BID-REX
Interreg Europe

European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

Key lessons brief

Information needs for decision makers

Main conclusions of first
BID-REX workshop

22 and 23 February 2017
Eghezée (Namur, Wallonia)

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 allocation for the preservation of European natural heritage.

In the context of nature conservation policies, biodiversity data should be correctly used by conservation practitioners and decision makers in order to understand and take into account the potential effects and impacts resulting from associated management decisions and actions. The availability of comprehensive, sound, and up-to-date data should be a key requirement to implement policies, strategies and actions to address biodiversity loss, monitor progress towards biodiversity targets, as well as to assess the current status and future trends of biodiversity.

In this context, the objectives of the first interregional BID-REX workshop, which involved mainly regional decision makers from seven different European regions, were to assess the current regional biodiversity data processes, conceptualize the current status of the regional policy instruments, and define and characterize the data requirements by decision makers.

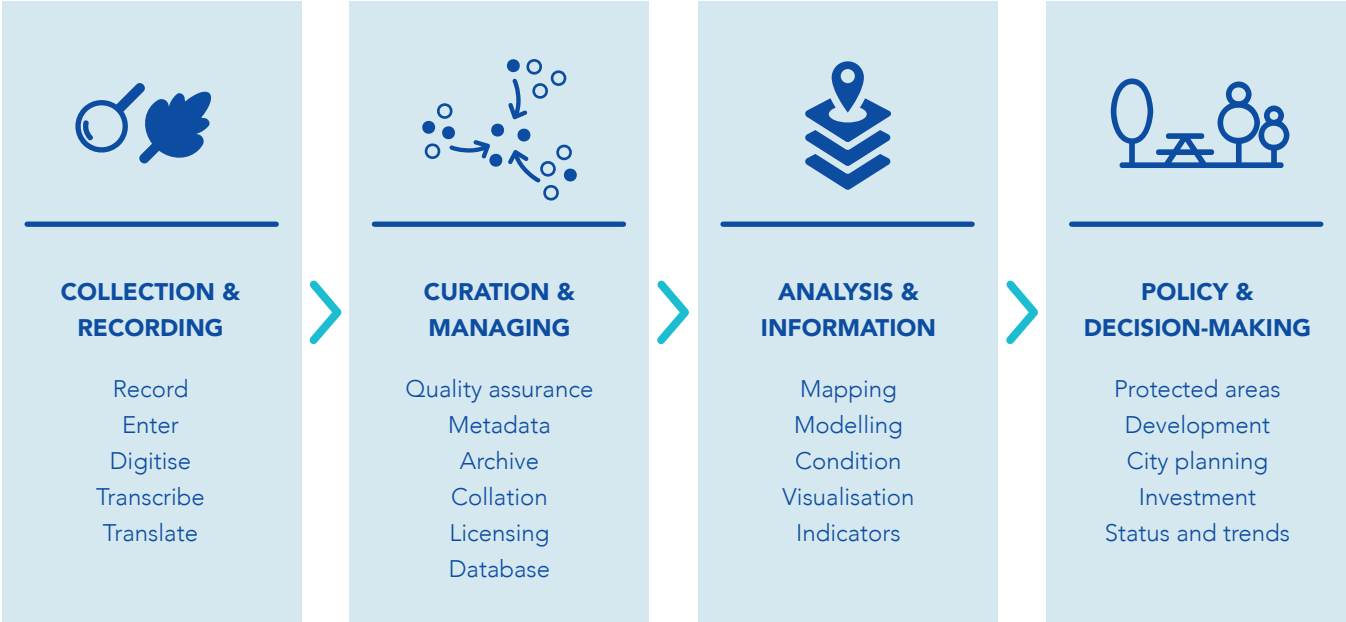
The main ideas that emerged in the workshop discussions can be summarized in four key aspects of information needs for decisions in conservation: the expression of information needs by decision makers; the importance of biodiversity information infrastructures to respond to these requirements; the effective use of that information in decision-making

processes; and, the real impact of the information in conservation policies. The main conclusions are outlined below.

In a decision-making process, multiple factors, not only the ones related to biodiversity, are interacting and influencing the final decision. In this context, it is critical from early on in the process that biodiversity information is adjusted to the needs and demands of the decision maker to maximize the impact and increase its influence in the final decision.

Expression of 'information needs'

The expression of 'information needs' or requirements by decision makers is a vital stage towards informing effective implementation and action, as poorly-expressed or imprecise definition of needs may lead to misunderstanding, and the provision of data or information



Above
Stages and actions involved in data collection, processing, and use

that is not fit for purpose. Furthermore, the clear and effective expression of data and information needs might affect the inventory methodology or approach to data processing employed by the data provider, and as such it is important to discuss this at an early point in the process.

In this context, a number of recommendations in terms of the expression of needs by decision makers or end users of data have been identified:

- Establish a regular dialogue between end users and data providers
- Clearly define the data needs, if necessary by formalizing them, including the desired level of precision and the degree of interpretation required
- The involvement of feedback from decision makers and the end users of data into data collection methods could be useful

- Data requesters/applicants should clearly express the context of use of the data
- Ensure that the context and demand are properly understood by data suppliers
- Regularly evaluate the process, from the perspective of both data suppliers and end users
- Clearly communicate any problems encountered

Biodiversity information infrastructures

Biodiversity information infrastructures can give an adequate response to these information requirements, which should be based on good quality and reliable data that is properly interpreted according to the decision context. Biodiversity information infrastructures are tools especially suited for this purpose, allowing heterogeneous data to become standardized, shared, stored long-term, analysed, and ultimately, trustworthy and relevant.

To ensure the impact of data-related infrastructures, a number of recommendations for data managers were identified:

Data quality, data interpretation considering the context, and trust in the data: key-factors for decision makers

- Clearly identify information priorities based on decision makers legal mandates and responsibilities
- Make the best use of financial resources and networks to mobilize biodiversity information to inform decision-making processes
- Improve accessibility to quality databases and metadata in order to build the understanding of end users such that they are confident to take data into account in decision-making processes
- Sharing good experiences using data infrastructures could lead to increased financial resources and network development

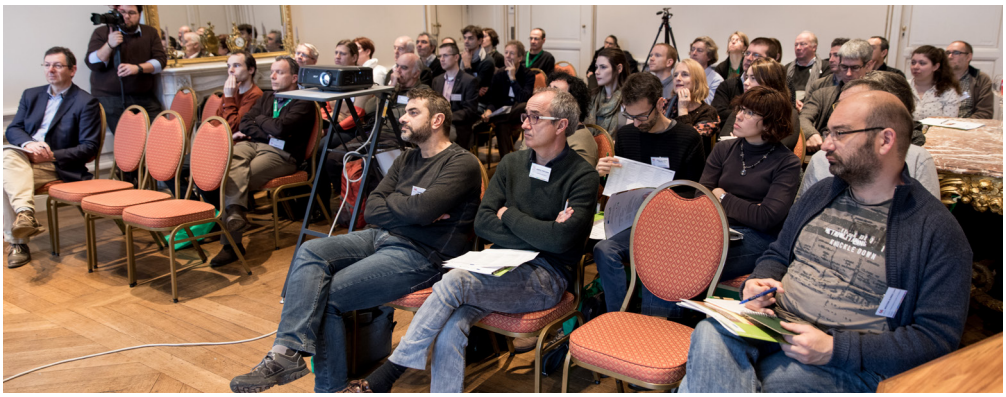
Effective use of biodiversity information

The effective use of biodiversity information in decision-making processes is influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic factors that interact and modulate the final outcomes. Extrinsic factors include those from political and legal backgrounds (conservation vs. development laws), to local and regional economic context (economic feasibility of projects), or the influence of lobbies (e.g. land owners, economical sectors).

Good practice one: SITxell

SITxell (http://www.sitxell.eu) is an example of an Open Data Infrastructure which provides biodiversity information to the municipalities of the Barcelona Provincial Council, for incorporation into local planning and policies. With a user-friendly design, the information provided considers the responsibilities of the municipalities; gives information to facilitate its interpretation; and, its successful uptake and resulting impacts allow for the identification and procurement of long-term funding.

Intrinsic factors include the credibility of data-providers and the confidence of the information supplied, including uncertainty assessments (temporal and spatial scale, risk analyses, etc.), but also how (or when) the information is used to feed into decision-making processes. Data providers' credibility, based on independence of political affiliations, impartiality, objectivity, professional reputation, stakeholder consideration and transparency, is considered essential for the inclusion of biodiversity data into decision-making processes.



Attendees at the first interregional BID-REX workshop in Namur, Wallonia

There are combined extrinsic and intrinsic factors that can boost the impact of biodiversity information in decision-making processes, including the development and use of 'think tanks', the communication of the value of habitats, species, and ecosystem services, and the improvement of information flows between researchers and public administrations.

One combined factor that is notable is the improvement of conservation priority setting, especially taking into account different socio-economic scenarios with constrained budgets. Some of the criteria used for priority setting are linked to the biological information itself

(e.g. legal and conservation status, importance of populations and/or distribution range, sensitivity to the impacts, feasibility of the project, etc.). Case studies highlighted that:

- Taking biodiversity data into account upstream of the decision-making process can lead to significant budgetary savings
- The costs of monitoring (improving the efficiency of measures) must be weighed up against the cost of non-targeted measures, compensation or possible incentives
- It is important to anticipate problems in defining habitats and defining the favourable status of conservation, otherwise there could be unclear conservation objectives

But what is the real impact of the information in conservation policies?

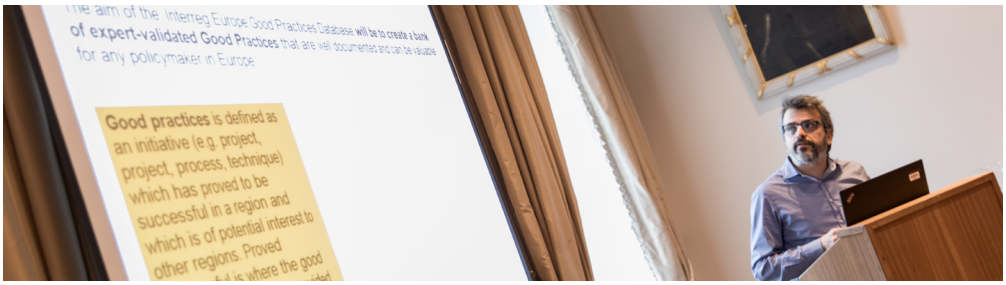
During the workshop, some examples of how decisions can be improved by taking biodiversity into account, and by using data and information provided by reputable and credible organisations were shared. It was also sought to identify where win-win situations have been achieved by preserving natural heritage without loss of economic value. Discussions focused on two main topics: trust and feedback between decision makers and data providers.

Mutual trust between data providers and decision makers

Mutual trust between data providers and decision makers is also relevant to prolong biodiversity information provision and its usage in decision-making processes.
Data providers must have confidence in the decision maker, and that they will not divert or misrepresent the meaning of the data transmitted to them. To achieve this, an environment of mutual trust should be established and reinforced through regular dialogue between parties and frequent assessment of satisfaction of bilateral expectations. Effective dialogue between the various actors, as stated previously, is very important throughout the whole decision-making process. In order to develop and achieve this dialogue, the organization of public meetings can help to make acquaintances and facilitate exchanges.

A regular dialogue between parties, and frequent satisfaction assessments of bilateral expectations, form the basis of an environment of mutual trust

Presentation at the first interregional BID-REX workshop in Namur, Wallonia



Systematic feedback procedures

Systematic feedback procedures allow decision makers to inform data suppliers of the actual follow-up of the decisions taken and the impact of the data provided. This information enriches the dialogue between parties and promotes long-term data provision. From the data providers point of view, this feedback is important for the establishment of indicators and for the improvement of their data, and adaptation to the decision makers' needs through an iterative process.

Good practice two: Collaboration between Elia and Natagora

Elia, Belgium's electricity transmission system operator, and Natagora, an environmental non-governmental organisation, collaborated to minimize the environmental impact of high voltage overhead lines in Belgium. After a wide dialogue, Natagora provided maps of bird's collision risk to Elia. Thanks to these maps, Elia added devices to enhance the visibility of the overhead lines in priority areas to reduce bird's collision risk. The feedback from Elia to Natagora's birdwatching community about the impact of its information has encouraged birdwatchers to collect new data.