes and how you can use monitoring and assessment in frame of Natura 2000 governance.

Maja Mikosinska, head of sector LIFE Nature & Biodiversity of EASME, and Laszlo Becsy of DG Environment Nature unit presented the state of play regarding the LIFE Integrated Projects.

Frank Vassen of DG Environment Nature Unit presented the future of LIFE IPs dealing with biodiversity: SNaPs (strategic nature projects). He explained that SNaPs have an increased focus on mainstreaming nature and biodiversity policies into other policy areas and will implement the PAF established according to a new format (such as green infrastructure). SNaPs will also have a thematic extension towards other biodiversity issues and will be transnational.

Hubert Bedoret, the director of Natagriwal, provided an introduction to the first field excursion of the next day concerning Agri-Environment-Climate Measures and the Natura 2000 network in rural areas, with a focus on the Walloon region of Belgium. He provided an insight in how both essential tools are implemented in the Walloon region.



Figure 1: Frank Vassen opening the plenary session of the IP Platform Meeting on 14th of October



Figure 2: Administrator General Marleen Evenepoel concludes the Platform Meeting on 14th of October

Jos Rutten, general director of the Agency of Nature and Forests, presented the introduction to the second field excursion of the next day, concerning the integrated approach in Flanders regarding climate, nature and water. He highlighted the importance of the [Sigmaplan](#), which is a large and long term integrated plan which protects Flanders from floods combined with space for nature in the Scheldt estuary. The Sigmaplan includes an intensive co-operation with several governments and NGO's. The key to a successful implementation lies within this co-operation, but also in the thematic consultation and dialogue with the society.

The plenary session was closed by Marleen Evenepoel, the Administrator General of the Agency for Nature and Forests of the Government of Flanders. She emphasised that LIFE makes a difference by working together with stakeholders and providing financial means to act in the field. She underlined that the Platform Meeting is about exchanging experiences and know-how to tackle ever growing challenges such as climate change.



Figure 3: Group picture of the participants of the Platform Meeting of 14th of October 2019

3 Field visits: Funding opportunities and implementation of Natura 2000

3.1 Field visit 1: Implementation of species protection plans

The first field visit focussed on the concrete implementation of the species protection programmes of Montagu's harrier and Hamster. The field visit was situated at Hoegaarden and Racour, which shows the cross regional border context and the use of EARDF. Farmers are actively involved together with the nature conservation NGOs to implement the species protection programmes.

Natagriwal explained the concept of Agri-environmental schemes (AES) in Wallonia by showing field strips with various purposes (field flower conservation, small fauna, birds, ..). More information was provided about the structure of the AES and how this works for farmers. The link between the AES and the Harrier action plan has been elaborated.

The Agency of Nature and Forests explained how the species protection programme of the Hamster is being implemented, what actions took place and what were the successes and the pitfalls. The Regional landscape 'Zuid-Hageland' told the participants more about the '[Plan Harrier](#)': what is it, what's the role of the coordinators and the business planners, how is the cooperation with the farmers and the experts and how does the monitoring with the volunteers work. The management contracts were also explained. Thanks to the [subsidy grant within LIFE BNIP](#) for innovative, small scale projects of stakeholders, an [educational movie](#) was developed within 'Plan Harrier' and the landscape use of harriers was tracked thanks to GPS dataloggers.



Figure 4: species protection programmes being explained at Hoegaarden



Figure 5: concept of AES being explained by Natagriwal at Racour

3.2 Field visit 2: Integrating nature and water policy

The second field visit focusses on integrating nature and water policy: how do we combine flood prevention and nature development. The river 'Demer' flows through the Natura 2000 site 'Demerbroeken'. Different stakeholders, policies and interests are being brought together. After a decade of planning and stakeholder management, the project starts to implement concrete actions.

The Agency of Nature and Forests highlighted the '[SIGMAplan](#)'. The municipalities often suffer of flooding, while the nature in the valley is threatened by drought during summer. Sigmoplan wants to prevent those floodings, restore the Demer and its extraordinary nature and promote the valley as a recreational hotspot. Several financing instruments were explained, as well as the broad context of water management in the Demervalley – Vierkensbroek. At the Demerbroeken, Natuurpunt explained the works of [LIFE Hageland](#), Project subsidies nature (funding of Nature and Forests) and provincial funds.



Figure 6: Demerbroeken

3.3 Lunchbreak with the Naturavan

Between both field visits, the participants enjoyed a Belgian specialty dish during their lunchbreak at the Abbey of Aarschot. The Naturavan was also present. Here, participants could enjoy an informal talk and Natuurpunt provided a short info session about the Naturavan. This upcycled caravan is being used as a [capacity building and communication tool](#) to gather stakeholders in the field.



Figure 7: Naturavan of Natuurpunt

4 Thematic workshops

4.1 Opening of the workshops

The workshops, organised on the third day of the IP Platform Meeting, were introduced by Angelo Salsi of EASME, Head of Unit LIFE. He underlined the importance of sharing knowledge among LIFE projects, networking and the general value of LIFE.

4.2 Workshop 'Project Management' (*Monday 14 October 2019*)

Topics

- Topic 1: How to keep track of the actions' progress
- Topic 2: Phases: reporting and amendments
- Topic 3: Complementary funds: managing and reporting

Questions

- What difficulties did you encounter?
- How have you dealt with them?
- Suggestions for the future

Topic 1: How to keep track of the actions' progress

Facilitators and reporting: Anastasia Koutsolioutsou and Camilla Strandberg-Panelius

What difficulties did you encounter?

- Challenging to follow all project actions due to:
 - A large amount of data coming in from all beneficiaries
 - In some cases, no information from beneficiaries
 - What is relevant (for the project, for EASME)
- Difficult to know what the level of detail is needed for reporting to EASME makes it difficult for the CB to know what level of detail is needed from the partners;
- Challenging to motivate your beneficiaries to report;
- Challenging to communicate within the project; Important to communicate and include in project implementation all partners from the beginning, even if they do not all have actions to implement in the beginning – build the team spirit, make everyone included-valued, share deliverables and project outputs with all for comments before delivering-publicising
- Human management is difficult– rules and protocols vs. personal communication
- Lack of human resources;
- Challenging bureaucracy/paperwork connected to amendments and reporting;
- IPs are large and it is challenging to grasp and communicate ONE project and the progress of the entire project;
- Delays in the beginning of the project, how to deal with these;
- Risk of changes in the strategy implemented/political priorities during the project.

How have you dealt with these?

- A robust and competent management team, steering committee (all beneficiaries included);
- Clear guidance from the project management team to the partners, templates and instructions;

- Stepwise management goals/Breaking down GA time plan and milestone schedule to smaller steps (voluntary approach, implemented by some management teams)
- Support from the project team to all partners;
- Frequent meetings, but important not to be a burden for partners;
- Important with physical meetings, motivates and makes the participants more committed to the common goal and thus to reporting of progress etc;
- Flexibility in the management, partners are different and cannot be obliged to report the same way (public authorities versus small NGOs);
- Adapt to changes, not complicate things;
- Monthly reporting from partners to CB can be a good thing, part of the work done for a later reporting (IR);
- Use of different project management tools, Google Drive, Sharepoint, excel etc.;
- The lack of resources (personnel for management) can be dealt with in the phase amendment, where funds are transferred to project management (both technical and financial);
- Regular meetings with the Ministry to keep both them and the project on track with discussions/changes/developments in policy, strategy.

Suggestions for the future

Specific guidelines and tools

- Clear instructions from the financier on the level of detail needed for IR regarding progress/results/problems;
- Templates/examples on how to report the progress specifically for IPs;
- Important the instructions are adapted to IPs, not only modified guidance of the traditional projects:
- Flexibility, what does it mean, how do you best apply it; flexibility in one group had to do with flexibility in terms of time plans, action implementation vs the GA, that is flexibility in terms of what EASME expects – EASME has stated frequently that IPs are more flexible than traditional projects in their implementation but some projects feel that this is not the case, others are OK;
- Close contacts with both the external monitoring team NEEMO and with EASME should be a requirement.
- Guidance and suggested templates from EASME on the management of IPs without reducing flexibility and freedom to choose – Caution is needed on this

Direct communication

- Visibility of EASME – projects are visited by EASME during the first project year to discuss the EASME requirements and focus, both on reporting and on project results;
- Simplification, continued flexibility, trust.

Topic 2: Phases: reporting and amendments

Facilitators and reporting: Yael Meroz and Viktorija Maceikaite

What difficulties did you encounter?

- Lack of clear guidance on both reporting and amendments;

- Too detailed reporting, action by action reporting is not relevant in an IP and it doesn't allow providing an update on the "big picture";
- Reporting is very time consuming as it is needed for both reports, amendments, monitoring visits and quarterly reports to TMOs;
- Difficult to know what the level of detail is needed for the IR (different approach by different TMOs and PAs);
- Double reporting with phase amendment and IR;
- Financial reporting is very detailed;
- The budget is very detailed makes the reporting time consuming and complex, costs need to be tracked and compared to actions;
- We must be careful not to lose the flexibility of IPs by applying many rules (both external and internal);
- It is not clear what are the changes to include in the phase amendment;
- Too much printed paper (amendments), original signatures (IR financial statements);
- English as the reporting language – challenging to find translators for amendments and IRs, risk of losing quality.
- Motivation of partners to ensure success of the project

How have you dealt with these?

- Networking with other IPs asking them how they have done the phase amendments and the IR (sometimes facilitated by TMOs and PAs)
- Discussions with the external monitor team and PA when possible;
- Frequent meetings and strict approach with the partners;
- Creation of a clear hierarchy for reporting purposes (i.e. action leaders report to a central reporting team).
- Financial management meetings;
- Active Steering committee where most if not all beneficiaries are included.

Suggestions for the future

Detailed guidelines

- Based on good examples, take feedback from passed experience;
- Clear reporting guidelines with good examples still giving the IP the flexibility needed to manage all different situations that occur.
- Networking between IPs facilitated by EASME or monitors (Platform Meetings, regional meetings) or by the projects themselves (creation of an online cloud/"forum" environment);
- FAQ, toolkit with examples of good reports and tools;
- Secure already in the proposal/revision that enough resources are put on project management (both technical and financial) with ALL beneficiaries;
- Combine phase amendments and IRs.

Report by theme or pillar to see the big picture

- Reporting based on the objectives and goals of the project using themes or pillars depending on the character of the IP;
- Details in tables etc so that the information is available in the reports and not lost
- Grouping of costs when possible;
- The budget should be made simpler to facilitate the reporting of costs, reduce budget categories;

- Support the flexibility as the project must adapt to changes both in management structure, implementation of action, changes in strategy (PAF) and political priorities.
- Do not link complementary actions only to Natura 2000 territories and only in qualitative form

E-governance

- Use of e-signatures and electronic copies
- Create an on-line tool that would allow faster approval of certain changes (e.g. administrative) and less administrative burden as in case of current amendments.

Topic 3: Complementary funds: managing and reporting

Facilitators and reporting: Ben Delbaere and Maud Latruberce

What difficulties did you encounter?

- Disconnected timing with other programmes and actions;
- Beneficiaries have no control or limited control over Complementary Actions (CAs);
- The EC expectation and definition of CAs is not clear;
- It is difficult for the IP to access information of CAs, if it is available it is often not fit for purpose and CAs are reluctant to start additional data collection or reporting;
- Difficulties to identify the % of budget of CAs that is dedicated to N2K;
- How can the project monitor and measure the impact of CAs and what is the sense of reporting?
- Complementary Actions and Complementary Funding – difference between these (individual actions versus programmes)? And how should they be distinguished from each other?

How did you deal with these and suggestions for the future?

Interface between the CAs and the IP actions

- Use of dedicated facilitators with allocated time
- Platforms with CAs (meetings on regular basis), and keep them going beyond the IP
- Mobilising of the partners

Direct involvement in the PAF development + other key funding programmes

- Crucial to get N2K, PAF and biodiversity included in other funding programmes
- Use the IP partnership to get involved in the preparation of key funding programmes

Getting clear guidance and expectations of EASME

- Harmonised requirements
- Gather good examples from the projects
- Simplified reporting of the CAs, how do they contribute to the implementation of the strategy, what is the broad picture rather than individual progress
- Having trust in the projects
- Developing cross-departmental cooperation at all levels, including at the EU level
- Setting of horizontal objectives across funding sources to improve efficiency of funding

4.3 Workshop 'Natura 2000 governance'

Chair: Thomas Defoort

Facilitators/rapporteurs: Maud Latruberce and Ben Delbaere

The workshop started with 3 presentations (LIFE IP Intemares, LIFE BNIP Flanders and Wallonia), followed by a facilitated session during which the 25 participants discussed in 4 subgroups two main questions:

1. What are current IP experiences regarding creating a leverage effect on Natura 2000 governance?
2. How can this leverage effect be improved in the future?

All subgroups dealt with the same questions and exchanged/discussed their results afterwards.

Key messages:

A participant said 'I love IPs', supported by others. Some even said 'I love PAFs', certainly in the new format. The main reason for this feeling is because IPs are creating a leverage effect towards Natura 2000 governance by offering capacity to:

- build relations between many actors;
- jointly develop nation- or region-wide strategies and conservation priorities and objectives;
- enable communication and cooperation between hierarchical levels (vertical) and between sectors and actors at the same level (horizontal);
- facilitate cross-pollination between the actors, cross-border cooperation, and stakeholder engagement.

The leverage effect (to ensure that all actors stay on board and nature conservation is mainstreamed) may be improved by:

- facilitating a durable dialogue, beyond the IP duration (e.g. by creating a forum of involved actors or identifying ambassadors who help in reaching out);
- allocating budget for governance coordination (in future IPs/SNAPs or in PAFs);
- allowing flexibility in IP implementation, focusing on the overall integration objectives rather than specific action achievements;
- aligning the timing of PAF updates with Member State reporting on art 12 and art 17, to integrate results in the new priorities;
- supporting education, training and capacity building in other sectoral departments and organisations to support mainstreaming and harmonization of objectives.

Detailed report

Main elements from the presentations:

Intemares (Victoria González Vela, Fundación Biodiversidad):

- Focuses on Natura 2000 in the Spanish marine environment
- Baseline assessment of governance at the project start:
 - Complex institutional organisation at the level of General State Administration.
 - Little participation from the stakeholders directly linked to the areas.

- Well-structured system of rules, not established in a participatory manner.
- The existence of rules does not guarantee compliance and there are deficiencies in their enforcement.
- Insufficient and inadequate budget and staff.
- Incentives have not been designed in a participatory manner.
- Overlapping of different protection types of Marine Protected Areas.
- Common vision of a sustainability concept that implies moderated use of resources.
- Increased number of groups and institutions promote participatory and innovative projects.
- What has been done on governance so far?
 - Built a roadmap to address conservation priorities for marine habitats and species of Community interest and Natura 2000 site management plans.
 - Enhanced coordination between public administrations:
 - same competent authorities for Natura 2000 and the 5 Marine Strategies;
 - coordination and collaboration with the Autonomous regions;
 - collaboration with other Ministries;
 - participation in the Interministerial Commission on Marine Strategies;
 - collaboration with neighbouring countries;
 - establishment of an institutional forum to manage the marine N2000 Network.
 - Designed and implemented new processes to promote stakeholder participation and to facilitate collaboration between managers and users.
 - Elaborated a Governance strategy (toolbox to guide future implementation of governance models in Natura 2000 sites) and a Capacity Building Strategy to train users and managers.
 - Designed and implemented a mechanism to combine different sources of national and EU funds for the marine Natura 2000 Network targeted towards commonly agreed priorities.
- Next steps for governance:
 - Implement different governance models in pilot sites.
 - Produce best practice guidelines in a participatory process in marine Natura 2000.
 - Implement the Capacity Building Strategy in public administrations.
 - Design new processes for the elaboration of participative fishing management plans, together with the recreational and professional sector.

BNIP in Flanders (Thomas Defoort, ANB)

- Application of a nested process of setting conservation objectives:
 - regional consultation groups set regional objectives;
 - local consultation groups set site-specific objectives;
 - local platforms and project groups define local projects and action plans within sites.
- The objectives are implemented by a set of instruments:
 - a Natura 2000 Programme laying out the regional objectives;
 - a Species Protection Programme, including individual species protection plans;
 - Strategic Management Plans for N2000 Sites, translating the regional objectives to site-specific objectives;

- Site Management Plans, specifying concrete actions at site and parcel level to implement the site-specific objectives;
- an Action Plan Environmental Pressures (not yet implemented because covered by environmental policies).
- Stakeholder consultation is enabled by a diverse governance structure:
 - Regional Consultation Board N2000.
 - steering groups.
 - local N2000 Platforms.
 - local cooperation partnerships.
 - local project partnerships.

BNIP in Wallonia (Tomy Tchatchou, SPW)

- Natura 2000 governance in Wallonia is built on three main components:
 - Natura 2000 Implementation Strategy:
 - Identifying biodiversity issues to set up the network;
 - Mapping and inventories of species and habitats;
 - Regulatory approach to define management units and rules;
 - Site management;
 - A voluntary process to monitor and control conservation objectives.
 - The legal framework (regulatory approach) consists of:
 - conservation measures (generic and specific);
 - conservation objectives at regional and site level;
 - the Prioritized Action Framework (PAF).
 - Natura 2000 management consists of:
 - N2000 site management plans covering the Natura 2000 site network;
 - species and habitats action plans covering the entire Walloon territory;
 - restoration and management actions by a range of stakeholders and funds.
- The governance structure to implement Natura 2000 in Wallonia is led by the Regional Ministry in charge of Agriculture, Nature, Forest, Rurality, Tourism and Heritage and with involvement of scientific institutions, private and public landowners, land users, nature conservation organisations. The coordination is enabled through:
 - a regional Natura 2000 Forum;
 - public consultations;
 - Natura 2000 committees at site level;
 - Natagriwal: an interface between government and farmers for contact, negotiating, communication, awareness raising.

Key points from the discussions

In the subgroups participants discussed several issues and how IPs are overcoming these. Here only the contribution by IPs to the issues are listed, in random order. Current activities and future needs may be mixed as not all IPs are at the same stage of implementation.

It was noted that approaches in MS differ very much and that this diversity is positive and should be maintained, while learning from each other.

- Dedicated and well-trained staff is needed for the development and implementation of participatory processes

- In the definition of conservation objectives and measures, different approaches have been favoured from pure top-down to participatory approaches, depending on the MS and the type of environment (for marine conservation objectives, due to a lack of knowledge top-down processes are favoured). A mix between top-down and bottom-up approaches should be sought;
- Different types of measures have been used: regulatory, voluntary and a mix of the two (e.g. in Wallonia). The participants could not say what works best.

1. What are current IP experiences regarding creating a leverage effect on Natura 2000 governance?

IPs help to:

- build better relations between government departments (mostly at higher levels);
- build better links between government and local actors;
- increase overall capacity and resources for coordinating governance;
- enable stakeholder engagement (including NGOs, private landowners, small businesses, ...);
- lead to official, accountable engagement and commitment;
- implement PAFs (prioritised action frameworks), which are useful tools, especially with the new format. They can trigger the engagement of different stakeholders in Natura 2000 objectives. The following should be considered about the PAFs:
 - The status of the PAF is not the same across the EU: some are official planning documents, others are not; some are approved by the stakeholders, others are not.
 - They have been elaborated using different types of consultation processes, depending on the MS: some processes only involved experts (top-down approach, e.g. in Finland), while others were more participatory (e.g. in Flanders).
- enable cooperation between stakeholders (within the nature conservation sector and with/between other sectors), facilitating cross-pollination;
- facilitate the process from state-wide strategy building over site and species-specific action plans to local implementation;
- build associations of public and private landowners, allowing easier communication with one representative of often large groups;
- enhance cross-border cooperation (within country and with other countries);
- build a common vision and common language, focusing on added value of Natura 2000 for human well-being/society;
- jointly establish conservation objectives for a large area (region, state);
- build capacity within beneficiaries (by facilitating education, training, capacity building, communication);
- interface and liaise between actors, both horizontally and vertically, improving dialogue;
- opens doors with actors that would otherwise be reluctant/disinterested by giving European 'weight';

- repair the damage that was done by designating Natura 2000 sites in the early stages in several MS;
- stimulate voluntary contributions to management, restoration, monitoring.

2. How can this leverage effect be improved in the future?

- Ensure continued funding for Natura 2000 governance.
- Keep all on board (by continuing the transparent and integrated stakeholder approach).
- Be flexible in implementing the IP, focusing on the overall objectives instead of concrete conservation actions, as they have then less time for more strategic actions e.g. on governance.
- Feed experiences from the IP to other sectors (including those already involved) to continue mainstreaming.
- Allow time for governance (for some IPs setting up governance is already going on for 20-30 years).
- Include governance as a standard horizontal measure in PAFs.
- The timing for the PAF elaboration should be revised: in 2019 the timing was not coherent, as the MS had to define the PAFs while the reporting for articles 12 and 17 of the Birds and Habitats directives was not fully completed. The PAFs should come after the reporting, once all the results are available.
- The integration of nature conservation into other policies is especially difficult with the Common Agricultural Policy. A key for better integration is education/ training/ capacity building in the organisations in charge of the other policies.
- Identify ambassadors and key figures to not lose time with broad communication but targeting key players.

4.4 Workshop 'Funding opportunities'

Chair: Tom Andries

Facilitator: Viktorija Maceikaitė

Rapporteur: Yael Meroz

Background note: Typically, the IP NAT projects have large budgets if compared to traditional LIFE projects. They aim to implement Natura 2000 policy also by pairing with different European funding possibilities. This is particularly acute as currently new initiatives take place: new multi-annual work programme for LIFE (MAWP) is being drafted, a concept of a new type of projects within the LIFE programme (SNaPS – Strategic Nature Projects) is being developed, etc.

Overall aim: to manage complementary funding opportunities and to discover new strategies to implement Natura 2000 objectives. This was done through the exchange of experiences around the tables in working with different funding mechanisms up to now and finding new ideas for the future, including regional funds and innovative alternatives for funding.

Set-up of the workshop

The workshop started with three keynote presentations, followed by a discussion, in a plenary session and in small sub-groups.

Findings

Brief summary of the keynote presentations

The keynote presentations perfectly introduced the topic and issues at stake:

- Przemyslaw Oginski (DG ENV nature unit) presented funding opportunities for Natura 2000 in 2021-2027 in light of the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027 – a budget for a Union that protects, empowers and defends. Mr. Oginski highlighted changes between current and proposed cohesion policy funding, rural development funds and the increase in the budget of LIFE programme proposed by the EP (7.27 bn EUR), which will include also a new instrument for a lean energy transition. Emphasis was made on the following opportunities:
 - While a general reduction in these funds is envisaged, the Common Provision Regulation (ERDF, CF, ESF+, EMFF) will specify ‘Greener Europe’ among the main thematic objectives and set financial indicators related to: (a) protection, restoration and sustainable use of Natura 2000 sites, (b) nature and biodiversity protection, green infrastructure;
 - European Regional Development Fund / Cohesion fund with specific thematic objective 2b(vii) “enhancing nature protection, biodiversity and green infrastructure, in particular in the urban environment, and reducing pollution”;
 - European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) – Interreg - proposed to contribute to five ERDF policy objectives, including greener and low carbon Europe. While the programme will have a reduced share of funding for cross-border cooperation, it will increase transnational and maritime opportunities;
 - New mechanisms: Common Agricultural Policy strategic plans that must be consistent with environmental planning tools (i.e. PAFs), European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (greening, eco-schemes), European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (30% for environment, synergies with LIFE to be ensured);
 - European Maritime Fisheries Fund that may support actions for the protection and restoration of marine and coastal biodiversity and ecosystems, including in inland waters, support for sustainable aquaculture, Community-led Local Development and support for collection of data/monitoring;
 - Horizon Europe, the next EU Research & Innovation Programme. Although no specific biodiversity and nature objective, but with a possibility to fund biodiversity and natural capital related research under the ‘Food and Natural Resources’ cluster.
 - European Green Deal where preserving EU’s natural environment is one of the priorities.
- Julie Lebeau (LIFE BNIP Natagriwal) has talked about mobilisation of EAFRD, nature subsidies and various other instruments to implement Natura 2000. The presented Walloon Rural Development Programme’s Priority ‘Restoring and preserving ecosystems’ covered:
 - Agri-Environment and climate method (AECM);
 - Natura 2000 compensations;
 - Restoration of Natura 2000 habitats – a 100% subsidy for every landowner or land manager
 - Other subsidies, mainly national funding.

As explained by Julie in her presentation, different measures had their own pros and cons. For example:

- Natura 2000 compensations is a mandatory system where legal obligations have to be respected and only in legally designated zones. No time limit is applied, and compensations can be requested for agricultural land and forest area. The payment for agricultural land differs depending on the constrain level: the lower constrain – the lower payment. The eligibility of the land ownership is not limited as all rural landowners and not only farmers can apply.
- AECM is a voluntary system with voluntary choice zones. However, there are specifications of AECM that have to be respected and the contract is valid for 5 years. Another limitation of this system is that only farmers are eligible. The size of the compensation depends on the target and on the level of constrains. As in case of Natura 2000 compensations, payments are smaller in case of low constrains level.
- It should also be noted that AECM can be linked with Natura 2000 network. In that case, there are more restrictive specifications (e.g. no intervention before 15/06 and no fertilisation or even higher payments when no intervention before 15/07 and livestock loads are restricted), better conservation of habitats and payments are combinable with N2000 compensations.
- Restoration of Natura 2000 habitats is a 100% subsidy (60% - Walloon Region, 40% - RDP) but it can be only applied in the Natura 2000 network. All landowners or land managers are eligible for the subsidy.

Julie demonstrated through an example of subsidising riparian forest plantations in Wallonia in the Natura 2000 network, that use of subsidies for habitat restoration was more favourable than application of AECM. In case of application of AECM, the compensation was smaller.

- Dr. Sebastian Schmidt (LIFE IP Atlantische Sandlandschaften) has shared experiences of the project dealing with complementary funding. The mobilised funds comprised Cohesion Fund to fund large infrastructure, EAFRD to implement agricultural measures and training of farmers, Horizon 2020 to perform scientific studies, ESF to fund institutional activities of management bodies, ERDF for recurrent management, tourism promotion, visitors' facilities, decontamination. National, regional and private funds (e.g., Bingo Environmental Foundation of Lower Saxony, German Federal Foundation for the Environment, etc.) have been mobilised too. From the experience gained so far, it was concluded that the link of complementary actions to IP could be ambiguous, application and approval procedure heterogeneous with no control mechanisms available for the IP, and the impossibility to evaluate other funding programmes.

Sebastian explained that there were specific concerns or positive features that should be considered in case of different funding sources. For example,

- ERDF: climate protection for moor development – funding for measures with the objective of climate protection and reduction of peatland greenhouse gas emissions (planning, pilot studies, research, awareness and restoration activities). However, objective is not primarily the optimisation of habitat types and funding authority does not evaluate actions regarding Natura 2000 objectives. Added value is additional actions initiated by the IP and raised awareness for N2000.
- EAFRD: Directives for Nature Conservation Investments – Management Plans: funding of development of Natura 2000 areas and other areas with a high nature value, their management concepts, restoration, acquisition of land, awareness. Here applicants often apply for comprising actions covering several areas and targets, but the negative side is that the funding authority does not evaluate actions regarding N2000

objectives. Added value is additional actions initiated by the IP and raised awareness for N2000.

- Regional fund: Programme for supporting species of the annual dwarf rush and amphibious shore weed communities – provides funding for new construction and management of existing small water bodies. It is a new programme that has a direct link to the IP. Added value is additional actions initiated by the IP.
- WFD: Implementation of Water Framework Directive in North Rhine-Westphalia at the river Ems – funding is provided to improvement of hydro morphological status of the river Ems, extending the watercourse, developing a secondary floodplain, improving a structural and species diversity. The negative side is that the funding authority does not evaluate actions regarding N2000 objectives. Added value is raised awareness for N2000 objectives, improved cooperation between water management and nature conservation.

The main questions in relation to complementary actions still to be answered were the following:

- How to mobilise new funds / use existing funds?
- How to integrate and manage actions and stakeholders?
- How to monitor implementation / success?
- How to report? KPI?

Issues discussed by the participants

After the keynote presentations, the participants were invited to share their experiences with using different funding instruments in smaller groups. Participants dealing with marine IPs were invited to work in a separate group due to the specificities of the funding sources. All groups focused their discussion on the following issues:

1. Adding EU funding instruments used for N2000;
2. Experiences with using these instruments (pro – cons): what works, what does not work and why;
3. Regional funds: availability, investments;
4. Innovative alternatives for funding: habitat banking, carbon offset, Invest Europe, etc.

Findings of the discussion on the selected issues and solutions for the future

The IPs already mobilise funding from the following funds: European Regional Development Fund, Cohesion fund, European Social Fund, European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, Horizon 2020, NCFE, Green funds (but which were deemed as quite difficult to mobilise), regional and private funds. Sharing experience around the table, the participants concluded that significant attention should be given to complementary actions (CAs) by IP projects. Some pointed out that quality of CAs and not only value is important. It was deemed worthy to have a team dedicated to the complementary actions in the IPs and establish a stronger link with the competent funding authorities by inviting them to join. It was recognised by the participants that the most common problem to mobilise a fund is when the competent authority is not engaged in the project as a partner. At the same time, it was pointed out that having the funding authority in the project as a partner can be a double-edged sword.

It was acknowledged that the use of some funds is less “popular”. Nevertheless, other possibilities should be explored more carefully. The mobilisation of the European Social Fund to fund participation of certain social groups in the field work in Natura 2000 territories was well reflected by a Danish and

Belgium IPs examples that had made use of cooperatives for restoration activities or other projects that made use of volunteers.

Discussing the availability and possibilities to use regional funds, it was pointed out that these are not always fully used. The experience from southern European countries shows that there is unspent money available in the regions and that it is there where IPs could tap on to generate complementary funding. Thus, the IPs should establish closer contacts with regional authorities.

Participants agreed that they feel reluctant to use private funding (true especially for public bodies). Nonetheless, some good examples were shared, including eco-energy company working with hydropower in Finland where collected revenues are used for habitat restoration, bank financing linked to wood revenues for investment in N2K sites, and initiatives of a private bank foundation that organises annual calls for applications or lottery foundations that look into financing green projects.

The following solutions were proposed based on the group discussions:

- It is important to have a team dedicated to the complementary actions in the IPs.
- If possible, assign a person to evaluate CA projects during the selection stage.
- The projects must ensure liaison with the funding authorities.
- Funding authorities (competent authorities managing funds) should also be involved in the IP projects right from the start (as partners or as members in an Advisory Board or Steering Committee).
- Capacity building is needed also for the funding authorities, something which the IPs can take upon them if the budget allows it.
- Engagement of managing/competent funding authorities might be a problem that could be overcome by a legally binding document at the national level.
- Stronger lobbying is needed, to be done also by the IP itself, with funds such as ERDF or with links to the RDP, in order to facilitate mobilisation of funding from measures that are least used so far.
- Convince municipalities to reinvest received revenues into Natura 2000 network.
- Establish closer contacts with regional authorities to explore possibilities to use regional funds.
- Explore possibilities of using European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument funding for protection of species that inhabit in neighbouring non-EU countries or migratory species.
- Mobilise European Social Fund for training or various stakeholders.
- In light of increasing funding for climate change issues, investigate possibilities how to liaise/tap in.
- R&D and related funding should be a possible area of complementarity as LIFE projects can be potential customers and serve as a “test bed” for researchers. Joint calls with the EU R&D Programme could be organised in the future on specific topics (and could be more easily sought in D Actions).

Cultural funds, if any, should also be explored.

4.5 Workshop ‘stakeholder engagement’

Chair: Femke Vergeest

Facilitators: Femke Vergeest / Wendy Ollivier

Rapporteur: Anastasia Koutsolioutsou and Darline Velghe

The workshop started with an introduction about the NL IP project and the lessons learned regarding the importance of collaboration for successful Natura 2000 governance. The beneficiary of the LIFE IP Delta Natuur informed that this IP can provide support to another 2 IPs on governance & N2K as part of their activities.

Different approaches about stakeholder engagement and effective Natura 2000 governance were indicated, such as:

1. Mutual Gains Approaches useful to gain from other policy areas
2. Make the undercurrent visible
3. Separate facts from fiction
4. Organise a careful process strategy

The workshop focused on the Mutual Gains Approach. The basic principles behind the approach were discussed and then the group separated in sub-groups to practice the implementation of the approach in two different settings.

Mutual Gains Approach (MGA)

A negotiation and stakeholder engagement approach that is based on the principle that success and sustainability in conflict resolution may be better achieved if one can communicate cooperation, if one can create value for multiple stakeholders during the negotiation process.

The MGA method relies on facilitated meetings with all stakeholders, aiming to engage all stakeholders in a joint agreement, so that every party feels they are both part of the problem and the solution. In the negotiation process beliefs and assumptions are regenerated, behaviour and actions are changed and a different result, win-win and better accepted by all is reached.

The two main elements of the MGA are the identification of issues and interests.

1. Issue: the subject or topic that needs to be solved. Parties/stakeholders should define together what the topic/problem/issue is. It is hereby important that the issue is described in a neutral way for an equal treatment of all stakeholders.

2. Next the discussion is directed to define what the **interests** of each party on the issue are. Different parties may have different positions and interests on the issue; different stakeholders may have different opinions about the possible solutions. One should make their interests known and should carefully listen to and try to understand others' interests as well.

The key questions to understand the interests are:

- Why is that important for you?
- What elements should the solution hold to be a good solution for you?
- Are there other things of importance to you? Make your own interests known!

It is important to think and listen before judging the other parties, make a long list of possible solutions, including hybrid solutions that take different parties' interests into account. By learning and respecting each party's/stakeholder's interests you can reach better/more acceptable solutions. Solutions with more value for all negotiation participants should be searched. If required, one should look for creative solutions.

4.6 Workshop 'Capacity building'

Chair: Sarah Rousseaux

Facilitators/rapporteurs: Anastasia Koutsolioutsou and Camilla Strandberg-Panelius

The workshop started with 2 presentations (LIFE 4 Nature, LIFE Natura SI), followed by a facilitated brainstorming after which three groups were formed discussing the following aspects of capacity building focusing on developing a capacity building strategy for 1) Landowners (external), 2) Private companies (external), and 3) Public authorities (internal).

All subgroups dealt with the different topics and presented their results afterwards.

Keynote LIFE 4 Nature "Identifying capacity building needs & key questions on design" (Yorgos Melissourgos – WWF Hellas)

Objective: build capacity of identified and prioritised stakeholders concerning the implementation needs of the Birds and Habitats Directive and in particular on the management needs of Natura 2000 and conservation priorities of protected habitats and species

- Identifying the correct stakeholders is crucial. Stakeholders' perceptions as a key component of mapping.
- Big challenge: heterogeneity of stakeholders across places and scales
- Different strategies will work for different target groups
- Provide direct training or train the trainers? Do both if applicable
- Prioritising is a must, given available resources
- Site management in place is a powerful driver
- More effort needed at the local scale with end-users
- Replicability can also be achieved via robust strategies (+ pilot testing & scaling up)

Keynote LIFE Natura si (Maya Cipot – Ministry of the environment and spatial planning)

The strategy identified was to:

1. Increase the capacity of the Slovenian NCP
2. Higher recognition of the LIFE programme
3. More project proposals
4. More LIFE projects gained
5. IP project proposal

This was accomplished by:

Training the trainer on project management, communication, EU-funding, visiting Best of the Best projects, IPs, networking.

Promoting awareness through:

- webpage, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube;
- Media (press conference, articles, interviews);
- LIFE Info Days;
- Newsletter;
- LIFE project exhibitions;

- LIFE knowledge fairs;
- Brochure;
- Meetings with other EU Funds NCP (Horizon 2020, Cohesion...).

Increasing the capacity of Slovenian applicants using trainings/workshops, bilateral meetings, questionnaires, videos, translating material, having a helpdesk, and networking on conferences and on online networking platform.

Finding the weakest link is crucial for a successful capacity building!

Open session

Train people on how to manage nature.

During the open session stakeholder groups were identified. The focus was on the following questions that were also used during the group discussions:

- What are the internal and external, local, regional, national and international stakeholders identified by different projects?
- Levels of engagement desired or experienced by different stakeholders? Their interest, power, authority and/or legitimacy to influence project outcome? How do these influence the capacity building approaches and expected outcomes?
- Different training themes identified for different stakeholders?
- Different training needs identified for different stakeholders?
- Knowledge sharing on different training tools and approaches for different stakeholders.
- Importance of capacity building for sustainability, replicability and transferability.
- How do we measure the impact of capacity building?

Comments from the open session:

- Important to identify the increase of knowledge both within the project and external
- Target groups are very different: management authorities, farmers and farmer organisations, academia, volunteers, hunters, fishermen, subcontractors, industries (energy, water, tourism, forest) etc.
- Important to identify the needs of each target group,

Group on Landowners (external)

The groups of landowners identified concerned farmers, private forest owners and stockbreeders.

The needs of landowners were identified as:

- Financial - Landowners do not want to lose income and if possible, they want to increase their income. They depend financially on land management.
- Need of knowledge and support on administrative procedures. For example, farmers need to be informed and trained in how to apply for nature-friendly funding opportunities and CAP measures.
- Need to know about the potential impacts of climate change on their activities and income and how they may implement mitigation/adaptation measures.

The capacity building strategy was discussed based on the above-mentioned needs and included:

- The need to follow an institutional approach and reach the landowners through their professional associations (farmer associations, forester associations, etc.). This is a train the trainer approach whereby one needs to train the associations and agricultural or forestry advisors first for eventually increasing the capacity of the final target population.
- The importance of demonstration projects and examples of successful cases as this is an effective way for landowners, such as farmers, to learn and get convinced to implement new land-management practices.
- The organisation of farmers schools and workgroups on specific land-management topics.

Group on Private stakeholders (external)

Task: to discuss a capacity building strategy for external private stakeholders

Two examples were discussed in the group

1. An excavation company extracting soil that already when applying for permits takes nature values into account. They have been contacted by an NGO that negotiated with the company on how they could benefit from taking nature (mainly a frog) into consideration when extracting soil.
2. Big yacht companies where the boats are hired for trips in the archipelago. The process of weighing the anchor takes time. These boats often drag the anchor along the sea bottom for several hundreds of meters which destroys the sea bottom. The boats are often anchored in N2000 sites where special attention is needed to secure that nature is not destroyed.

Findings and lessons learned from the discussions on case 1

- When a private company is involved focus must be put on their interest,
- The capacity building strategy must be based on a win-win situation where the both the company and nature are rewarded,
- For excavations, permits are needed. The nature values should be included already in the application of permits to avoid long processes of permit applications.
- There are several layers in a private company that needs to be trained to secure that nature values are included in the strategy.
- One layer is the management that needs to choose nature values as one of the values for which the company is working. This can be done through negotiations, demonstrations in the field, films etc.
- Another layer are the persons doing the work in the field. Here demonstration and hands on help on site to see and understand the special features that needs to be considered in the work is crucial.

Motivation is crucial - why should there be a change?

- ➔ Easier permit procedures, saves time and money for the company
- ➔ Field workers - pride in the work done, by small changes there might be a big difference for one species.

Findings and lessons learned from the discussions on case 2

- A capacity building strategy in this case is quite complicated as there are several target groups; the yacht company, the crew, and the customer each of which must be considered separately.
- The yacht company needs to be made aware of what is happening when the anchor is dragged along the sea bottom; methods used are demonstration films, discussions. One motivation for the company to apply a “non-dragging” approach is a green-anchor label for being conscious of the consequences their conduct has on the environment.
- The crew needs to understand the importance in the weighing of the anchor correctly. This can be done through demonstration films, diving paths, etc. However, an important aspect when it comes to the crew is that they need to have guidance on how to talk to the customer who often are the ones expecting the yacht to move immediately when told to lift the anchor.
- The customer needs to be made aware of that the yacht company has committed to a non-dragging approach which means that the start from a location takes more time. If the company clearly shows the “green anchor” on their boat this influences the customer. This might even be a motivation for a customer to choose that specific yacht company.

Group on Public authorities (internal)

Increasing capacity internally in Public authorities is mainly done using:

- trainings, and training the trainer;
- the public authority has a specific area of expertise and therefore the training can be very focused;
- depending on the authority demonstration/training in the field is a very relevant method;
- the goal of the capacity building must be very clear to motivate a training;
- each training has to be adapted to the audience which means that using already existing material (replication) can only partly be used.

4.7 Workshop ‘Communication’

Chair: Liesbet De Keersmaecker

Facilitator: Yael Meroz

Rapporteur: Viktorija Maceikaite

Background note: Disseminating information is one thing, achieving a real impact – and measuring it – is something different, especially in an IP, where needs and scope are different.

Overall aim: To: (i) allow projects to exchange experiences and examples of successful / unsuccessful communication strategies/means; (ii) inspire projects to set up future communication campaigns and/or strategies with even more impact; (iii) help projects in selecting the best approach to measure such impact.

Set-up of the workshop

The workshop started with one keynote presentation, and – due to delays in the presentation – it was followed immediately by work in two small (10 participants each) sub-groups.

Findings

Brief summary of the keynote presentation

The keynote presentation somehow introduced the topic and issues at stake. It was titled “Community building and story-telling: a new Flemish approach” and given by Joost Tack of the production company Hotel Hungaria.

The presentation showed past communication campaigns of the company, explaining how they were tailor made to the specific target group identified, both in terms of content (story telling) and in terms of the means chosen. Joost then moved on to describe the latest campaign which his company decided to embark upon and that it the production of a 7-episode TV series about the Nature in Belgium, supported by a series of other communication means.

The main “story” which the series aims to tell is the following: “Belgian nature is precious and under pressure. In order to protect it, we need to respect it, and in order to respect it, we need to reconnect with it emotionally. We want people to be amazed about the beauty and diversity of Belgian nature. We want to create that impact through 360° storytelling and doing”.

The idea of 360° storytelling is to blend several communication means, which in this specific case were: TV, Social media, Online platform, Print & Radio, Products and gadgets, Events. Details and examples for each of these means were provided, stressing also the need to network, partner up and create synergies with other subjects and to create “emotions” in your target audience.

Findings of the discussion in groups on the two selected issues

1. Opportunities and difficulties for a successful communication

Participants explored and discussed the following questions:

- The best (and the worse) of experiences encountered with communication practices and the top key success factors that contribute to the good communication practice in the stories shared?

Here, the following “success” or “impeding” factors were identified by the participants:

- The involvement of a local authority in the local communication activities has been very useful to reach local media and people. This has been facilitated though mainly by the presence of very **motivated and committed people** in this entity.
- It is important to find the right “story” to tell the different target groups, using different terminology. In one particular case, the beneficiaries realised that talking about drinking water quality rather than on nature or N2K conservation was much more effective when talking to the local public. The beneficiaries agreed that the aim should not be making the N2K network known, but rather enhance its conservation. This relates back to the keynote speech, as it proved that **creating strong emotions in the target audience** is a key factor for an effective communication.
- On IP project mentioned that having one journalist working as part of the project team has proved useful to **enhance the effectiveness** of the communication actions.

Attention points:

- An element that could be exploited as an opportunity for projects is the number of beneficiaries. While requiring more coordination and effort at the initial phase, **projects with many partners can help facilitating a more capillary communication**.

- Projects have to pay close attention to the **periods in which they want to get media attention**, especially at national level. For instance, it would be easier to get coverage in the summer period or in the first days after the winter break.
- In case journalists have expressed interest in the project (or one event/product of it), make sure to **keep an updated media contact list** so that these can be followed up on in a coordinated way.
- When telling a “story”, beneficiaries can decide to use **different “names” for the project**. Indeed, some projects have opted not to use their acronym in the communication activities with the general public but rather a slogan, while they have continued to use the acronym in their work with public authorities.
- IPs are more **prone to be affected by national scandals or changed agendas at government level**. Two projects have indeed shared such an experience (e.g. scandal involving the reference ministry or an NGO involved as a partner), explaining that these situations have made it very difficult for them to react effectively, considering the hostile communication environment.
- Always use **different approach for a different audience**.

- The approach selected by them to address communication obligations and needs (e.g. external company, ad hoc manager, a “live” dissemination strategy, different actions on different levels...).

- ✎ There was not full agreement on **the question on whether or not to involve a professional communication group in the partnership or in the project** (as external assistance). On the one hand, it was agreed that these service providers can provide skills and knowledge, but that they are not technically capable of conveying the “story” of the project, which should be elaborated and told by the “technical/institutional” beneficiaries. An interesting best practice in this regard was that of the Slovenian IP where a communication agency was included in the partnership. The beneficiaries have decided that this partner would be in charge of the communication activities in the first two years, defining the Communication strategy and providing in this period guidance and transferring knowledge to the “technical” beneficiaries (through workshops for different sectors/pillars and hands-on experience). The idea is to allow them to take over the communication activities in the following years.
- ✎ All participants agreed that it is **essential to define the project’s Communication strategy right from the start** and keep it as a “live document”. The Strategy should define the target audience and the type of message that you wish to transmit to each of them. It was also mentioned that including in the process of the definition of this document the related reference group (e.g. farmers, hunters...) would be helpful in making it more effective. One project where this hasn’t been done says that now they find it very difficult to start defining such a strategy.

- The strategies they have put in place to measure the impact of their communication action: what has been the main challenge here? How was the baseline situation approached?

Here, basically all participants reported **difficulties in carrying out this task**. Also, the surveys looking into behavioural changes have proven unreliable, as the cause-effect nexus was difficult to demonstrate considering the many variables at stake. No real propositions were put forward. In particular, the following was mentioned:

- ✎ A common case scenario in ongoing LIFE IP projects is that the **budget for measuring the impact is usually underestimated**.
- ✎ All participants agreed on the **need for internal capacity building** on the subject.

- A joint action by all IPs in **developing a methodology to measure the impact** was proposed. However, it seems that some projects are actually working on developing such a methodology right now. Once this is completed, it could be shared through networking activities, also with EASME.

- How can networking be leverage to successful communication?

- All participants agreed that **networking can be very useful** in providing practical advice on how to approach communication with certain stakeholders.
- An example put forward by one IP was that of **organising a national platform meeting**, to be hosted by them, involving all EU-funded projects working on Nature.

2. Suggestions for the future

1. Participants were asked to think how they could leverage on their IP to enhance communication at an EU level. Some came up with already established celebrations to which they could tag along for an increased impact. In this way they would be able to combine funds, which are often underestimated/unbudgeted, and attain a more significant impact. These include:
 - Planet birdsong - <http://www.planetbirdsong.org/>
 - Alpine Convention Day - Oct 18, 2019
 - World Fish Migration Day - May 16, 2020
 - Participants were then presented with the proposal to launch a coordinated task force for the organisation of Natura 2000 day, where IPs act in a concerted way on an EU-wide or a regional/topic basis. Participants were enthusiastic about the idea, and also EASME mentioned that they will provide some support (registering of events on the N2K day official website) and eco in their social media, but no concrete commitments have been declared. It is likely that if the idea is adopted, it will start with a regional/thematic approach.
2. Many participants supported to change the “brand name” Natura 2000, which is, reportedly long, outdated and misleading.
3. The need to work harder to better link nature conservation and climate change issues, a topic receiving increasing attention and funding has been agreed on. This also links back to the proposition to using a story, such as the climate change one, that touches more people and that is high on the agenda, to tell your own story and give it more local personalised flavour.

4.8 Workshop ‘Dealing with dynamic habitats in the framework of the Nature Directives’

Chair: Lionel Wibail

Facilitator: Ben Delbaere

Rapporteur: Maud Latruberce

Background note: Habitats of community interest generally have "static" definitions, provided by the official Interpretation Manual of European Union Habitats. These definitions include a description of physical conditions, species composition (mainly plant communities), and sometimes their geographical distribution. Dynamics (from climate change, other societal choices or ecological processes) conflict with these characteristics and cause dilemmas in conservation.

Overall aim: to collect viewpoints from the participants on the issues and possible solutions in relation to dynamics in nature that conflict with the achievement of the conservation goals that are fixed and legally enforced through the Nature Directives. The session looked at it from the perspective of IPs rather than from site-based projects.

Set-up of the workshop

The workshop started with two keynote presentations, followed by a discussion, in plenary session and in small sub-groups.

Findings

Brief summary of the keynote presentations

The keynote presentations perfectly introduced the topic and issues at stake:

- Lionel Wibail (DEMNA, Department of agricultural and natural area studies in Wallonia) pointed out that:
 - o The interpretation manuals of the Habitats directive sometimes give a very precise description of habitat types, with lots of details (e.g. for alkaline fens 7230, luzulo-fagetum beech forests 9110), and sometimes the description is very short (e.g. sea caves 8330);
 - o climate change will have an impact on the habitat types in the long term: some habitats may remain but with different functioning or characteristic species, others may switch to another habitat types, or may just disappear. Taking the example of beech forests (9110), beech will decline to the profit of other tree species. Yet, if beech is not the dominant species anymore, according to the strict definition of habitat type 9110, then the forest is not a habitat of Community interest anymore;
 - o these changes raise questions for Natura 2000 management objectives: what position should managers have regarding habitats of Community interest versus habitats that are more resilient to climate change and versus the recommended intervention to adapt to climate change (involving species reintroduction and translocations)?
- Dennis van Schaardenburg (LIFE Deltanatuur, the Netherlands Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality) explained that in the LIFE Deltanatuur project, they are trying to reconcile flood protection, economy and Natura 2000 objectives. The measures implemented may however locally lead to a decline in certain species or habitats of Community interest (e.g. bringing back the tide in the delta). Therefore, in the “benefits for nature plan” developed within the project, they have used ecological potential maps as a reference, instead of the current static nature conservation objectives.

Issues discussed by the participants

After the keynote presentations, the participants were invited to give examples of issues for Natura 2000 managers that are linked to dynamic habitats, and they selected three issues that were discussed in small groups to find possible solutions. These three issues are:

- How to apprehend range shift, which is a natural response to climate change, regarding the strict definitions of habitats in the Habitats directive?
- How to deal with climate change adaptation strategies conflicting with protected habitats?
- How to leave room for natural processes as Natura 2000 site manager?

Other issues mentioned included: the development of invasive alien species, the introduction of exotic species for economic purpose (in response to climate change – especially to make forests more resilient to climate change), socio-economic changes affecting Natura 2000 site management (such as the decline in pastoralism), habitat fragmentation within and outside Natura 2000, loss of species/habitats other than those for which the Natura 2000 site was designated, and difficulties with forecasting.

Findings of the discussion on the three selected issues

Range shift versus definitions in the Directives

In order to consider range shifts, the participants made the following suggestions:

- Give more flexibility in the habitat descriptions in the interpretation manuals: this is a process involving expert group meetings;
- Add new habitats in annex 1, but only focussing on climate change adaptation – i.e. habitats that are more resilient to climate change: this would require a long legislative process;
- Develop scientific research on the sensitivity of annex 1 habitats to climate change, in order to get practical recommendations for adaptation;
- Include climate change adaptation as a criterion for the assessment of habitats.

The participants did not have much time to make a reality check of each solution. It was however highlighted that re-opening the annex 1 of the Habitats Directive would be very delicate as it would involve a legal process.

CCA strategies affecting protected habitats/species

The following solutions were discussed:

- Updating the annexes of the Nature directives on a regular basis: the group expressed some doubts as to the usefulness of such a solution, as it would require a legislative process with clear risks that lobbies would try to get rid of problematic species. It would be more useful to confine the discussion in the interpretation manuals (hence the next suggestion).
- Introducing flexibility in the habitat interpretation manuals, for climate change considerations only.
- Enlarging the conservation approach to include other aspects than habitats/species, such as ecosystem services, e.g. considering a forest not only as a habitat but also as a carbon sink – so whether that species is there/dominant.

It is to be highlighted that the first two points fully coincide with the findings of the participants regarding range shifts vs. the Directives.

Leaving room to natural processes

Suggested solutions include:

- Active spatial planning to decide where to leave room to natural processes: this implies trade-offs with other land use sectors.
- Assessing pilot sites with non-intervention: this would require more flexibility in the definitions.
- Ensuring monitoring.
- Focussing on fixed habitats OR biodiversity gain.

- ⇒ From the three issues discussed, a common suggestion emerges which is including more flexibility in the definition of habitats in the interpretation manuals associated to the Habitats directive.

5 Findings for project beneficiaries

This text provides a summary with recommendations for beneficiaries and applicants based on the key points that were discussed at this platform meeting. There are recommendations for the proposal stage and the implementation stage. For the implementation stage, recommendations are listed per category as discussed during the platform meeting.

5.1 General messages

- Governing Natura 2000 sites requires:
 - defining nature conservation objectives,
 - translating these objectives into actions,
 - integrating the objectives into other policies,
 - engaging all relevant stakeholders.
- IPs are relevant tools to improve Natura 2000 governance and to better integrate nature conservation objectives into other policies, as they offer possibilities to:
 - build relations between relevant stakeholders;
 - jointly develop nation- or region-wide strategies and conservation priorities and objectives;
 - enable communication and cooperation between hierarchical levels (vertical) and between sectors and actors at the same level (horizontal);
 - facilitate cross-pollination between the actors, cross-border cooperation, and stakeholder engagement;
 - open “doors” with stakeholders that would otherwise be reluctant or not interested in the targeted objectives, by giving European weight.
- Among the challenges IPs have to tackle, some seem to be especially demanding, for example: policy mainstreaming, engaging stakeholders, communicating within the team and to external stakeholders, and monitoring/reporting on the project actions as well as on complementary funding.
- To take up these challenges, IPs or potential IP candidates should take them into account as soon as possible, in the project development phase, and use the flexibility offered for IPs to adapt throughout the project duration.

5.2 Recommendations for the project development phase / proposal stage

- Focus on strategical levels, not on individual actions.
- Plan in the budget sufficient time for dedicated and well-trained staff to undertake the following key actions:
 - governance actions and participatory processes: a mix between pure top-down and participatory approaches should be sought, which requires both time and skills;
 - mobilising partners and authorities in charge of other policies/complementary funds, and keeping them on board, e.g. allowing time for dedicated facilitators;
 - contributing to the development of key strategic policies and programmes, including the PAFs, the Rural development programmes, other operational programmes (EU

Structural funds), the future national strategic plans for the Common agricultural policy, etc., in order to better integrate nature conservation objectives in these programmes, and even developing lobbying actions,

- monitoring the IP complementary actions and/or funding and reporting about them, e.g. with a dedicated team for complementary funding,
 - capacity building activities: dedicated time is needed to identify the target groups and select the right approach. This is essential for achieving the IP objectives, and especially for the integration of nature conservation objectives into other policies,
 - engaging stakeholders through mutual gain approaches for instance, which require a lot of time (specially to identify the needs and interests of each group of stakeholders);
 - communication actions: allocating staff and time for the definition of a strategy at the very beginning of the project and also for the assessment of the communication impacts, which is often underestimated.
 - Making sure that enough budget is put on project management (both technical and financial) for ALL beneficiaries.
- Involve key stakeholders (e.g. authorities in charge of complementary funding/other policies) right from the start, either as project beneficiaries or mere partners, and to establish a durable dialogue beyond the IP duration, through meetings on regular basis.

5.3 Recommendations for the project implementation phase

- Use the flexibility to (re)focus on strategic actions
 - The key strategic actions require both dedicated and well-trained staff and time, which is often underestimated at proposal stage: governance actions, regular meetings with the Ministries and other authorities/decision-makers, negotiations with stakeholders, the development and monitoring of complementary funding, capacity building, communication strategy, etc. IPs should use the flexibility offered by the LIFE programme to provide such actions with sufficient human resources (possibly through budget reallocations). Again, IP partners should focus on strategic actions, not on individual concrete conservation actions.
- Work on policy mainstreaming
 - Use the IP partnership to be involved in the preparation of key sectoral policies and key funding
 - programmes, e.g. the PAFs, the RDPs, the CAP strategic plans, etc.;
 - Feed decision-makers in other sectors with their experience (including decision-makers that
 - are involved in the project);
 - Educate/train/build capacity in the organisations in charge of the other policies, especially for
 - the agricultural and rural development policies.
- Reinforce capacity building actions
 - Capacity building actions should be developed within the IP team and among external stakeholders, for various purposes: the implementation of governance actions, the integration of nature conservation objectives in other policies and programmes (getting the relevant decision-makers on board, inform them on the issues at stake, etc.), the development of effective communication actions, the management and monitoring of complementary funding, the management of the project, etc.

- Specific tips to build capacity within the IP team, i.e. public bodies:
 - trainings, including trainings to trainers, should be developed;
 - the public authority has a specific area of expertise and therefore the training should often be very focused;
 - demonstration or training in the field are sometimes very relevant;
 - the goal of the capacity building must be very clear to motivate a training;
 - each training has to be adapted to the audience which means that using already existing material (replication) can only partly be an option;
 - ongoing training programmes should be identified, to insert the selected topics there, avoiding competition/additional trainings. Sometimes it makes sense to insert such training in the programme of University degrees or schools for public administration, to increase sustainability;
 - e-training modules can be useful options.
- To build capacity among external stakeholders, and eventually engage them, identify the different target groups and adapt the approach to each group. The needs and interests of each group should be identified and considered to select the right approach for each group. For instance, 'train the trainer' approaches are recommended for public authorities and landowners/site users. For the second group, demonstration projects and examples of successful cases is also an effective approach. With private companies, a win-win situation should be sought, where the both the company and nature are rewarded.
- Engage stakeholders using mutual gain approaches
 - Mutual gain approaches can be quite effective to engage stakeholders, if appropriately implemented. To do so, it is crucial to develop participatory processes: stakeholders should be invited to define together the issues at stake, make their interests known and listen to the interests of the other groups, and discuss possible solutions. These processes require time and resources which should be included in the proposal phase.
 - Key questions to identify the interests of the different groups include:
 - Why is that important for you?
 - What elements should the solution hold to be a good solution for you?
 - Are there other things of importance to you?
- Identifying ambassadors
 - For communication, capacity building, stakeholders' engagement and strategic governance actions, it is important to identify ambassadors and key figures, in order to target them specifically with an appropriate approach / story and have a more effective impact on the identified target groups (not losing time with broad actions).
- Tips for an effective communication
 - Set up a clear and well-designed communication strategy in the first years of the project and keep it a 'live' document. The key groups of stakeholders (e.g. farmers, hunters...) should be involved in the definition of this strategy;
 - Identify the key target groups and find the right "story" for each group (in the strategy);
 - Use also topical issues like climate change to reach more people or to have more impact on decision-makers.
 - Apart from the two preceding recommendations, which are really the most important ones, other tips were shared by some IPs to enhance the effectiveness of communication actions, namely:

- Involving local authorities in local communication activities;
 - Having a journalist in the project team;
 - Using the project partners to facilitate a more capillary communication;
 - Working with the media: IPs should keep an up-to-date list of media contacts and pay attention to the time period they want to get media's attention;
 - Experiences with professional consultants have had mixed results, they are not always a good solution.
- Network at the EU level
 - Use the opportunity of the LIFE funding to develop networking activities at the EU level, sharing your experiences on the project management, reporting, communication, governance approaches, funding opportunities etc. with other Integrated LIFE projects but also in the biogeographical process.
 - About communication specifically, it seems there is a need for methodologies to measure the impact. A joint action by all IPs was suggested but some projects are already working on such a methodology. Once this is completed, it should be shared with other IPs and with the EASME.
- Tips for good IP management
 - A robust and competent management team, and a steering committee (all beneficiaries included);
 - Clear guidance from the project management team to the partners, with templates and instructions;
 - Stepwise management goals/Breaking down the general time plan and milestone schedule to smaller steps (voluntary approach, implemented by some management teams)
 - Support from the project team to all partners;
 - Frequent meetings, but important not to be a burden for partners;
 - Physical meetings motivate and make the participants more committed to the common goal and thus to the reporting of progress, etc.;
 - Flexibility in the management, partners are different and cannot be obliged to report the same way (public authorities versus small NGOs);
 - Adapting to changes, not complicating things;
 - Monthly reporting from partners to the coordinating beneficiary can be a good thing, part of the work done for a later reporting (IR);
 - Use of different project management tools, Google Drive, Sharepoint, excel etc.;
 - The lack of resources (personnel for management) can be dealt with in the phase amendment, where funds are transferred to project management (both technical and financial);
 - Regular meetings with the Ministry to keep both them and the project on track with discussions/changes/developments in policy, strategy.

6 Closing of conference

At 16th of October, the conference was closed by Maja Mikosinska (EASME head of sector LIFE Nature & Biodiversity). She thanked all the participants of the Platform Meeting for their valuable input during the workshops and emphasis that the input will be used in the management of IP projects and the LIFE procedures. She also motivates the IP project managers to use the network that has been created during this Platform Meeting. To conclude, she underlines that all IPs are putting their best foot forward in creating a green(er) future with more nature and biodiversity.



Figure 8: Maja Mikosinska closing the IP Platform Meeting

7 Networking activities: Natura 2000 movie night and info market

7.1 Natura 2000 movie night

To enhance networking between the participant in a more informal setting, the Platform Meeting organised a Natura 2000 Movie Night. The goal was to screen inspiring examples of digital communication in relation to Natura 2000 or biodiversity as a whole. At the end of the movie night, the viewers could vote for their favourite movie.

In total 9 movies were screened during the movie night, touching several topics ranging from documentaries for the broad public till training stakeholders. Table 1 provides an overview of the screened movies. The winner was selected by an anonymous survey among the viewers: 'Great bittern' of Ecopedia. Congrats!

Table 1: overview of screened movies during the IP Platform Meeting

Nr	Project or organisation	Type of movie	Theme of the movie	Link to movie
1	Life intemares	Documentary	LIFE actions	weblink
2	Natuurpunt	Documentary	'The return of Nature' focuses on nature management realisations	weblink
3	Atlantische sandlandschaften	IP and restoration	LIFE actions	weblink
4	Aranlife	Working with stakeholders	Combining agriculture and nature restoration	weblink
5	Ecopedia	Training stakeholders	Train-the-trainer: Great bittern	weblink

			conservation measures	
6	Life seposso	Broad audience	Nature education for kids	Weblink
7	Onze natuur	Broad audience	Teaser of Belgian nature documentary	Weblink
8	Mires of estonia	Broad audience	Tales of folklore used to get message across about Natura 2000 habitats	weblink
9	SPW	Broad audience	'Nature for everybody': Enjoying nature with reduced mobility	weblink

7.2 Info market

An info market was organised during lunch of day 3. The info market presented the attendees with information about the project actions of LIFE BNIP, as well as the pilot projects (project subsidies within LIFE BNIP for inspiring and innovative projects by stakeholders).

The list of the info stands can be found in table 2.

Table 2: list of info stands during the IP Platform Meeting

Organisation	Role	What
Regionaal landschap Meetjesland	Pilot project	'LIFE Animated' : digital game for children
Regionaal landschap Zuid-hageland	Pilot project	'Fly along with the harrier' : movie and project info
Vogelopvangcentrum opglabbeek	Pilot project	'GPS tracking of wildlife' : first results
Agency of Nature and Forests	LIFE BNIP Coordinating beneficiary	project actions
Walloon Public Service	LIFE BNIP project partner	project actions
Federal Public Service	LIFE BNIP project partner	project actions
Natuurinvest	LIFE BNIP project partner	project actions and virtual reality tour

8 Annexes

8.1 Annex 1: Programme of the Platform Meeting

Please double click the programme below to open.

EVENT PROGRAMME		
16 OCTOBER 2019		
		ROOM
Welcome with coffee and tea	09:00 - 09:30	00.01
Opening of the day by Angelo Salsi (EASME, head of unit LIFE)	09:30 - 09:45	00.11
Workshops	09:45 - 12:00	
Stakeholder engagement (LIFE IP Delta natuur) The Mutual Gains Approach is an approach for successful negotiations and policy making with many stakeholders. During this participative workshop we will involve you with your own specific questions and cases to work on inspiring new solutions and ways to approach your own challenges. Participants are invited to provide their own cases.		01.16
• Keynote: Femke Vergeest (LIFE IP Delta natuur)		
Funding opportunities and link with implementation of Natura 2000 How to implement Natura 2000 policy in the field and pair this with the different (EU) funding possibilities. New innovative (regional) approaches are highly welcomed. The outcome should act as a compass to manage complementary funding opportunities and to discover new strategies to implement Natura 2000 objectives.		01.05
• Keynote: Funding opportunities for Natura 2000 in 2021-2027 (Przemyslaw Oginski, DG ENV nature unit)		
• Keynote: mobilising EAFRD, Nature subsidies, various other instruments to implement N2000 (Dulie Lebeau, LIFE BNIP Natagriwal)		
• Keynote: Complementary funding, experiences in the LIFE IP Atlantische Sandlandschaften (Dr. Sebastian Schmidt)		
Natura 2000 governance How are national/regional NCOs translated into (site) management plans? This workshop will explore how different strategies (climate, biodiversity, water, etc.) interact with IPs. Are IPs creating a leverage effect towards Natura 2000 governance? The outcome of this workshop should provide you a clear overview of possible strategies with pros and cons.		01.04
• Keynote: Marine Natura 2000 governance in Spain (Victoria Gonzalez, LIFE IP Intemares)		
• Keynote: LIFE BNIP: Different Natura 2000 governance models in Belgium (Tomy Tchatchou SPW-DGO3 and Thomas Defoort ANB)		
Lunch and info market Meet our partners and pilot projects	12:00 - 13:30	00.07

8.2 Annex 2: Survey 'Evaluation of the Platform Meeting'

A total of 31 responses, which constitute 34% of the 91 attendees of the IP Platform Meeting, were collected in the evaluation survey of the IP Platform Meeting. In the survey the delegates could indicate a score between 1-5 for various parts of the conference. There were also some questions where the delegates could reply on a 'strongly disagree-strongly agree' scale and one question where the delegates could reply on a 'very dissatisfied-very satisfied' scale.

Figure 1 shows us that all visitors of the IP Platform Meeting were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the conference.

Question: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with this event?

16,1%

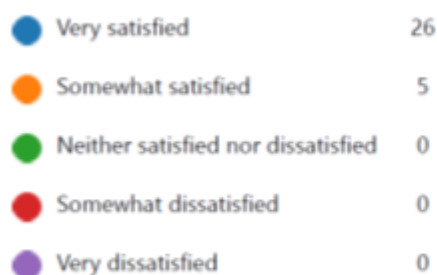


Table 1 presents the overall scores given to 15 questions where a numeric score could be given, ranging from 0-5. The score '5' is the highest score, where '1' is the lowest score. It shows that in 89,5% of the cases a score of 4/5 or 5/5 was given. Only one time a score below 3 was given (0,2%).

Scoring	Total	Percentage
5	208	49,4%
4	169	40,1%
3	43	10,2%
2	1	0,2%
1	0	0,0%
<i>Grand total</i>	<i>421</i>	

Table 2 offers an overview of the average scores given to several issues of the conference.

Issue	Average score (best score: 5/5)
The overall organisation of the IP Platform Meeting	4,7
Accessibility in terms of transport, reception, ease of access	4,6
Meeting venue and facilities	4,7
The conference format / schedule	4,4
The conference website (instead of printed info)	4,8
The interactions with other participants	4,5
Plenary session	4,2
The amount of time in which participants were able to ask questions to the speakers	4,4

Theme based workshops	4,5
Workshop: Project management	4,4
Keynote speakers during workshops	4,3
Facilitation during workshops	4,3
Movie night	3,8
Field visits	3,9
Info market during lunch	3,8

In an open question, the participants were asked what the highlight of the conference was. A summary of responses is listed below:

The workshops	The communication and organization itself	Networking opportunities
Real experiences and real problems	the insight on the future LIFE programming phase	Share knowledge and practical experience
The open-minded, interested approach and presence of EASME	The field trips	The overall concept of the conference with different themes
Exchange between the project managers	Keynote speech by Angelo Salsi	professional facilitators

In an open question, the participants were asked if they had recommendations for future events. A summary of responses is listed below:

healthy options (like fruit) during coffee breaks	Reduce the duration of the field visits and don't serve lunch too late during your trip	Organise a workshop session specific for communication officers or financial officers
To keep the same approach with focuses and interaction	possible collaboration between IP's on communication	To ask what we think about the administration system for LIFE projects
To show more clearly the general political context, trends	More time for discussions, interaction, communication and networking with other IPs.	more information from the EU
more support to network	Information on administrating natura 2000 governance at the EU Level and hard to understand Chapters such as the	Facilitation of workshops

	required KPI might be helpful for IP- Project managers	
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8.3 Annex 3: participants list of the IP Platform Meeting

8.3.1 Sorted by project

MS	First Name	Last Name	Organisation	Project	Role in the project/organisation	Email address
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