

Informing and communicating on the Emerald Network beyond the scientific community



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Supporting life on Earth...

Biodiversity refers to the variety of life on Earth. According to the latest researchers' estimates, 7.4 billion *Homo sapiens* share the planet with nearly 1 trillion other organisms. All these living organisms, including those we know little about, such as microbes or invertebrates, are strongly interconnected and thus interdependent.

Unfortunately, biodiversity loss has accelerated to an unprecedented level in Europe and around the world in the last decades. It has been estimated that the current global extinction rate is 100 to 1 000 times higher than the natural rate.

What is more important is that humans effectively depend on biodiversity, which plays an essential role in keeping ecosystems stable, healthy and functional. Ecosystems clean our water, purify our air, maintain our soil, regulate the climate, recycle nutrients and provide us with food. They deliver raw materials and resources for medicines and other purposes. They are simply at the foundation of our civilisation and economies. Losing biodiversity is thus a major hazard to the survival of humankind.

BIODIVERSITY LOSS IN NUMBERS

Some 42% of mammals, 15% of birds and 45% of butterflies and reptiles are endangered in Europe. Worse, a recent assessment of the conservation status of around 6 000 European species undertaken by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) revealed that up to 25% of European animals are threatened with extinction.

SOME HISTORY

■ In 1989, the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention, ETS No. 104) launched the idea of a network of protected areas across Europe.

■ In the following decades, this idea resulted in the existence of two complementary ecological networks: the Emerald and the Natura 2000 Networks. The Natura 2000 Network is the contribution of the EU and its member states to the Bern Convention's Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest, while the Emerald Network is established in countries that are not members of the EU.

■ Together these two networks form a coherent and co-ordinated pan-European system aimed at the long-term survival of species and habitats of European importance and thus biodiversity and ecosystem services protection.



Pressure on natural habitats is growing due to landscape fragmentation, intensive agricultural exploitation, pollution, climate change, etc. These changes lead to the degradation and loss of habitats, which negatively affect species survival and thus cause biodiversity loss. Therefore, the creation of ecologically coherent networks of protected areas – such as the Emerald Network – helps protect habitats and the species that depend on their conservation.

■ However, the setting-up of a network of protected areas is a complex endeavor, mixing scientific work by experts and legislative and political action by national authorities. In addition, in order to be effectively built and eventually managed, the network has to receive support and contributions from civil society at large, including local stakeholders. Some of these actors, such as NGOs and academia, are already directly involved in the practical work of the network's establishment. Others, whose contribution might be expected in the future, may have never heard of its existence, even less on the social and economic benefits it can bring.

... through protected areas' networks in Europe

Emerald and Natura 2000 networks

- Member states of the EU
- Countries performing the Emerald network
- EU's Natura 2000 Network
- Bern Convention Emerald Network

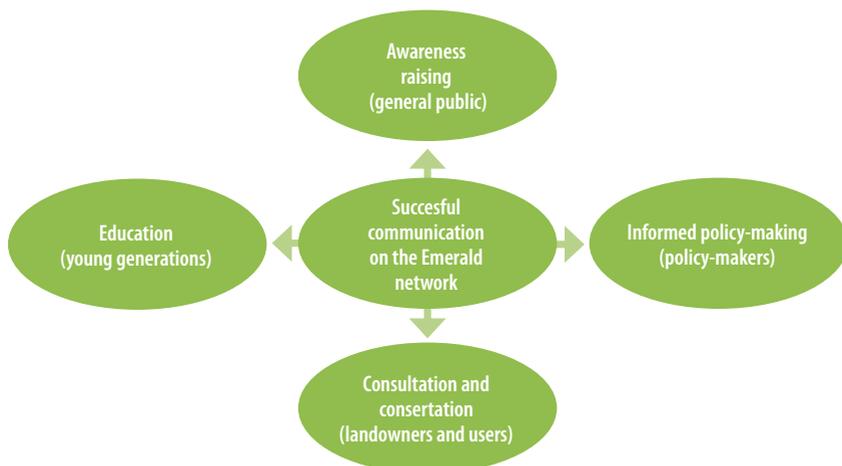




Communicating on biodiversity conservation and protected areas ...

So how do we effectively communicate the relevance and benefits of setting up a network of protected areas in Europe to beneficiaries with different backgrounds and agendas? Using what language and support? In other words, how do we make the role and achievements of the Emerald Network visible beyond its usual users and contributors (scientists, national authorities dealing with nature conservation, environment NGOs)?

■ One of the first tasks is to carefully identify the target groups you need to reach. In order to gain overall support for the whole Emerald process, **society at large** has to be convinced that every individual has a stake in protecting, preserving and sustainably managing biodiversity for everyone's well-being. Educating **young people** is also essential, as the management of the Emerald Network will essentially depend on the young generations. The **key stakeholders** in the future management of the network, such as local land users, farmers and hunters, should benefit from tailored communication campaigns which involve consultation and conservation. At the political level, national **policy makers** should receive clear, concise and timely information in order to make informed decisions and ensure they put the Emerald Network high on the political agenda. Later on, decision making would also benefit from a large acceptance of the network by society.





... by sending the right message to the right audience

The main message to be conveyed remains the same for each one of the four target groups identified above: biodiversity conservation through networks of protected areas brings benefits to all. However, a successful communication strategy will adapt the message depending on the target groups' needs and expectations. Failing to convey the right message to one group or concentrating efforts solely on some of them could jeopardise the whole process.

GENERAL TIPS AND TRICKS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION

- ▶ Awaken citizens' curiosity about biodiversity by conveying interesting facts about nature and biodiversity.
- ▶ Simplify the messages you convey, sticking to the most important and avoiding complex jargon.
- ▶ Ask for feedback from outside the scientific community when preparing communication campaigns.
- ▶ Tailor the tone of communication to the end-users' needs and expectations.
- ▶ Find a suitable end format to deliver the information:
 - infographics, animations and short videos are perfect tools for large public communication campaigns;
 - clear and concise information on costs and benefits is perfect for policy makers.
- ▶ Diversify communication channels (web, social media, radio, printed materials, public interventions, thematic meetings, etc.).
- ▶ Always make information available in national language(s).



1. General public

The analytical report of the Eurobarometer’s “Attitudes of Europeans towards the issue of biodiversity” showed that EU citizens are unfamiliar with the EU network of protected areas Natura 2000. Almost 8 in 10 respondents said they had never heard of Natura 2000 and those who were familiar with the term did not necessarily know its actual meaning. This situation can easily become an obstacle to the full and successful establishment of the Emerald Network at national level in the participating countries, as policy makers are often reluctant to put an issue high on the political agenda unless there is consensus in society.

Dedicated webpages in local languages

In Georgia, an Emerald Network website (www.nacres.org/emerald) contains information about the network, its features and processes in the local language of the country. The availability of information in local languages, our Georgian team argues, is a prerequisite to stronger involvement of local communities in the network.



Communication through mainstream media, such as printed and online newspapers, TV and radio, still allows reaching the widest possible audience. Online communication via dedicated websites is also a very useful tool to provide more specific and detailed information on the Emerald Network to those with a particular interest in nature conservation. But websites need to be kept updated and news should be also shared by other channels, such as social media.

Emerald Network yearly calendars

Two national Emerald teams, from the Republic of Moldova and Armenia, published yearly calendars presenting the Emerald Network in their countries. In Moldova, the 2015 calendar was signed by the minister of the environment.



2. Young people



Bringing the Emerald Network to the classroom is essential as children will grow to become tomorrow's citizens and for some of them, our future policy makers. At the same time, children transmit information learnt in the classroom to their parents and friends, thus contributing to raising the awareness of the general public.

Curriculum inclusion

In Romny (Sumy Region, Ukraine), in co-operation with the Emerald team in the country – biology teachers have introduced the Emerald network into the school curriculum.

Field trips are a fun way to learn “on the spot” and to put in practice the theoretical knowledge learnt in school, not to mention the perfect opportunity to connect urban children to nature.

Older students from secondary school and university are a key public too, as they may develop the desire to work in nature conservation. Those already enrolled in biology-related topics could learn the basics of the Emerald Network legal framework and requirements. They could further contribute to enriching the knowledge on biodiversity in the countries by researching the species and habitats of European importance to be protected.

Reaching to the youngest

Every year, a travelling bus called “Caravana BIO” visits schools across the Republic of Moldova, presenting the Emerald Network and explaining to young people the essentials of biodiversity and its importance for human well-being and democracy.

Involvement of biology students

In the Russian Federation, students of the Ryazan State University participated in field trips led by biology professors. The group verified populations of plants and habitats in candidate Emerald sites and their conservation status.



3. Land users



Local stakeholders such as farmers, hunters, foresters and other land users are a key player in the future management of the Emerald Network sites. A big part of the management measures will depend on the willingness of these actors to contribute to the success of the whole endeavor. Indeed, apart from marine and fresh water areas and high-altitude rocky land, most of the natural habitats covered by Natura 2000 are in agricultural or wooded areas. According to statistics from 2011, Natura 2000 territory was covered by more than 34% of agricultural land and by nearly 51% of forests.

Consultation of the land users is necessary during the whole Emerald Network constitution process, from the moment territories in a given country are identified as particularly valuable for biodiversity conservation, until these areas become officially part of the network. Seminars and round tables create space for necessary interaction, debate and informal contacts. Such collaboration activities have to be open to all interested, although some actors might have to be invited personally. The whole consultation process has to be open and transparent. The issuing of certificates, diplomas or other forms of recognition to regions or localities that contribute to the sustainable management and use of their land, in line with biodiversity needs, might be a very good idea to be pursued by national authorities. Distribution of handy visibility products creates a connection with the public and stimulates curiosity about the network. By regularly seeing the Emerald Network name and/or logo, citizens might decide to become real actors in its implementation.

Round tables

In Ukraine a national round table was organised with representatives of ministries, but also members of the State Agency of Forest Resources, the National Academy of Agriculture, the State Agency of Water Resources and the State Agency of Land Resources. The involvement of farmers and foresters is a prerequisite for the success of the implementation of the Emerald Network.



4. Decision makers

Informed policy making requires knowledge. It is critical that the information provided to policy makers is clear, concise and timely. This is going to shape their perception of the issues at stake. In the case of the Emerald Network, as the current phase of its implementation essentially relates to science, information provided might be difficult to comprehend and thus to translate into political action.

What is at stake is the need to dispel, from the beginning, any misconceptions that can affect decision making at national level. A network of areas of special conservation interest is not composed of fenced-off sites with no human intervention. On the contrary, it aims to engage sectors such as tourism, agriculture and forestry to contribute to biodiversity conservation, through both active and passive sustainable management regimes.

The choice of the way information on biodiversity is conveyed to decision makers is thus a matter of strategy. Scientists concentrate their communication on the risk of further biodiversity loss. However in order to trigger positive action from policy makers, it is preferable to focus on activities based on the love of nature. Stressing the economic risks linked to the disturbance of the various services that nature provides to humans can also motivate action among decision makers.

Informative, concise and eye-catching leaflets could be a good starting point for successful communication on the Emerald Network to policy makers. Such documents need to concentrate on the “why” and the Emerald Network should be presented as a solution.

Co-ordination meetings also have an important role to play. Several national Emerald teams organised meetings with governmental agencies, scientific experts and NGOs to inform them about the goals and objectives of the Emerald Network implementation process and gain their support. In addition, all seven countries held their own National Emerald Seminar, which also gathered national authorities, academics and NGOs to discuss the implementation of the Emerald Network.



Emerald Book

“Emerald books” have been published by Armenia and the Russian Federation. They contain precise data about the most valuable sites whose conservation through the Emerald Network is essential for the whole of Europe. These books are very detailed, encompass years of scientific research and can help policy makers learn more about the biodiversity resources of their countries!

These books should be distributed in printed and digital versions in order to ensure wide dissemination.

Later on, when the message on the need to establish and maintain a network of areas at national level is well accepted, there is further need to go into the details on which areas should be protected and why. The Russian Federation was the first country to develop a national Emerald book.

In many countries in eastern Europe and the South Caucasus such co-ordination activities took place and were quite successful in achieving the adoption of biodiversity strategies or action plans at national level. This shows the political commitment of the country to the Emerald process. It lays the foundations for this long-term endeavor and defines concrete steps to reach the ambitious goal – a fully functioning Emerald Network by 2020.

Successful communication to policy makers

The implementation of the Emerald Network became a milestone in the National Strategy on Environmental Protection and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan in Azerbaijan and the Republic of Moldova.

In Armenia, achievements in the framework of the Emerald Network are reflected in the State Strategy and Programme of Conservation, Use and Reproduction of Biological Diversity.

In Georgia, the procedure for setting up the Emerald Network was reflected in two major draft laws: the law on biodiversity and the new draft forestry code.

The inventory of Emerald sites, their designation and the setting-up of priorities for their management is foreseen in the Association Agreements of the EU with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.



COMMUNICATING ON FLAG SPECIES

The Lady's Slipper Orchid is listed under Appendix I of the Bern Convention and protected through the Emerald Network. This beauty holds its scientific name *Cypripedium calceolus* from the Greek words "Cypris" or one of Aphrodite's names and "pedilon" or sandal, because the fused petals of the flower resemble a slipper or a shoe. Shy and pale, or flaunting in glorious color, it can be found under trees, in small openings, grassy meadows or prairies. Thought to be one of the slowest-growing plants in the world, the lady's slipper orchid takes between 6 and 11 years of growth before it actually produces flowers. It can grow up to 60 cm tall. The main threat for this species survival is collection which led to major declines in the past. The habitat of the species is also threatened by inappropriate forest management such as clear cutting or the use of herbicides and pesticides, and by overgrazing.

Since 2009, the European Union and the Council of Europe co-finance the work on the setting-up of the Emerald Network in seven countries in central and eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. The current European Union/Council of Europe project Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites, Phase II, running from October 2012 until December 2016, concerns the following countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, the European part of the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

The European Union is also a Contracting Party to the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention). Following a decision of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention, the EU Natura 2000 Network is considered as the EU contribution to the Emerald Network. Together, both networks form the largest co-ordinated conservation network designated to support the long-term survival of the most valuable European species and habitats.

In 2016, the Emerald Network:

- ▶ covers nearly 600 000 km² on a territory of over 6 100 00 km² in 16 countries working for the establishment of the network;
- ▶ represents an average of 10% of the national territories of these 16 countries;
- ▶ comprises 3 500 candidate and fully adopted Emerald sites;
- ▶ should be launched by 2020.



The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

www.coe.int

The European Union is a unique economic and political partnership between 28 democratic European countries. Its aims are peace, prosperity and freedom for its 500 million citizens – in a fairer, safer world. To make things happen, EU countries set up bodies to run the EU and adopt its legislation. The main ones are the European Parliament (representing the people of Europe), the Council of the European Union (representing national governments) and the European Commission (representing the common EU interest).

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