BID-REX
Interreg Europe

European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

Key lessons brief

Main conclusions of third
BID-REX workshop

30 and 31 January 2018

Budapest (Hungary)

Improving data flows

BID-REX aims to enhance natural value preservation through improved regional development policies by strengthening the link between relevant biodiversity data and conservation decision-making processes. More specifically, it aims to promote the mobilization of relevant biodiversity information to increase the impact of ERDF and other relevant EU funds allocation for the preservation of European natural heritage.

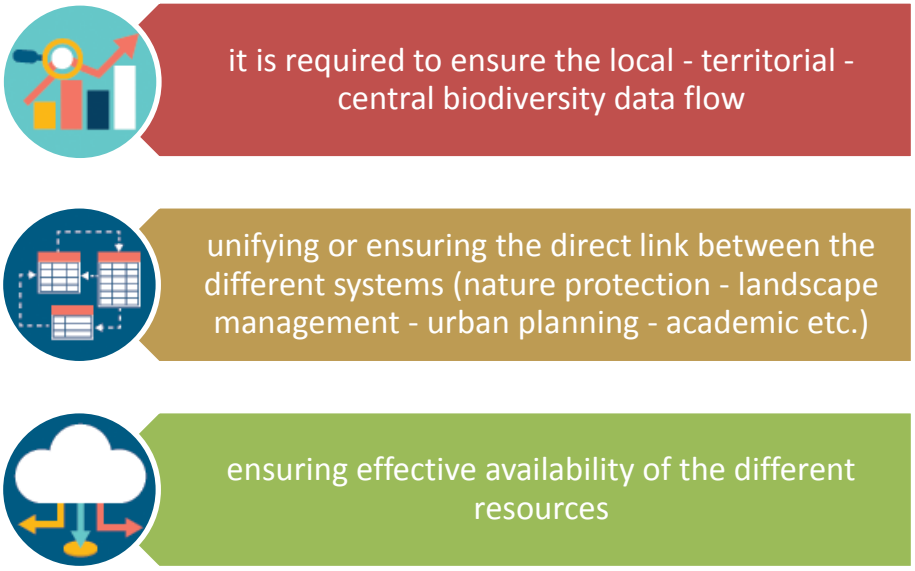
The third workshop focused on practical aspects of biodiversity information flow; presented partners' practices, formulated recommendations on how it could be improved. The workshop built on the results of the two previous workshops including determining relevant biodiversity data and information for decision makers and reconciling those with the needs.

Partner regions' representatives and key stakeholders' delegates met in Budapest, presented and discussed their experiences in three main areas of biodiversity information flow:

- protected area development;
- different investments; and
- concept, strategy, and programme development

The exact availability of biodiversity information flow is a main element of not only the whole biodiversity information flow but of the starting and running of the process itself.

Its existence helps and makes possible its effective use. Already its partial lack and its set up require significant effort (time, energy, resources, etc.). In this context number of recommendations has been identified, practices presented:



Protected area development has a characteristic biodiversity information flow practice: most cases in local scale development data provider and final user are the same from the idea/task formulation to the implementation. In this case the "information flow" is a direct use of own data and information.

However we should avoid that on one hand in case of an action ensuring a specific, narrow goal we would forget about other relevant, important data and on the other hand relevant external data sources should not be lost (scientific, citizen, etc.) including socio-economic information to avoid loss of socio-economic value. At regional level we have to count with numerous data provider, databases with different system (municipality, institutions, ministries, NGOs, etc).

For the biodiversity information flow, **improvement in cooperation** is needed by the data owners, data providers; for such cooperation to take place, networks are needed to enable the data to be reached openly (University of Debrecen – OpenBioMaps) where it is not set up yet.

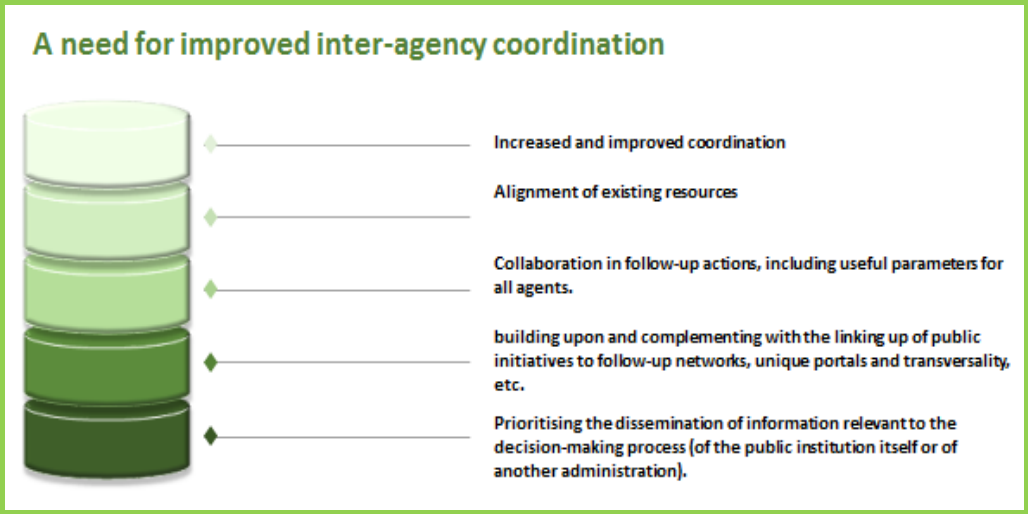
To improve inter-institutional coordination is a key of success.

In the case of Natura 2000 development, European/national guidelines are available both for management plan development and the prioritization of Natura 2000 area development.

Good practice: Improved inter-agency coordination in the Basque Country

Our approach to improve coordination and collaboration between administrations and also with other data producers and users involves addressing two lines of work.
The first would be to build or establish tools that improve and facilitate that coordination. At the same time they should allow the importance and necessity of biodiversity information and data to be better visible and valued. It would be specified in:

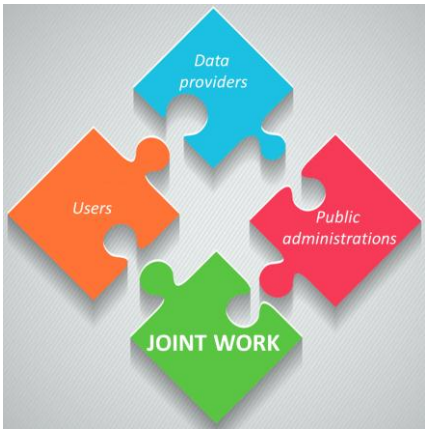
- The signing of collaboration agreements between administrations, with specific objectives, lines, actions and budget commitments
- Development and establishment of common methodologies, protocols and standards for projects: knowledge, information, monitoring and evaluation of biodiversity, from the methodology of field work, to the treatment of data, the format of data delivery and mapping, indicators, etc.
- In addition, design the appropriate regulatory framework to highlight the need for inter-administrative coordination; that gives support or legal coverage to the Nature Information System of the Basque Country and establishes it as the basis for the construction and feeding of information and knowledge; that forces the development and adoption of common standards and protocols; and that it allows to give greater relevance to Biodiversity, forcing all data to be collected in the Nature Information System of the Basque Country and to prepare periodic report.



In **regional development environment** the main actors of biodiversity information flow are data providers, users and public administrations.

A smooth biodiversity information flow depends on how their main actors are able/ready for an intensive and continuous joint work.

All have a specific working environment, own interest, own future image. A case basic, temporary joint work for a better coordination and cooperation between them is more and more requested.



Mainly for a better performance in concrete cases, but more importantly is the long term cooperation based on signed cooperation agreements and joint project development.

In case of different investments supported by ERDF and other relevant EU funds, beside sector specific information, the integration of biodiversity information is required: **biological information** (species, habitats, temporal trends, spatial distribution, threads, pressures, sensitivity), **strategic biodiversity mapping** (ecological network, infrastructure, protected areas, etc.), **environmental information** (geological, soil, air, pollution, health), **land use** (maps of quarries as biodiversity hotspots), **socio-economic aspects** (areas with organic farming, public/private owners of land, etc.), **local or regional planning**, **legal framework** (policy and regulatory context), **type and nature** of the project (industrial, access, potential growth, etc.).

Even that all these data (and more) exist, available still there is some difficulties or pitfalls on data exchange between sectors. Some sectors have important biodiversity data, information for own practice, own development (water management, agriculture) but out of nature conservation "sector" horizon.

Both stakeholder participation and effective communication (at different phases and different levels) are crucial for the development project's success.

Integration of all these is necessary and important both to biodiversity information system and the development activity of certain sector.

Biodiversity information experts and social-economic groups have to find new common language for the mutual understanding.

Beside the common language, nature protection experts should know more and more about other sector's policies and practices, work with them and make efforts to create think-tanks at local and regional levels to better integrate information.

The most common data that are needed for **developing programmes and strategies** are biodiversity data like species distribution, preferably in a spatial, GIS form, conservation status, conservation and monitoring activities conducted in the area.

However, population trends and sensitivity of species to the variety of impacts are also used for long-term planning. Ecosystem Services valuation and accounting of Natural Capital is becoming a more desirable language.

In most cases, biodiversity data is taken into account only until to the extent where it is necessary and obliged by the law; for example under EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) and AA (Appropriate Assessment) procedures.

There is a space for further improvement in that field and the inclusion of biodiversity data to a greater extent in policies, in particular of sectors other than the environment. Nature conservation is usually only a separated part of the strategy, a separate chapter; it is not sufficiently mainstreamed into other sections.

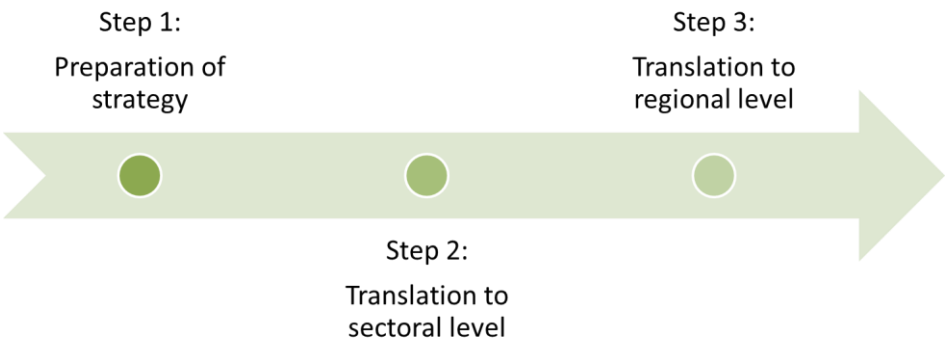
Close cooperation between sectors is still not a common practice. Scientists and policymakers are working separately with insufficient knowledge exchange, collaboration and common meetings. Lack of a common ground for meetings and collaboration is one of the reasons for problems to occur.

In addition to that, there are no operational guidelines how to include biodiversity data into policies.

Despite goodwill on both sides, there still might be difficulties to cooperate, by reason of lack of practical knowledge on facilitation and communication on both sides.

Having personal relations between scientists and policymakers encourages common understanding and builds trust. Therefore, joint events should be promoted.

The comprehensive policy process using biodiversity data should comprise three steps:



The first step should be the preparation of the strategy, which should be treated as an intention or a goal to achieve in the next decades. It should include references to biodiversity data.
The second step would be a translation of the overall goal to the sectoral level, where nature shall be mainstreamed to all sectors.

The third step is the regional level which uses the most detailed biodiversity information which is necessary for making the policy operational and translated to the guidelines for territorial planning.

Often, even if high-level policy frameworks encourage cooperation, it is not translated down to local and regional levels. One of the reasons for this is the lack of action plans translating policy concepts into practical steps and tasks that can be actioned.

Communication about the benefits of including biodiversity data into policies should be translated into economic terms using Ecosystem Services valuation. This way, it is easier to include it also to other sectors, speaking about health, employment safety, economic benefits and other positives.

In some regions, like Catalonia, scientists created a lobby group which is targeting policymakers with their message. They have regular meetings where they discuss a concrete issue, create a position which then they convey to the decision makers.

Attendees at the third interregional BID-REX workshop in Budapest, Hungary

Group work - Section 1

Protected area development

Group work - Section 2

Different investments

Group work - Section 3

Concept, strategy, program development