Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE

Co-funded by the European Union

ReCo

Work paper “Learning from peer-reviews” (D.2.3.4)

Final version

28.02.2025

Title: Learning from peer-reviews. Main outcomes from the peer-review visits.

Deliverable: D.2.3.4

Authors:

Michala Mariňáková, the ReCo project team

Ametyst

The document was developed as a part of the project "ReCo – Restoring degraded eco-systems along the Green Belt to improve and enhance biodiversity and ecological connectivity" (www.interreg-central.eu/projects/reco), supported by the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme with co-financing from the European Regional Development Fund.

Content

1. Introduction

The ReCo project aims to address the challenges facing the Central European Green Belt (CE EGB). To improve the protection and conservation of habitats along the CE EGB, ReCo focuses on transnational cooperation, recognising that ecological connectivity extends beyond national borders. An important part of the project is represented by the Joint Pilot Actions, which focus on restoring valuable habitats and supporting endangered species through innovative ecological restoration approaches.

In the second year of the project, each pilot region implementing the Joint Pilot Actions (hereafter "Actions") was visited by a joint peer review team composed of Joint Pilot Team members. The teams carried out an in-depth analysis of the Actions, focusing on challenges identified, perceptions of the Actions among stakeholder alliances, and potential community-based leverage effects achieved. The visits included also discussions with selected local stakeholders. The results of the visits, including recommendations for policy improvements, were included in written peer review reports and are summarised in this document, which will serve in particular for the elaboration of Joint Practitioners Guides, Joint Transnational Restoration Strategy, and local/regional restoration (action) plans in ReCo pilot regions.

2. Methodology for the peer-reviews

2.1. Summary of the methodology

The methodology is described in deliverable D.2.3.1 “Joint peer review methodology for peer-review trips” in detail. It has following steps:

1. Creation of peer-review teams

Each team consisted of a “Core team” (2 members who participated in all the visits), and representatives of at least 2 partners. Associated partners and Project Advisory Board Members were invited as well but unfortunately, they could not participate, except for one associated partner who participated in the visit to PR5 Ińsko Lakeland.

Each team had a leader nominated by the Lead partner (LP) and 1 or 2 note takers. Other roles were set as needed.

2. Preparation of the visit

The team leader organised an initial online meeting of the team with the local project partners (PPs) responsible for implementing the Action. Additional meetings were organised as needed. The agenda of the visit, sites and stakeholders to be visited were prepared by the local PPs and approved by the team leader. The practical organisation of the visit (accommodation, meeting room, transport) was mainly done by the local PPs. Local PPs provided available documentation and all team members studied the documentation and available information on the action in advance.

3. Peer-review visit

The peer-review visit included several stages:

Presentation of the Action: initial situation, preparation phase, implementation, results and impacts (environmental, socio-economic, political, problems and their solutions, communication, cooperation and conflicts with stakeholders and the public, synergies and conflicts with existing plans, strategies, policies and laws. Filling in the questionnaire about the Action if not prepared by the local PPs in advance, discussion.

Field visit: Presentation of the project sites and measures (to be) implemented.

Meetings with stakeholders: At their premises, in the meeting room or directly on the project sites. The Peer Review Team discussed with the stakeholders how they perceived the measures implemented and the Action as a whole, their participation, benefits and inconveniences resulting from the Action, and possible future cooperation. Possible stakeholders: representatives of the local community, landowners and land users, duty holders (especially public bodies responsible for nature conservation), local NGOs, subcontractors, local business people.

Evaluation of the Action: The peer review team discussed the results of the visit before leaving.

4. Completion of the report

The report from the visit was drafted by the note takers and the leader according to a common template, and discussed with all members of the peer-review team. It was recommended that an online meeting be held to discuss the findings of the visit and the report, but no such meeting took place and comments were provided in writing only.

2.2. Feedback and recommendations

In general, the methodology was found to work. Teams were able to follow the suggested steps and produce the report in the required format. Some adjustments were recommended:

2. Preparation of the visit

Providing available documentation on local actions in advance of the PR visit could be an advantage, but is not necessary if the peer-review team is familiar with the action in advance. However, local PPs should provide information on the current status of the Action, what has already been implemented. This would enable the review team to ask more targeted questions and provide more relevant feedback at the time of the visit.

It is better if the local PPs complete the basic information and the questionnaire in advance.

3. Peer-review visit

Timing: The timing of the peer review visits was constrained by the project timetable; however, it would be better to carry out the visit when the Action is more advanced to ensure a more effective review.

Presentation of the Action: If relevant, include a presentation of measures carried out in the past, which would show whether there is some continuity of different activities to address the identified problems/management of the locality.

Site visit: It is important to allow sufficient time and to emphasise this.

Meetings with stakeholders: This is a very important part of the visit. The presence of active site managers or people responsible for site management is necessary, but other stakeholders directly linked to the Action should also be involved, e.g. nature conservation specialists, community representatives and landowners. Stakeholders not directly involved in the pilot action, but important for the area, for past and future restoration activities, people from regional development or tourism, or even possible critics of the action should also be invited.

4. Completion of the report

The peer review team should identify common lessons that could be transferred between interventions, such as approaches to planning, overcoming challenges and engaging local stakeholders. These shared lessons, combined with external perspectives, should be seen as a valuable outcome of the peer review process. This networking in terms of shared knowledge and experience could be highlighted as a relevant outcome of the peer reviews.

An online/physical discussion when the report is drafted would be better than just written comments but it is quite demanding.

3. Summary of the Joint Pilot Actions

3.1. Pilot Region 1 - Fichtelgebirge and Smrčiny Mountains

Location: Czech-German border near Aš and Hof.

Target species and habitats:

- Wet meadows
- Oligotrophic water streams
- Flat moors, spring moors
- Freshwater pearl mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*), marsh fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*)

Objectives:

- Restoration of habitats of endangered species.
- Restoration of small streams.
- Improved water retention and rewetting to restore the natural state of the wetlands.
- Creating interconnectivity between the different habitats to increase biodiversity and restore ecological balance.

Measures:

- Cleaning up the network of small tributaries of Bystřina Brook, and improve the vegetation on their banks to improve food supply of the pearl mussel population.
- Replacement of a wooden dividing object that brings water from Lužní potok Brook to a side channel - breeding habitat for juvenile pearl mussels.
- Improvement of the structure of the stream Humboldtgraben.
- Establishing ecological corridors and transition zones between different habitat types to promote the mobility of flora and fauna and strengthen ecological connectivity.
- Dismantling of drainages.
- Removal of non-native afforestation.
- Removal of sediments from 100 m of a stream and restoration of a gravel stream bottom.

Stage of implementation at the time of the peer review: In progress (early stage).

Challenges and issues:

- The Municipality of Rehau extracts drinking water in significant quantities from shallow wells at many points in the Rehau Forest, which, in addition to drainage through ditches, further contributes to the degradation of the moorland. The extracted water is missing from the peat bogs and wet meadows of the Rehau Forest, which serve as natural water reservoirs. As a result, streams in the region are at risk of regularly drying out during dry phases. To prevent this, the Municipality of Rehau is obliged to release water from the drinking water supply into the streams during dry periods.

It is most probably not possible to stop it; however, removal of drainage ditches would mitigate the negative impact and also reduce the need to add water to streams.

- To stabilise the pearl mussel population in long-term, it is necessary to implement major changes in the landscape management. Although some steps are already done or in preparation, it will take a very long time to achieve this. Until then, the pearl mussel population is threatened with extinction and it is necessary to invest enough resources into its maintenance, including financing the semi-artificial breeding.
- Management of meadows needs to be assured every year.
- Climate change: Long dry seasons lead (together with the disturbed water regime) to drying up of streams which endangers the pearl mussels. In long-term, restoration of water regime is needed. In short-term, using the existing or newly built ponds as a source of water is possible. Higher temperatures in summer create a need to adjust management measures in cooperation with experts.
- Communication and cooperation with some important stakeholders in the Czech Republic, especially landowners and land users, is quite complicated. Ametyst will use the last project year for more negotiations.

Strengths and highlights:

- Biodiversity improvement
- Improvement of nature resistance to negative impacts of climate change and human behaviour
- Preserving endangered species
- Viable example of good practice

Main weaknesses:

- Action requires long term continuation and financing
- Complicated transnational/transboundary communication and cooperation due to unwillingness of some stakeholders

3.2. Pilot Region 3 - Škocjanski Zatok

Location: Škocjanski zatok Nature Reserve

Target species and habitats:

- Mudflats and sandflats not covered by sea water at low tide
- Salicornia and other annual plants colonizing mud and sand
- Mediterranean salt meadows (*Juncetalia maritimi*)
- Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilus scrub (*Sarcocornetea fruticosi*)
- Kentish plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*)
- Little tern (*Sternula albifrons*)
- Common tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

Objectives:

- The general objective of the JPA in the Škocjanski zatok NR is to address climate change challenges impacting wetland ecosystems, with a special focus on coastal wetlands. This initiative seeks to

develop and apply strategies to reduce the negative effects of climate change on N2000 protected habitats and bird species inhabiting in the brackish lagoon of the Škocjanski zatok NR.

Measures:

- The Action included the creation of two new mudflats in the central area of the brackish lagoon, covering a total of 420 m², to encourage the growth of halophytes, thereby enhancing N2000 habitats and supporting the nesting of target Natura 2000 bird species.
- Material for constructing and shaping the mudflats was obtained by deepening the interconnected secondary channels within the lagoon. This has also improved water circulation and reduced the isolation of peripheral habitats.

Stage of implementation at the time of the peer review: Completed.

Challenges and issues:

- The administrative procedures to obtain the necessary documents took a long time. Fortunately, the partner in charge started early enough.
- Decline in the abundance of wintering bird species in the lagoon during the works. To mitigate the impact, the works were completed as quickly as possible.

Strengths and highlights:

- Very good cooperation with stakeholders.
- Effective and targeted measures for addressing climate change issues and protecting biodiversity.
- Sharing interdisciplinary knowledge.
- A great best practice example which can become one of the recommended methodological approaches or strategies for similar measures on coastal salt marshes as well as on inland wetlands. It can therefore be recommended to further present the methods used not only in Slovenia or in the European Green Belt, but basically anywhere.

Main weaknesses:

- Pollution from surrounding areas (noise, wastewater, light pollution)
- Possible oil spills in the port that could impact the reserve area

3.3. Pilot Region 4 - Gorenjska Region: Reviving Alpine Meadows in Karavanke

Location: Western Karavanke – the area above Municipality of Jesenice

Target species and habitats:

- Mountain hay meadows
- Biodiversity of meadows – namely daffodils (*Narcissus poeticus ssp. radiiflorus*)

Objectives:

- Motivate and engage more farmers to join the Preservation Daffodil Programme, leading to properly managed meadows and more land under conservation.
- Increase awareness among inhabitants and visitors about the biodiversity of this area and the importance of its conservation.
- Attract more visitors during other periods of the year and promote proper behaviour in nature.

- Facilitate farmers' work by finding new solutions for mowing steep meadows.
- Increase the number of blooming meadows and maintain the daffodil population in this area.

Measures:

- Monitoring of landowners participating in the Adapted Programme.
- Monitoring of daffodil plots to assess population health and coverage.
- Insemination project to enhance biodiversity and daffodil propagation.
- Pilot mowing of steep meadows to explore effective management techniques.
- Empowerment of biodiversity awareness among residents and visitors through education and communication.
- Involvement of new landowners/areas to expand the reach of conservation efforts.
- Development of a VR-based communication tool to promote the region's nature, culture, and tourism.
- Purchase of equipment for the integrated “VR+AR” (Virtual and Augmented Reality) solution to enhance visitor engagement.

Stage of implementation at the time of the peer review: 3 activities completed, 2 nearly completed, 2 in progress, 1 not started yet.

Challenges and issues:

- Adverse weather conditions in 2024: Snow at the end of April caused a bad season for daffodils and limited the collection of photos and videos for the VR application. Some photos may be added/changed later. Increasing weather extremes may negatively affect the target species and habitats; already now, some changes can be observed. It is necessary to discuss the management with experts and adjust it if needed.
- One area of concern is the long-term sustainability of mowing practices, which are labour intensive and not well remunerated. This raises questions about their viability over time without additional incentives or support. In addition, the current system of annual funding decisions hinders farmers' ability to engage in long-term planning, creating uncertainty in their operations and commitment to sustainable practices. However, significant steps have been taken to improve sustainability. The Development Plan to 2030 provides a structured and forward-looking approach that offers a framework for continued progress. A particularly promising development is the planned establishment of an association of mountain farmers. This initiative has the potential to amplify farmers' voices, advocating for better and more reliable long-term financing solutions.
- Increased tourism causes pressure on fragile ecosystems. Some farmers noted concerns about visitor behaviour (e.g., leaving paths or trampling meadows). The development of a VR application with behavioural guidelines demonstrates a forward-thinking approach and provides an excellent solution to further enhance communication and visitor management.

Strengths and highlight:

- Excellent stakeholder involvement ensures effective collaboration and shared ownership of the Action.
- Perfect integration of local people, especially through events, strengthens community engagement and support.

- Iconic flagship species (daffodil) serves as a strong regional identifier and an outstanding marketing tool.

Main weaknesses:

- The economic situation of the farmers remains marginal, as the preservation of the daffodil meadows does not provide sufficient income for their livelihood.
- A clear dilemma exists: beneficiaries of daffodil meadow management are primarily vendors of tourism services and nearby villagers, while farmers, who bear the workload and costs, benefit less directly.

3.4. Pilot Region 5 - Ińsko Lakeland

Location: Ińsko Lakeland

Target species and habitats:

- European bison *Bos bonasus*

Objectives:

- Enhancing migration routes for European bison herds.
- Minimizing human – European bison conflicts.

Measures:

- GPS-Collar Deployment: equipping additional 20 animals with state-of-the-art GPS collars, providing valuable data for conservation efforts.
- Migration Barriers Identification. This entails studying geographical features, human-made structures, and other factors contributing to obstacles in the animals' migratory routes.
- Poaching Identification and Tracking. The integration of real-time tracking systems allows for prompt responses to potential threats.
- Formulation of Recommendations for Transport Infrastructure Investments

Stage of implementation at the time of the peer review: In progress.

Challenges and issues:

- Negative perception of the species by farmers: Despite intensive communication, some farmers are still against the bison protection. This is partly understandable because bison cause damage on crop, although the problem is probably not that big. Better mitigation strategies and continuous communication are needed.
- Poaching: 24 individuals were illegally killed in the last 5 years, and there is a clear and constant increase in poaching cases observed. Although the level of mortality caused by poaching probably does not threaten the population as a whole, the problem is mainly the tolerance of such behaviour by society, as well as criminal law enforcement authorities. Therefore it needs to be further addressed.

Strengths and highlights:

- Symbolic, emblematic species
- Close cooperation with stakeholders
- Comprehensive approach to the problem

Main weaknesses:

- High personnel, economic and time requirements

3.5. Pilot Region 6 - Thayatal, Podyjí

Location: National parks Thayatal (AT) and Podyjí (CZ)

Target species and habitats:

- European Wildcat (*Felis silvestris*)
- Amphibians, lizards
- Dragonflies, Grasshoppers, Hymenoptera
- Saltmarsh plants
- Salt marshes
- Wetlands
- Small ponds
- Dry grasslands
- Woodlands of the type Kl. Querco-Fagetea

Objectives:

- Understanding migration patterns to improve connectivity in the pilot region, preparation of a guideline for wildcat release in the future.
- Restoration of degraded wetland and creating mosaics of different habitat types (three small ponds with shores of various steepness, wetland).
- Management of the small patches of dry meadows
- Improving connectivity of woodland habitats.

Measures:

- Radio-tagging and releasing the wild cat individuals and monitoring their migration patterns. Documenting the results and providing a guideline for further measures to enhance the population.
- Removal of reed, digging out top layer of soil and creating three small ponds of various depth.
- Removal of shrubs and trees (including *Robinia pseudoacacia*) by brushcutter and chainsaw as well as using small vehicles.
- Removal of shrubs by grazing (*Prunus fruticosa* and *P. spinosa*) and combination of shrub-removal and grazing (*Rosa* sp., *Robinia*).
- Planting more than 300 trees, fitting to the abiotic local conditions to improve connectivity.

Stage of implementation at the time of the peer review: Different stages from not started to completed.

Challenges and issues:

- The first wildcats that had to be radio-tagged and released, disappeared 2 weeks before the release. The responsible partner had to find other individuals which will be released in spring 2025.

- The responsible partner underestimated the length of the administration process coupled with the tender announcement for a contractor selection (creation of ponds). Therefore, the action was delayed.
- A potential risk was identified that the tree planting could affect the Northern Lapwing population. However, following discussion with an expert, it was determined that the risk was low.
- It is not always easy to find suitable areas with willing landowners.
- Grassland management is dependent on subsidies. If possible, CAP subsidies are used.
- There seems to be lack of policy or strategy regarding better landscape permeability for animals on the Austrian side, especially along highways and railroads. On the Czech side, this issue is tackled within the spatial plans (by so called migration corridors – biotopes of special protected species), which could serve as an inspiration.

Strengths and highlights:

- Involvement of the experts from the start/preparation phase through implementation.
- Positive feedback from local communities.
- Transferability of experience from the neighbouring countries.

Main weaknesses:

- Insecurity in getting funds for the activities.

4. Recommendations and key messages

The main recommendations and key messages for the preparation and implementation of restoration projects resulting from the peer-review visits:

Stakeholder engagement

- Strong stakeholder involvement and community engagement are critical for the success and sustainability of conservation actions. Clear and transparent communication with stakeholders minimises misunderstandings and builds trust.
- They may bring invaluable insights to the project, enabling synergies to be leveraged, and their close involvement ensures that they can apply the knowledge gained in the project to their own work. This also ensures sustainability.
- The projects should use both the expertise and local knowledge of the stakeholders.
- Identifying potential conflicts and managing them appropriately is essential and can prevent future fatal clashes with stakeholders that can negatively affect project outcomes. The establishment of compensation mechanisms is one of the possible tools to address the conflicts.
- For the stakeholder engagement, adequate time is needed, which has to be respected in the project planning. It has to be ensured during all project stages from its preparation to the final evaluation and sustainability period.
- It is advantageous to consider which stakeholders should be involved first and more intensively, and which ones later.
- Regular updates and feedback loops are vital for maintaining stakeholder engagement.
- Establishing long-term cooperation that goes beyond the scope of an individual project is optimal.
- Early and consistent involvement of local communities in the project supports its acceptance and mitigates potential resistance. Community engagement and local pride are important for ensuring long-term success and sustainability of restoration efforts.
- Addressing the community needs and incorporating traditional knowledge enhances project relevance and sustainability.
- General public needs to be informed appropriately. Using website and social media is very useful communication tool, but do not forget personal communication.

Collaboration and Partnerships:

- Strong partnerships with governmental bodies, NGOs, academic institutions, local communities, conservation agencies, and the private sector provide additional resources and expertise.
- Cross-sector collaboration enhances the impact of restoration efforts.
- Including experts in all project phases is essential for the project success and positive impact on the target features, biodiversity and environment.
- International cooperation is important for very mobile species such as the European bison or the wildcat.

Tools:

- GIS applications and software (e.g., QGIS) as useful tools for project planning, monitoring, organising processes and visualising results.

- GPS tracking technologies provide data-driven insights for better management, help to identify ecological needs of the species and migration barriers, to mitigate damages caused by the animals and to prevent illegal killing.
- Leveraging a flagship species for effective boost of conservation impact and regional identity.
- Integration of monitoring technologies like the drone imagery for monitoring advances and offering material for public communication.
- Investing in ecological corridors and wildlife crossings would further improve connectivity, reducing the risks posed by infrastructure barriers.
- Excursions and lectures for public and schools.
- Leveraging media outreach, including social media and news outlets, would further promote the project's successes and inspire similar initiatives in other regions.
- Exchange of experience among partners/practitioners from different regions/countries: e.g., peer reviews, networking meetings, online presentations.

Preparational phase:

- Baseline data collection is essential for project planning and measuring the progress and impacts effectively.
- Long-term knowledge of the environment, acquired experience and contacts with experts and stakeholders are important for properly planned measures.
- Adequate time allocated for planning ensures clear objectives and feasible action plans.
- The owners of the area where activities are planned (whether public or private) must be promptly notified and provide their consent.
- It is always important to check how much time is required to obtain the necessary documents, as delays in their acquisition can significantly postpone the start of works.
- Securing adequate funding and technical expertise is critical for project success.
- Diversified funding sources can mitigate financial risks.
- Understanding the local ecological context and potential social impacts helps in designing appropriate interventions.
- Restoration projects should aim for both environmental sustainability and social equity.
- Photo documentation of the pre-restoration phase is important for future assessment of the project impact.
- It is essential to establish a monitoring plan and find suitable experts.

Implementation:

- Flexibility to adapt plans based on ongoing monitoring and feedback is necessary.
- Recognizing that restoration is often a non-linear process, helps in managing expectations.
- Regular coordination with subcontractors is important to avoid larger problems later, especially when doing earthworks in protected areas.
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation are essential to track progress, learn from successes and failures, and make necessary adjustments.
- It is necessary to ensure photo-documentation during the works.

- Setting clear, measurable indicators from the outset enables more effective evaluation.

After implementation:

- Field survey to assess short-term impact after the implementation should be followed by long-term monitoring as some consequences will only become apparent later.
- Dissemination of results to achieve replications, extension of the measures to other areas.
- Presentation of results to stakeholders and general public.
- Peer-review of the project, carried out in a spirit of open communication, exchanging opinions and suggestions, helps to strengthen the positive impacts of the project and improve the planning of future measures.

Policy messages:

- Creation of a policy/strategy should be initiated in all countries where it is still missing to ensure protection and restoration of migration corridors for large mammals, and ensure better landscape permeability.
- A key priority is the integration of ecological corridors and wildlife migration routes into regional and national spatial planning policies. Infrastructure projects, such as roads and railways, should include mandatory wildlife crossings, underpasses, and buffer zones to prevent habitat fragmentation. Updates to land-use policies should designate protected ecological corridors to facilitate bison movement and genetic exchange between populations.
- To mitigate human-bison conflicts, adjustments to compensation schemes for farmers affected by bison-related crop damage should be expanded and streamlined. Other conflict species may need to be addressed similarly.
- Introducing financial incentives for landowners who maintain bison-friendly landscapes, such as sustainable grazing and agroforestry practices, would further promote coexistence of bison and people. Additionally, regulated feeding programs should be incorporated into conservation strategies to reduce bison encroachment on farmland while ensuring their natural foraging behaviour is maintained.
- Addressing the persistent threat of poaching requires stronger legal protection and stricter enforcement measures. Laws should introduce higher penalties for illegal hunting, improved monitoring through GPS tracking and surveillance technology, and enhanced cooperation between conservation authorities and law enforcement. The introduction of community-based anti-poaching programs could strengthen local engagement in bison conservation efforts. The same applies to other conflict species like Eurasian lynx, brown bear or grey wolf.
- Sustainable long-term funding mechanisms must be incorporated into national and EU biodiversity strategies. Dedicated financial support for bison conservation through EU funding programs, national environmental funds, and public-private partnerships should be secured to support habitat restoration, monitoring programs, and research initiatives.
- Finally, bison conservation should be fully integrated into Poland's national biodiversity strategy and EU Green Deal policies. Legal frameworks should explicitly recognize the European bison as a priority species, ensuring its protection aligns with broader habitat restoration, climate adaptation, and rewilding initiatives. Cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries should be strengthened to promote transnational conservation strategies, ensuring a cohesive and scientifically driven approach to bison population management across Central and Eastern Europe.
- Long-term financing is necessary for management measures (e.g., restoration of grassland habitats). The project teams should actively participate in the processes of preparing subsidy programs, such

as national CAP strategies and nature conservation programs. Among other things, it is necessary to support farmers in mountains and protected areas.

- Alternative financing sources should be initiated as well, e.g., from the tourism sector.
- It would be appropriate to ensure regular grant funding for the protection of European Green Belt assets to support long-term protection. This should be provided on the EU level as the European Green Belt in its essence is an EU ecological network.
- Changing legislation in some countries is needed to allow other forms of management, e.g. managed burning.

5. Conclusion

Both the partners responsible for implementing the Actions and the members of the peer review teams expressed that the peer reviews were very interesting and useful for them. The peer-review teams' members provided feedback, identified potential risks, made recommendations to improve the actions under review, and provided tips for future project planning and implementation. They were also able to gather experience from the actions that can be successfully transferred to other projects.

The following conclusions and observations can be drawn from the peer reviews carried out:

1. Importance of stakeholder engagement
   - Strong involvement of local communities, landowners, and conservation groups is critical for project success.
   - Early engagement minimizes resistance and ensures smoother project execution, as the example of the Škocjanski zatok shows.
   - Regular feedback loops and transparent communication build trust and long-term cooperation.
2. Lessons from implementation challenges
   - Many pilot actions faced bureaucratic hurdles, highlighting the need for early preparation of permits and funding approvals, to overcome administrative delays.
   - Weather unpredictability (e.g., late snow affecting daffodil monitoring, drought impacting pearl mussel habitats) necessitates adaptive management strategies to address seasonal and climate constraints.
   - Many conservation efforts rely on temporary funding sources, suggesting a need for more sustainable financial models, such as integrating tourism revenues minimizing financial uncertainty.
3. Best practices for ecological restoration
   - Shared ecological systems benefit from coordinated efforts across national borders, as seen in the Thayatal-Podyjí wildcat conservation initiative and the Fichtelgebirge-Smrčiny Mountains habitats restoration activities.
   - Use of innovative monitoring tools, like GIS, drone imagery, and VR-based communication enhances both conservation efforts and stakeholder engagement.
   - Restoration projects must consider ecological corridors to ensure species mobility and genetic diversity, i.e. long-term habitat connectivity.
4. Key policy recommendations
   - Some countries need to update regulations to allow alternative land management approaches, such as controlled burning.
   - A key priority is the integration of ecological corridors and wildlife migration routes into regional and national spatial planning policies. Infrastructure projects must respect these corridors and ensure permeability and habitat connectivity.
   - Leveraging flagship species (e.g., daffodils in Gorenjska, pearl mussel in Fichtelgebirge Mountains, European wildcat in Thayatal National Park or European bison in Ińsko Lakeland) can align ecological and economic (tourist) goals, pointing conservation actions as opportunities rather than just challenges.

The key factors for the successful implementation of a restoration project are:

- Careful planning based on actual data and expert knowledge.
- Open communication with stakeholders and their appropriate involvement.
- Respect for the local ecological context and potential social impacts.
- Use of innovative tools for project preparation, implementation, monitoring and communication.
- Adequate time allocated for planning and documentation.
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation, adjustment of measures based on the actual situation.
- Presentation of results to stakeholders and the public.