



Ministry of the
Environment Finland

Life Integrated Projects – What did we learn?

Assessment of EU Life integrated projects 2014–2020

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Pekka Harju-Autti, Matti Sahla, Elsa Rinta-Kanto

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Life Integrated Projects – What did we learn? Assessment of EU Life integrated projects 2014–2020

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Abstract

In 2014, the European Commission started a wholly new approach to EU Life projects by introducing top-down Life Integrated projects (IPs). Since then, 70 Life IPs have been funded. The aim of this report is to reach a comprehensive overall understanding on how successful the EU Life IPs have been – from the project leaders themselves.

Self-assessments of 54 Life integrated projects are analyzed in this report, representing 77% of all the 70 Life IPs. In a quantitative assessment the data was analyzed 1) by Life subprogramme; 2) by Life IP starting year; 3) by number of projects per country; 4) by country groups determined by national innovation environment; and 5) by geographical country groups. The qualitative questions were analyzed in a specific workshop organized for all the IPs.

The results showed that these projects have several strengths: Strong top-down strategical nature, based on national strategy. A long enough project period gives enough time to cooperate and make things happen. IPs work well as platform for new co-operation – complementary funding is particularly good in this. Commission bureaucracy is generally seen as the weakest point. However, fluent co-operation with monitoring team helps effectively to understand the bureaucracy.

Project leaders encourage strongly the Commission to continue supporting this type of projects, which are highly necessary nowadays.

Keywords

EU LIFE, funding instrument, integrated project, strategic project, EU project, finance, environment, nature, climate

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Life integroidut hankkeet – Mitä opimme? Arviointi EU Life integroiduista hankkeista 2014–2020

Ympäristöministeriön julkaisuja 2023:9**Teema**

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Julkaisija Ympäristöministeriö**Tekijä/t** Pekka Harju-Autti, Matti Sahla, Elsa Rinta-Kanto**Kieli** englanti**Sivumäärä**

95

Tiivistelmä

Euroopan komissio omaksui vuonna 2014 kokonaan uuden lähestymistavan EU Life-ohjelman hankkeisiin ottamalla käyttöön ylhäältä alaspäin suuntautuvat Life-ohjelman integroidut hankkeet. Tähän mennessä on rahoitettu yhteensä 70 integroitua hanketta. Raportin tavoitteena on saavuttaa kattava yleiskäsitys siitä, kuinka onnistuneita EU Life-ohjelman integroidut hankkeet ovat olleet – hankkeiden vetäjiltä itseltään.

Raportissa tarkastellaan 54 integroidun hankkeen itsearviointeja, mikä vastaa 77 prosenttia yhteensä 70 integroidusta hankkeesta. Määrällisessä arvioinnissa tiedot analysoitiin 1) Life-alaohjelmien; 2) integroitujen hankkeiden aloitusvuoden; 3) maakohdainten hankkeiden lukumäärien; 4) kansallisen innovaatioympäristön mukaan määriteltyjen maaryhmien; ja 5) maantieteellisten maaryhmien perusteella. Laadullisia kysymyksiä tarkasteltiin erikseen järjestetyssä työpajassa kaikkien integroitujen hankkeiden osalta.

Tulokset osoittivat, että näillä hankkeilla on lukuisia vahvuuksia: Vahva ylhäältä alaspäin suuntautuva, kansalliseen strategiaan pohjautuva strateginen luonne. Hankkeiden riittävän pitkä kesto antaa riittävästi aikaa yhteistyölle ja aikaansaannoksille. Integroidut hankkeet toimivat hyvin uuden yhteistyön alustoina – täydentävä rahoitus on tässä erityisen hyvä.

Komission byrokratiaa pidetään yleisesti suurimpana heikkoutena. Sujuva yhteistyö seurantaan kanssa auttaa kuitenkin tehokkaasti ymmärtämään byrokratiaa.

Hankkeiden vetäjät kannustavat voimakkaasti komissiota jatkamaan tällaisten hankkeiden tukemista, koska niille on nykyään suuri tarve.

Asiasanat

EU LIFE, EU-rahoitus, integroidut hankkeet, strategiset hankkeet, EU-hankkeet, rahoitus, ympäristö, luonto, ilmasto

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Life integrerade projekt – vad lärde vi oss? Utvärdering av EU Life integrerade projekt 2014–2020

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År 2014 ändrade Europeiska kommissionen helt sin strategi för EU:s Life-projekt genom att inkludera integrerade top-down-projekt. Sedan dess har 70 integrerade Life-projekt bildats. Syftet med denna rapport är att – direkt från projektledarna – få en djup övergripande förståelse för hur framgångsrika EU:s integrerade Life-projekt har varit.

I rapporten analyseras självutvärderingar för 54 integrerade Life-projekt, vilket motsvarar 77 procent av de 70 integrerade projekten. I en kvantitativ utvärdering analyserades data 1) efter Life-delprogram; 2) efter Life-projektets startår; 3) efter antal projekt per land; 4) efter landsgrupper indelade efter den nationella innovationsmiljön, samt 5) efter geografiskt indelade landsgrupper. De kvalitativa frågorna analyserades i ett särskilt arbetsseminarium som organiserades för alla de integrerade projekten.

Resultaten visade att dessa projekt har ett flertal styrkor: En stark, nationellt baserad top-down-strategi. En tillräckligt lång projektperiod som ger gott om tid för att samarbeta och få saker att hända. Integrerade projekt utgör en bra plattform för nya samarbeten, och för detta fungerar kompletterande stöd särskilt bra. Kommissionens byråkrati ses vanligtvis som den svagaste punkten. Med ett smidigt samarbete med övervakningsgruppen är det dock lättare att förstå poängen med byråkratin.

Projektledarna uppmanar starkt kommissionen att fortsätta sitt stöd till den här typen av projekt, som i dagsläget är ytterst nödvändiga.

Nyckelord EU LIFE, EU-finansieringsinstrument, integrerat projekt, strategiskt projekt, EU-projekt, finansiering, miljö, natur, klimat

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FOREWORD

Eight years ago the European Commission started a totally new kind of approach to European environmental projects. Instead of having a large amount of small bottom-up style projects, as always in the previous funding periods, the Life instrument started to aim for large integrated projects with a top-down approach. This was truly a courageous move from the Commission. Nobody knew how well these new kind of large environmental projects would be executed in practice.

Five years ago, when organizing a workshop in Finland to all existing Life integrated projects, IPs, we realized the need for EU-wide cooperation for ALL integrated projects. This was a new instrument, and project leaders are facing similar challenges everywhere in Europe.

Now eight years has passed since the start of this great instrument, and a huge amount of work has been done in these largest environmental projects in Europe. The first ones are even just about to complete their projects.

In September 2022, again in Finland, we gathered together with 50 Life integrated projects to share our experiences to each other, and to learn from the past. Out of the total number of 70 European integrated projects, to have 50 projects under the same roof was something remarkable. It was also an excellent opportunity to have deep group discussions, and to find new ways to develop this unique instrument even better for the future. After all, the project leaders are the ones that know best how well this unique instrument works in practice.

The European Commission LIFE management was also present in our event and listened to discussions with careful ears. In the end of the workshop, we promised to the Commission to write a report of all our findings. Especially right now, when the Commission is starting to plan for the next multiannual program for the Life instrument, the timing for this report could not be any better.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Life IP projects' SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) table:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong top-down strategical nature, based on national strategy • A long enough project period gives enough time to cooperate and make things happen – creates new network possibilities • Very good experiences in project organization: LIFE IPs bring all organizations to work with a common goal; over time participants become almost family • General project atmosphere is good in Life IPs because of real engagement and respect • Co-operation with monitoring team has been generally fluent, swift and very useful. They help in understanding the bureaucracy. • IPs work well as platform for new co-operation. Life IP complementary funding is particularly good in this. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission bureaucracy is generally seen as the weakest point in all Life self-assessments • Reporting is too frequent, too long, overlapping. The report structure is not adapted/suitable for an integrated approach – is there too much focus on concrete results? IPs are more 'soft' projects focusing on transformational change. • KPI systems should be more flexible and the indicators should better motivate and be applicable also elsewhere than in bureaucracy • CINEA/Commission is often slow to respond, delaying decision-making • KPIs are especially very challenging. It is difficult to monitor targets and impact for a strategic/integrated 'soft' project
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LIFE IPs give opportunities to learn from other countries and thus the situation in whole Europe can be improved • Communication and dissemination online can be very effective. It is important to join forums/ common spaces that can help networking. • Success of cooperation with partner organizations: LIFE IPs can help develop new projects in the future with the same partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to get NGOs to join LIFE IPs because of the rather large own funding and low overheads. • Complementary projects important at the strategic level, but the amount of bureaucracy can become excessive.

Recommended executive action points

- There is a need to change the reporting requirements, tool and format. A portal for online reporting would be great (no more Word and Excel files). Especially the reporting on complementary actions has to become less complicated. It is advisable to form a specific working group composed of projects, external monitors and CINEA to solve the current challenges with reporting.
- KPIs need to be adapted to the needs of IPs. Today, the structure of KPIs comes from traditional LIFE projects and does not reflect the philosophy of IPs - it is difficult to show success of complex IPs with existing KPIs. Therefore, KPIs should be redefined and clearly informed for IPs. They should better motivate project leaders and be applicable also elsewhere than in high-level bureaucracy.
- CINEA/Commission response times need to be improved. Sometimes these organizations are very slow to respond, delaying decision-making.
- Project beneficiaries' financial struggles would be greatly improved if there would be higher first payment and lower final payment. Today, final funding is received from EU after the project is over, but some partners might be part of the project only for the first phase for example.
- Reduce administrative burden for small partners (100–200k).
- Increase digital dissemination materials coming from the EU.
- Project leaders think that it is important to join forums/common spaces that can help to exchange knowledge, experience and best practices, especially across borders. It would be great if CINEA / the LIFE unit could provide this.

1 Introduction

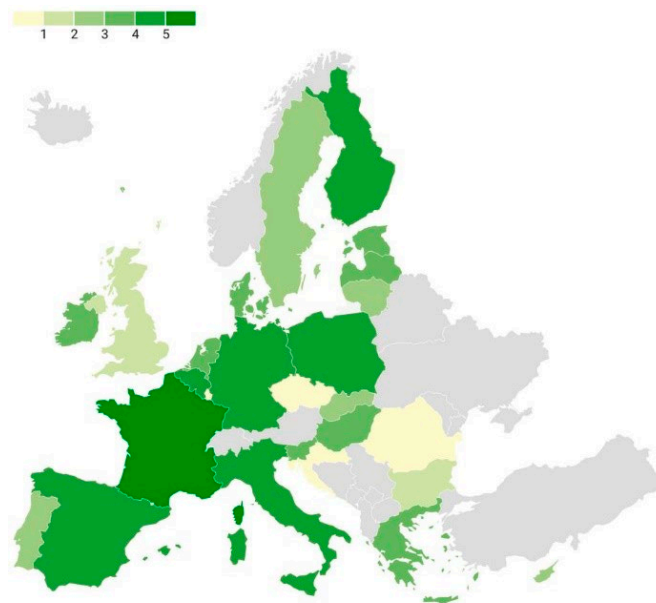
1.1 Life programme and integrated projects

The European Union's LIFE program finances nature conservation, circular economy, climate action and clean energy transition projects throughout Europe. Born on May 12, 1992, LIFE has financed more than 5,500 projects. Today, the climate and biodiversity crises are more serious than ever, but LIFE projects give hope and inspiration for the future. LIFE is also an important program for implementing the EU's Green Deal. The size of the Life program is 5.4 billion euros for the years 2021–2027.

Over the years, LIFE has turned into a more extensive and multifaceted funding program. LIFE now has four quite different sub-programmes: nature and biodiversity, circular economy and quality of life, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and transition to clean energy. It is characteristic of the projects that they include cooperation between various actors. Cooperation between research institutes, private companies, municipalities and cities, regions and other organizations has often been built into the projects.

In 2014, the Commission started a wholly new approach to Life projects by introducing top-down Life Integrated projects. Since then, 70 Life Integrated projects have been funded.

Figure 1. Amount of Integrated Projects in the EU member states



1.2 Methodology and data: project self-assessments

A specific project self-assessment tool was used to collect data from Life integrated projects with a start date between 2014 and 2020. The self-assessment tool had been developed in 2001 in the Finnish Ministry of the Environment to assess various research programmes (author: Harju-Autti).

The tool is comprised of 30 quantitative questions, to be assessed from 1 (weak) to 5 (excellent). The numerical questions are divided in three sections:

1. Project organization and cooperation:
 - Organising the project
 - Steering group operation
 - Coherence of project internal human resources
 - Cooperation with Commission monitoring consultant
 - Suitability of the number of partners in project consortium
 - Budget and amount of complementary projects
 - General project working atmosphere
 - Amount of project bureaucracy (in relation to reporting to the Commission)

2. Timeline, budget and dissemination:
 - Actualization of estimated project timelines
 - Ability to solve problems and issues faced along the way
 - Accuracy of estimated project budget
 - Distribution of budget between project partners
 - Ease of agreeing on the ownership/exploitation of project results
 - Dissemination and communications with project partners
 - Dissemination cooperation with complementary projects
 - Success of communications and dissemination online:
project web site & social media
 - Success of communications and dissemination in
seminars & press releases
 - International cooperation in the project
 - Actualization of project publication plan
 - Amount of feedback received from project external stakeholders

3. Targets achieved and impact:
 - Achievement of project targets
 - Success of chosen project strategy
 - Success of cooperation with partner organizations

- Development of methodologies (research, technology, conservation methods)
- Development of new cooperation networks
- Exploitation of results
- Impact of project results
- Concrete environmental benefits from the project
- Synergies from complementary projects relevant to project targets
- Opportunity to develop further future projects

In addition to numerical questions, three open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire:

1. For aspects evaluated as 1 or 2 on the scale, please comment on why that is
2. What would you do differently if you had the chance?
3. Feedback and wishes to the EU Commission/CINEA

We received self-assessments of 54 Life integrated projects that are assessed in this report. They represent 77% of all the 70 Life IPs started between 2014–2020.

1.3 Methodology and data: project leaders' collective analysis

In September 2022, fifty Life integrated projects were gathered together in Finland in a workshop to share experiences to each other, and to learn from the past. Out of the total number of 70 European integrated projects, 50 projects were physically present. The European Commission LIFE management was also present in the event.

This workshop event was also an excellent opportunity to analyze collectively the self-assessment results within group discussions, and to find new ways to develop the Life IP instrument for the future.

The 50 projects that were physically present were divided into six groups:

- Group 1:** Environment (Waste, air, circular economy...) – ENV1
- Group 2:** Environment (Water) – ENV2
- Group 3:** Nature and biodiversity (general) – NAT1
- Group 4:** Nature and biodiversity (rivers) – NAT2
- Group 5:** Climate change (mitigation) – CLIM1
- Group 6:** Climate change (adaptation) – CLIM2

In the workshop each group had 6–11 participants. The groups had two sessions:

Workshop part 1: Collective experiences of working on integrated projects. Here the focus was on assessing the numerical results and the first open-ended question: “for aspects evaluated as 1 or 2 on the numerical scale, please comment on why that is”.

Workshop part 2: The future of integrated projects. Here the focus was on developing the findings of the workshop part 1 to constructive suggestions for the future. Moreover, in this session the two last open-ended questions were assessed: 1) What would you do differently if you had the chance?; and 2) Feedback and wishes to the EU Commission/CINEA.

2 Project self-assessments quantitative results

We received self-assessments of 54 Life integrated projects that are assessed in this report.

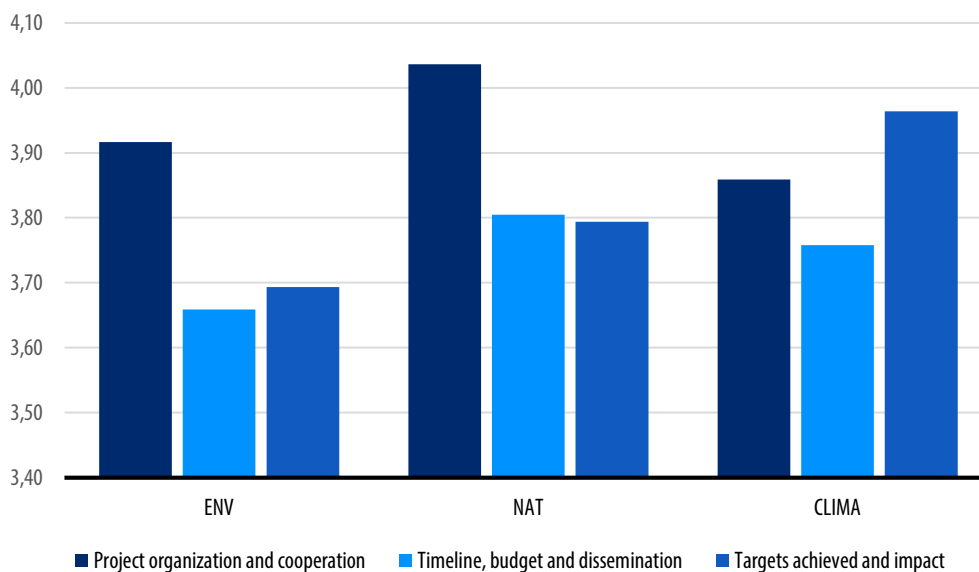
Quantitative assessments of the data is done by analyzing the data

- by Life subprogramme
- by Life IP starting year
- by number of projects per country
- by country groups determined by national innovation environment
- by geographical country groups

2.1 Results by Life subprogramme

The three subprogrammes had each approximately same number of respondents (ENV 21, NAT 17, CLIMA 16). Average scores of the 54 Life integrated projects are assessed here by Life subprogramme.

Figure 2. Average scores of Life Integrated Projects' self-assessment results by subprogramme.



The results show no remarkable differences between Life subprogrammes. However, generally the environment subprogramme has a slightly smaller average result than the other two.

This can be viewed as a very positive outcome: there would be an issue if one of the Life subprogrammes would be considerably weaker than the others.

The three sections of the questionnaire have no remarkable differences. The section “Project organization and cooperation” has slightly higher average scores than the other two.

To dig deeper into these results, we view next each question separately by different Life subprogrammes.

Table 1. Life Integrated Projects' self-assessment results by subprogramme per question

	ENV	NAT	CLIMA	all
Project organization and cooperation				
Organizing the project	4,0	4,2	4,1	4,0
Steering group operation	3,6	3,9	3,8	3,7
Coherence of project internal human resources	3,8	3,8	3,7	3,8
Cooperation with Commission monitoring consultant	4,3	4,6	4,4	4,4
Suitability of the number of partners in project consortium	4,3	4,1	3,8	4,1
Budget and amount of complementary projects	4,0	4,3	3,5	3,8
General project working atmosphere	4,4	4,3	4,3	4,4
Amount of project bureaucracy (in relation to reporting to the Commission)	3,1	3,1	3,2	3,1
Timeline, budget and dissemination				
Actualization of estimated project timelines	3,4	3,6	3,6	3,5
Ability to solve problems and issues faced along the way	4,0	4,2	4,2	4,0
Accuracy of estimated project budget	3,3	3,8	3,6	3,4
Distribution of budget between project partners	3,7	3,8	4,1	3,9
Ease of agreeing on the ownership/exploitation of project results	4,1	4,2	4,1	4,1

	ENV	NAT	CLIMA	all
Dissemination and communications with project partners	4,0	4,0	3,9	3,9
Dissemination cooperation with complementary projects	3,1	3,6	3,3	3,2
Success of communications and dissemination online: project web site & social media	3,8	3,9	3,7	3,8
Success of communications and dissemination in seminars & press releases	3,8	3,9	3,9	3,8
International cooperation in the project	3,5	3,5	3,4	3,5
Actualization of project publication plan	3,6	3,6	3,8	3,7
Amount of feedback received from project external stakeholders	3,6	3,5	3,5	3,6
Targets achieved and impact				
Achievement of project targets	3,7	3,7	4,0	3,8
Success of chosen project strategy	3,9	4,0	4,1	3,9
Success of cooperation with partner organizations	4,0	4,0	4,1	4,0
Development of methodologies (research, technology, conservation methods)	3,9	4,1	4,2	4,0
Development of new cooperation networks	3,7	3,9	4,1	3,9
Exploitation of results	3,6	3,8	3,9	3,7
Impact of project results	3,4	3,6	3,9	3,6
Concrete environmental benefits from the projec	3,5	3,3	3,6	3,5
Synergies from complementary projects relevant to project targets	3,6	3,5	3,6	3,6
Opportunity to develop further future projects	3,9	4,1	4,1	3,9
Average	3,74	3,86	3,85	3,78

The question-by-question results show that there are no drastic differences between Life subprogrammes. The two highest average scores are Cooperation with Commission monitoring consultant and General project working atmosphere.

It is a very positive outcome that the General project working atmosphere has been excellent. Well motivated and happy workers tend to deliver the best project results.

Other questions that received very good assessments are Organizing the project, Suitability of the number of partners in project consortium, Ability to solve problems and issues faced along the way, Ease of agreeing on the ownership/exploitation of project results, and Success of cooperation with partner organizations and Development of methodologies (research, technology, conservation methods). Naturally, all of these aspects are very important for achieving a successful project.

The results show that clearly the most challenging part in Life projects is the Amount of project bureaucracy (in relation to reporting to the Commission). In all the three Life subprogrammes project bureaucracy was assessed as the weakest element of the Life projects. One of the aims of this whole Life Workshop was to ponder on this issue, and perhaps find some constructive suggestions on how to improve some current practices.

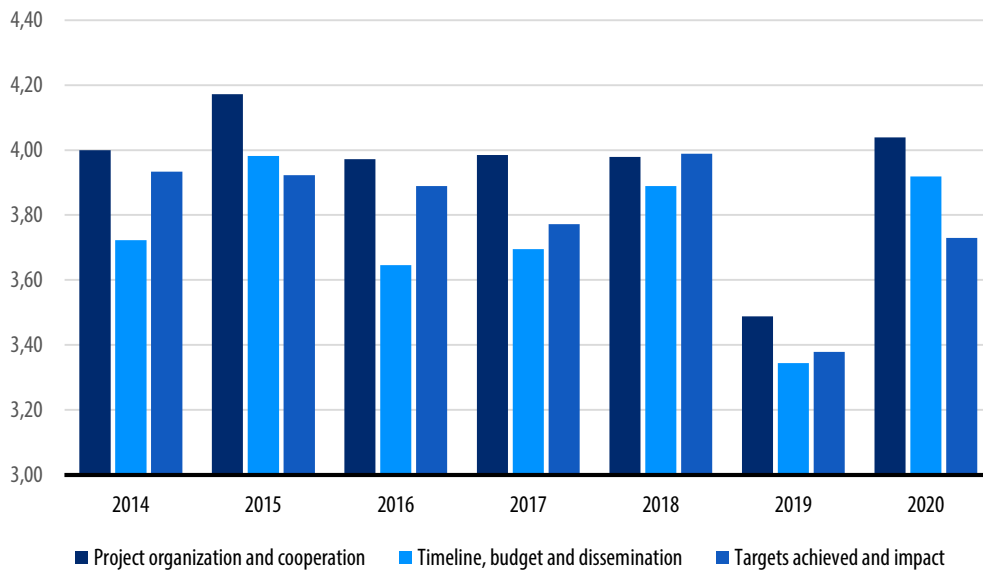
Another question that received strikingly low self-assessment scores was Dissemination cooperation with complementary projects. However, this result is not a great surprise given the nature of the Life IP projects: these projects are gigantic by nature, with their complementary projects lying somewhat at the outskirts of all the massive amount of daily project activities. As a result, it is somewhat understandable that the dissemination cooperation with the complementary projects often receives less attention.

Other aspects that received relatively low scores are Actualization of estimated project timelines, Accuracy of estimated project budget, International cooperation in the project, and Concrete environmental benefits from the project. These aspects will be discussed in the Chapter 3.

2.2 Results by Life IP starting year

Self-assessments of the 54 Life integrated projects are analysed here by Life IP starting year.

Figure 3. Life Integrated Projects' self-assessment results on average by starting year.



The results by Life IP starting year show no remarkable trend between the years 2014–2020. However, one of the years, year 2019, appears to have lower average scores than all the other years. Nine IP projects started in the EU in year 2019 – strikingly, none of them received average self-assessment scores higher than 3.9.

Table 2. Life Integrated Projects' self-assessment results by starting year per question.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
Project organization and cooperation	6	9	9	8	6	9	7	54
Organizing the project	4,2	4,3	4,2	4,1	4,0	3,6	4,1	4,0
Steering group operation	3,8	4,2	3,8	3,5	3,7	3,4	3,8	3,7
Coherence of project internal human resources	3,7	3,8	3,7	4,3	3,8	3,1	4,1	3,8
Cooperation with Commission monitoring consultant	4,2	4,8	4,4	4,9	4,7	4,0	4,1	4,4
Suitability of the number of partners in project consortium	4,3	4,2	4,1	3,6	4,0	4,0	4,1	4,1
Budget and amount of complementary projects	4,2	4,4	3,9	3,9	3,8	3,7	3,8	3,8
General project working atmosphere	4,3	4,6	4,6	4,5	4,7	3,3	4,6	4,4
Amount of project bureaucracy (in relation to reporting to the Commission)	3,3	3,1	3,1	3,1	3,2	2,8	3,5	3,1
Timeline, budget and dissemination								all
Actualization of estimated project timelines	3,7	3,7	3,3	3,5	3,8	3,1	3,9	3,5
Ability to solve problems and issues faced along the way	4,2	4,3	4,0	4,1	4,2	3,8	4,1	4,0
Accuracy of estimated project budget	4,0	3,3	3,3	3,6	3,8	3,1	4,0	3,4
Distribution of budget between project partners	4,2	3,8	3,7	3,6	3,5	3,8	4,7	3,9
Ease of agreeing on the ownership/exploitation of project results	4,0	4,4	4,3	4,0	4,5	3,6	3,8	4,1
Dissemination and communications with project partners	3,8	4,4	3,6	3,9	3,8	3,7	4,6	3,9

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
Dissemination cooperation with complementary projects	3,0	3,3	3,4	3,1	3,3	2,9	4,0	3,2
Success of communications and dissemination online: project web site & social media	3,5	4,1	3,7	4,0	4,5	3,3	3,8	3,8
Success of communications and dissemination in seminars & press releases	3,7	4,3	3,6	4,3	4,0	3,1	4,0	3,8
International cooperation in the project	3,7	3,8	3,4	3,4	3,5	3,2	3,4	3,5
Actualization of project publication plan	3,5	4,0	3,8	3,7	4,0	3,3	3,3	3,7
Amount of feedback received from project external stakeholders	3,5	4,2	3,7	3,1	3,7	3,2	3,4	3,6
Targets achieved and impact								all
Achievement of project targets	4,0	3,9	3,6	3,8	4,2	3,4	3,8	3,8
Success of chosen project strategy	4,2	4,2	4,1	4,0	4,2	3,3	3,8	3,9
Success of cooperation with partner organizations	4,0	4,2	4,1	4,0	4,0	3,6	4,0	4,0
Development of methodologies (research, technology, conservation methods)	4,0	4,2	4,2	4,3	4,0	3,5	3,8	4,0
Development of new cooperation networks	4,0	4,0	4,0	3,9	4,0	3,6	3,8	3,9
Exploitation of results	3,8	3,6	4,0	4,0	3,8	3,1	3,8	3,7
Impact of project results	3,8	3,7	3,9	3,3	4,3	3,0	3,8	3,6
Concrete environmental benefits from the project	3,3	3,1	3,4	3,6	4,0	3,1	3,6	3,5
Synergies from complementary projects relevant to project targets	3,8	3,9	3,7	3,3	3,3	3,4	3,3	3,6
Opportunity to develop further future projects	4,3	4,4	3,9	3,7	4,2	3,8	3,8	3,9
Average	3,87	4,01	3,81	3,80	3,95	3,39	3,89	3,78

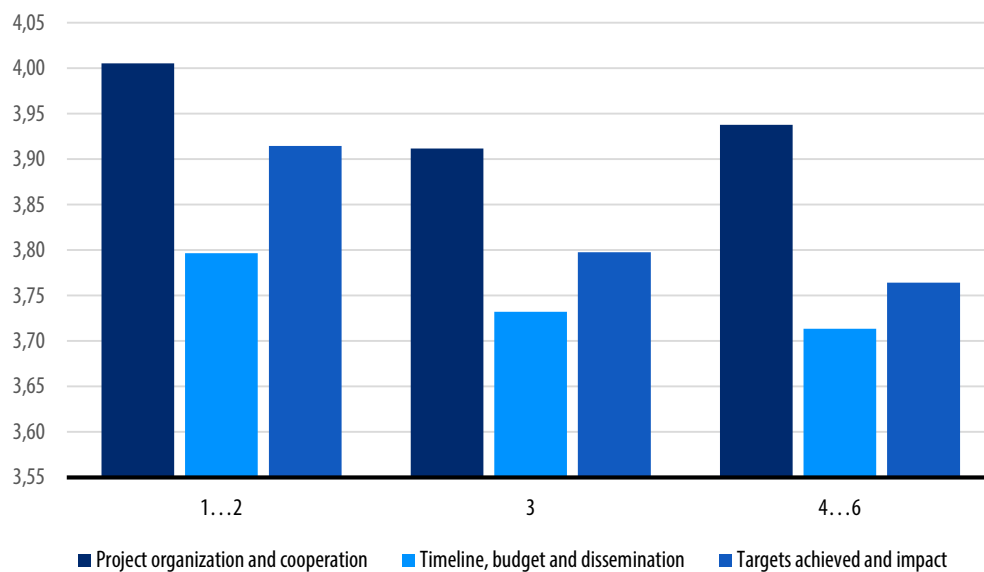
When assessing the year-by-year results in detail, the year 2019 appears to have in every question 0.3-0.6 points lower scores than the multiannual average. In other words, the best and worst aspects of the 2019 projects remain the same as in other years.

The annual averages of year 2015 is the highest, followed by the years 2018 and 2020.

2.3 Results by number of projects per country

In this part of the self-assessments' analysis we wanted to find out if the amount of projects per country has any significance. Results are as follows:

Figure 4. Life Integrated Projects' self-assessment results on average by number of projects per country.

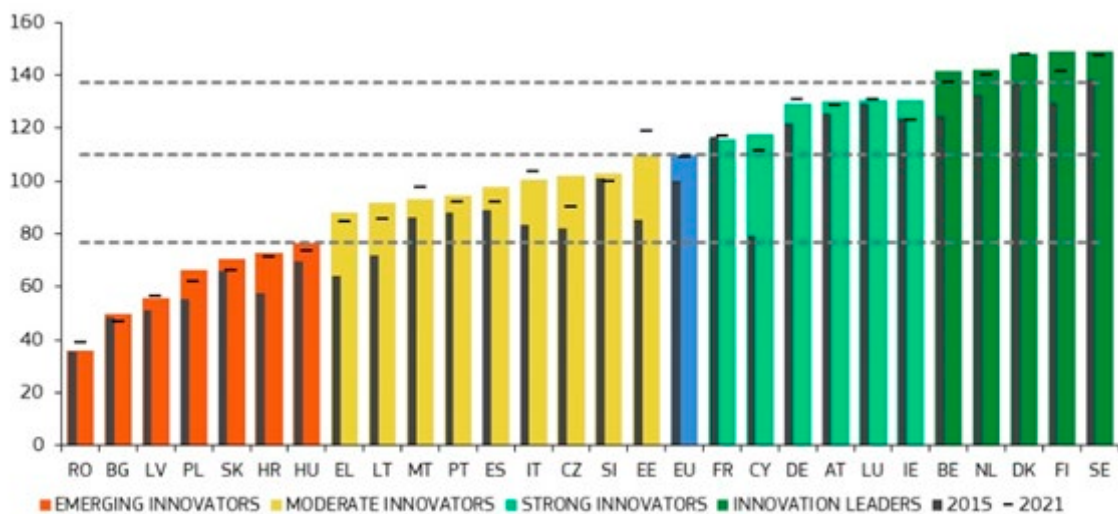


Results show that the amount of projects per country has no significant effect on the average self-assessment scores.

2.4 Results by country groups determined by national innovation environment

The European Innovation Scoreboard demonstrates the importance of establishing a pan-European Innovation Ecosystem. In that Scoreboard analysis, Member States fall into four performance groups: Innovation leaders (performance is above 125% of the EU average), Strong innovators (between 100% and 125% of the EU average), Moderate innovators (between 70% and 100% of the EU average) and Emerging innovators (below 70% of the EU average). According to the European Innovation Scoreboard 2022, the current European innovation leaders are Sweden, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium (EU 2022).

Figure 5. Performance of EU Member State's innovation systems . Source: EU (2022)



Based on the European Innovation Scoreboard, the four European innovation performance groups are as follows:

Country group 1: Sweden, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium (Innovation leaders)

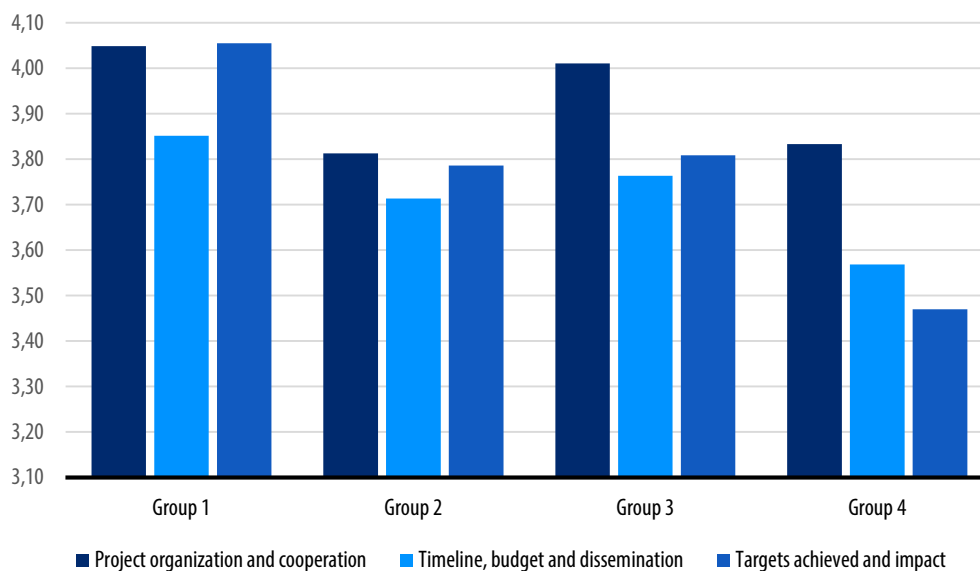
Country group 2: Germany, Ireland, France, Cyprus, Luxembourg and Austria (Strong innovators)

Country group 3: Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Spain, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia (Moderate innovators)

Country group 4: Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia (Emerging Innovators)

Self-assessments of the 54 Life integrated projects are analyzed here by the four European innovation performance groups as. The analysis shows that there is a clear correlation between countries' innovation environment and the self-assessment scores.

Figure 6. Life Integrated Projects' self-assessment results on average by innovation performance country group.



To dig into this analysis deeper, next we analyzed every question by European innovation performance groups. The aspects with the highest difference between the highest and lowest innovation performers are

- Development of new cooperation networks (difference: 1.0)
- Ability to solve problems and issues faced along the way (0.9)
- Opportunity to develop further future projects (0.8)
- Success of communications and dissemination in seminars & press releases (0.7)
- Development of methodologies (research, technology, conservation methods) (0.7)

These aspects indeed are the characteristics that one would expect to be found in a well working European innovation system.

Table 3. Life Integrated Projects' self-assessment results by innovation performance country group per question.

	1	2	3	4	all
Project organization and cooperation					
Organizing the project	4,3	4,0	4,1	3,8	4,0
Steering group operation	3,8	3,6	3,9	3,7	3,7
Coherence of project internal human resources	3,9	3,5	3,8	3,8	3,8
Cooperation with Commission monitoring consultant	4,6	4,4	4,5	4,3	4,4
Suitability of the number of partners in project consortium	3,9	4,3	3,9	4,2	4,1
Budget and amount of complementary projects	4,2	3,5	4,0	4,0	3,8
General project working atmosphere	4,5	4,4	4,5	3,8	4,4
Amount of project bureaucracy (in relation to reporting to the Commission)	3,1	2,8	3,3	3,3	3,1
Timeline, budget and dissemination					
Actualization of estimated project timelines	3,3	3,7	3,6	3,6	3,5
Ability to solve problems and issues faced along the way	4,7	3,9	3,9	3,8	4,0
Accuracy of estimated project budget	3,7	3,3	3,5	3,7	3,4
Distribution of budget between project partners	4,1	3,7	4,1	3,6	3,9
Ease of agreeing on the ownership/ exploitation of project results	4,4	4,4	3,9	3,9	4,1
Dissemination and communications with project partners	4,0	3,9	4,0	3,9	3,9
Dissemination cooperation with complementary projects	3,2	3,2	3,5	3,3	3,2
Success of communications and dissemination online: project web site & social media	4,1	3,8	3,9	3,6	3,8
Success of communications and dissemination in seminars & press releases	4,1	3,8	4,0	3,4	3,8
International cooperation in the project	3,5	3,7	3,5	3,3	3,5

	1	2	3	4	all
Actualization of project publication plan	3,7	3,7	3,8	3,4	3,7
Amount of feedback received from project external stakeholders	3,5	3,8	3,5	3,5	3,6
Targets achieved and impact					
Achievement of project targets	4,1	3,4	3,9	3,5	3,8
Success of chosen project strategy	4,1	3,9	4,1	3,6	3,9
	4,2	4,0	4,1	3,6	4,0
Development of methodologies (research, technology, conservation methods)	4,4	4,0	4,0	3,6	4,0
Development of new cooperation networks	4,3	4,2	3,8	3,3	3,9
Exploitation of results	3,9	3,7	3,7	3,6	3,7
Impact of project results	3,8	3,8	3,5	3,4	3,6
Concrete environmental benefits from the project	3,4	3,5	3,6	3,2	3,5
Synergies from complementary projects relevant to project targets	3,9	3,3	3,6	3,2	3,6
Opportunity to develop further future projects	4,4	4,0	3,9	3,6	3,9
Average	3,97	3,76	3,84	3,61	3,78

2.5 Results by geographical country groups

To get perspective on whether geographical areas have a difference, we assessed the results based on a division of six country groups as follows:

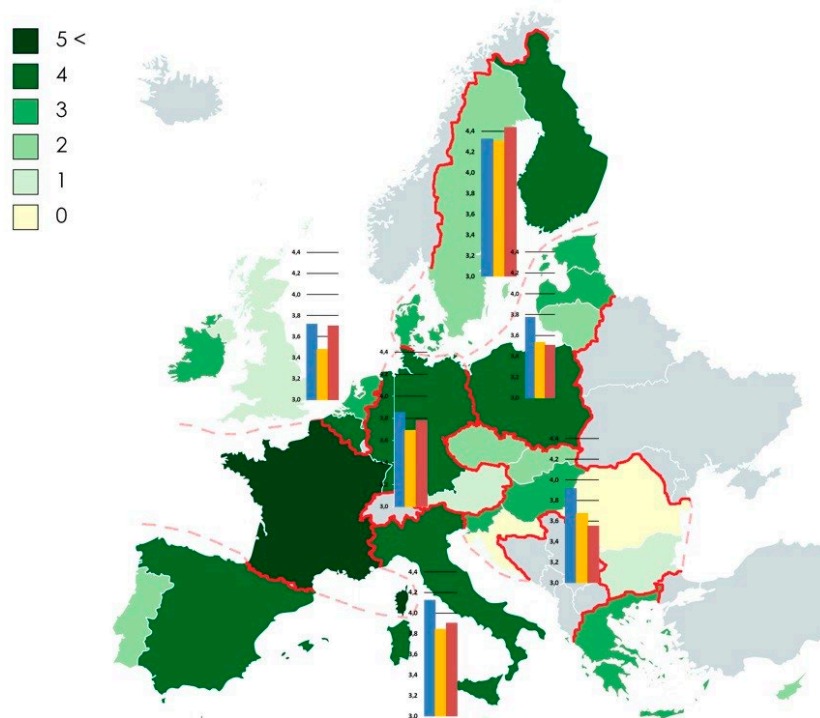
- Country group 1:** Germany, France, Austria
- Country group 2:** Belgium, the Netherlands, UK, Ireland
- Country group 3:** Finland, Sweden, Denmark
- Country group 4:** Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia
- Country group 5:** Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech, Hungary
- Country group 6:** Spain, Italy, Greece, Malta

These country groups were selected in order to have an equal number of projects in each group. As a result, each county group had 8–10 projects.

The results per geographical country groups show that there are remarkable geographical differences in the project self-assessments.

The average self-assessments in each of the three sections are remarkably the highest in country group 3 (Finland, Sweden, Denmark). This is not surprising, since these three countries happen to also be the three countries that were measured by the EU to have best national innovation environment. This gives further evidence that apparently national innovation environment strongly supports success of Life IP projects.

Figure 7. Life Integrated Projects' self-assessment results by geographical country groups.



Country Groups	1	2	3	4	5	6	all
n =	9	10	8	10	8	9	54
Project organization and cooperation	3,85	3,72	4,33	3,78	3,91	4,13	3,90
Timeline, budget and dissemination	3,69	3,48	4,31	3,53	3,67	3,84	3,69
Targets achieved and impact	3,78	3,70	4,44	3,51	3,55	3,90	3,78
All	3,76	3,62	4,35	3,59	3,70	3,94	3,78

3 Project leaders' collective analysis

The 54 received self-assessments of Life integrated projects were divided in six groups to brainstorm the following topics:

1. Project organization and cooperation: Identify and discuss the best elements
2. Project organization and cooperation: Identify and discuss the weakest elements
3. Timeline, budget and dissemination: Identify and discuss the best elements
4. Timeline, budget and dissemination: Identify and discuss the weakest elements
5. Targets achieved and impact: Identify and discuss the best elements
6. Targets achieved and impact: Identify and discuss the weakest elements
7. What would you do differently if you had the chance?
8. Feedback and wishes to the EU Commission/CINEA

The results of the group brainstorms are presented here as they were presented in the workshop.

3.1 Results by ENV groups

We received self-assessments for 21 ENV Life integrated projects. The group discussions were conducted in two groups:

Group 1: Environment ENV1 (Waste, air, circular economy...)

Group 2: Environment ENV2 (Water)

The outcomes of the two ENV groups' brainstorming are as follows:

3.1.1 Project organization and cooperation: Identify and discuss the best elements

Group ENV1

- Separate division established for project organization, people hired to work for the project
- A good and high level leader in a good position can steer the project, also motivation is important
- Connections to ministry level can have strong impacts to legislation preparation
- New people must be integrated carefully, good team spirit must be created, people must be connected also outside meetings, always celebrate successes
- Good cooperation with monitoring consultants
- Smooth information exchange to partners/co-beneficiaries, for example weekly updates

Group ENV2

- The most positive aspects:
- General project atmosphere, Cooperation with commission monitoring consultants, Suitability of of the numbers of partners in project consortium
- Project partners vary between 7–35. Huge difference in size
- Good with large variety of partners (however may give admin problems)
- Perhaps not the amount that counts – depends on project nature
- Problematic if there is an imbalance in the partnership (large vs. small) – no sufficient tools to address partners who do not contribute
- Difference in which stage the projects are
- Monitoring – some monitors are more helpful than others. Seems to depend on the country.

3.1.2 Project organization and cooperation: Identify and discuss the weakest elements

Group ENV1

- Project bureaucracy – inside our beneficiaries
- GDPR issues adding complexity in reporting
- Difficult to find a way to efficiently construct connections to complementary projects, because there are a huge amount of them in circular economy nationally
- Problems in hiring specialists and making them to stay
- Simplifying KPI reporting and monitoring, list available already at application stage

Group ENV2

- Commission bureaucracy – seen as weakest point (2.9)
- Tools are outdated (word, excel etc)
- KPIs and pillar approach are seen as difficult and separated from project content – perhaps better if they would be possible to fill them in during the project
- Commission should be really clear on what they need when they come with changes
- Move away from paper – hardcopy -> electronic
- Would be important with clear instructions regarding CINEA requirements
- Interim report – a lot of repetition -> need to organize document
- Takes a lot of time to co-author the report
- Usually it is possible to find compromises for changes – in most cases it is possible to reach solutions that are necessary for the implementation of the project.
- LIFE experience makes it easier to handle the project bureaucracy – shouldn't be that way...
- Sometimes the response from CINEA is very slow (eg. Amendments are not approved before the Interim report was submitted)
- External audits required much more information that required in the LIFE rules was asked for
- Auditors not necessary experienced in LIFE – especially problematic cases have occurred between phases requiring explanations

3.1.3 Timeline, budget and dissemination: Identify and discuss the best elements

Group ENV1

- Flexibility of the budget categories and timelines/deadlines
- Communication and dissemination online can be very effective
- Possibility to improve the strategic plan and solve problems and really implement the plans
- LIFE IPs give opportunity learn from other countries and the situation in whole Europe will be improved

Group ENV2

- Ease of agreeing on ownership of project results
- Ability to solve problems along the way
- Dissemination and communication with project partners
- May be problematic with different size partners – can be difficult to motivate partners with small input
- Bottom up approach – all partners are willing to contribute
- Events have been difficult to arrange during the last years – networking through virtual platforms
- Important to join forums/common spaces that can help networking (Would be good if LIFE unit could provide this!)

3.1.4 Timeline, budget and dissemination: Identify and discuss the weakest elements

Group ENV1

- Accuracy of estimated project budget – often much more than the 40 % own share is spent (possibility to share the budget to partners)
- Prices have risen
- Distribution time for partners should be longer than 30 days
- Dissemination from different partners can be sometimes confusing
- Difficult to get NGOs to join LIFE IPs because of the large own funding and low overheads.
- Final funding is received from EU after the project is over, but some partners might be part of the project for example only for the first phase. Higher first payment and lower final payment would help. Also the coordinating beneficiary can pay partners out beforehand if possible.

- When it is a short time in media, it is difficult to get the financier information/reference included

Group ENV2

- Actualization of project timelines
 - Good that it is possible to alter timeline – most project have had needs to delay (external circumstances also affect)
 - Phases – has worked well (smaller steps can help planning)
 - Recently problematic to find human resources and experts
- Accuracy of estimated project budget
 - Inflation – difference in prices compared to time when project preparation was done
 - Budget seems very big, but not always the case when you start looking time and partnerwise
 - E-actions at times under-budgeted, expectations from Commission are high
 - Is it sufficiently flexible (– can be problem with how the project is distributed between the partners own-contribution problems may arise)
- Dissemination cooperation with complementary projects
 - The projects have no control - you can influence but not affect
 - Depends on number of CAs – sometime time limitation preventing cooperation
 - Discussion on what is a complementary project arose – differs between projects (direct/indirect effect of project)

3.1.5 Targets achieved and impact: Identify and discuss the best elements

Group ENV1

- LIFE IPs bring all organizations to work with common goal
- LIFE IPs can help develop new projects with the same partners
- LIFE IPs have also activated other financing into the same subjects
- LIFE IPs can support in developing new methodology/researcher studies

Group ENV2

- Important to have all the most important partners for implementation of strategy involved
- How to measure impact can be problematic

- At times it may be sufficient to state only the increase positive issues not necessary to be able to measure everything
- Success of cooperation with partner organizations
- A long enough project period gives enough time to cooperate and make things happen – creates new network possibilities
- Fine balance between writing application and what can be achieved – difficult at times to deliver what you promised
- Success of chosen project strategy
- Can be difficult to achieve the “full” implementation of a strategy/plan – might be a little ambitious...
- Development of cooperation networks

3.1.6 Targets achieved and impact: Identify and discuss the weakest elements

Group ENV1

- Some methodologies developed might be quite specific and difficult to apply in other areas
- Because all are competing on the same future (LIFE IP or other) money, not always easy to share the best ideas

Group ENV2

- Concrete environmental benefits of the project
- Impact of project results
- Achievement of project targets
 - IPs work for implementation of strategy/plan -> most likely by changing the way of work the benefits will come at a later stage
 - Regarding policy it can be really important to have the agreed long-term objectives backed up by the Commission that you continue to implement
 - The ability to achieve the project targets may depend a lot on the political setting and the economic and environmental decisions made
 - Depends on targets

3.1.7 What would you do differently if you had the chance?

Group ENV1

- Include thematic coordinator to help in the over coordination and dissemination
- Try to have 3 persons per partner involved in the management coordination
- Have a financial buffer to cover inflation
- Be transparent regarding the budget with all partners from the planning stage
- Put less milestones, deliverables and indicators in the proposal. Many are too ambitious and then difficult to manage

Group ENV2

- Communication: each IP needs to organize an International events/ conference, coordination in terms of themes, topics and schedule is needed (neemo? CINEA?)
- More priority on E-Actions generally needed; including budget increase
- Put more emphasis in stakeholder engagement
- Project organization/financing: it needs tools/processes in case a partner does not deliver their actions
- Pre-financing should be paid according to budget share of partner (proportionate allocation); but small beneficiaries might get problems with cash flow.
- Timeline: employment of new personnel started with the project start, would be better to have them in the team from the beginning;
- Monitoring/Evaluation should be set up early in the application phase
- How flexible must/can an IP be in face of unpredictable developments (eg Covid-restrictions); Flexibility could be already included in Full Proposal. How detailed should description of actions and activities be have the flexibility needed?

3.1.8 Feedback and wishes to the EU Commission / CINEA

Group ENV1

- More time to transfer money to partners (1 to 3 months)
- Simplify the KPI's reporting, understanding what the KPI's mean for the LIFE impact as a whole, make the final list of KPI's available at the application stage
- Simplify the reporting, and digitalisation of reporting
- Clarify how to register the costs

- Guidelines about good practices in the implementation of the project
- Make the reporting on complementary actions less complicated
- Consider to allow to settle more than 7% overheads after some phases of course with the limit of 7% at the end of total project
- Increase dissemination materials coming from the EU
- Organize meetings for project coordinators to exchange knowledge, experience and best practices

Group ENV2

- Response of CINEA sometimes slow which can lead to difficult situations for IPs (delayed timelines)
- CINEA, external Monitors and auditors should be better realigned/ streamlined (be always in same page concerning rules and interpretations)
- Definition of Complementary Actions (CAs) is not clear and not the same in the different IPs; Also not clear on how to report on CAs. How exactly does CINEA define CAs?
- IPs are very valuable and necessary projects and are very well appreciated by the member states!!

3.1.9 Discuss the explanations about the weakest elements – How could we improve the practices within Life strategic projects

Group ENV1

- Have a common platform to share ideas and solutions among IP's
- Internship programme for LIFE manager and staff

3.2 Results by NAT/BD groups

We received self-assessments for 17 NAT/BD Life integrated projects. The group discussions were conducted in two groups:

Group 3: Nature and biodiversity NAT1 (general)

Group 4: Nature and biodiversity NAT2 (rivers)

The outcomes of the two NAT/BD groups' brainstorms are as follows:

3.2.1 Project organization and cooperation: Identify and discuss the best elements

Group NAT1

- Contact with monitors (experienced, good advice and quick reply).
- Consortium size suitable (10-12 average in group)
- Good engagement between partners

Group NAT2

- Mostly good experiences in project organization
- Co-operation with monitoring team is fluent – helps in understanding the bureaucracy
- The coordination burden is related to the number of beneficiaries
 - Invest on team building
- Good experiences in using IPs as platform for new co-operation
 - NGOs and scientific communities
 - Liaising partners through complementary funding

3.2.2 Project organization and cooperation: Identify and discuss the weakest elements

Group NAT1

- Commission slow to respond, delaying decision-making
- KPIs: database not user friendly
- No coherence for KPIs from different funds
- Separation of KPIs: CA and the project itself (complexity and workload)

- Reporting: too frequent, too long, overlapping, slow response from Commission
- Report structure is not adapted/suitable for an integrated approach
- Electronic financial and technical reporting potential not up-to-date (inclusive signature)
- Consider other formats (esp. financial: Horizon)

Group NAT2

- Reports are repetitive, not clear to who is reported and how the results are used
 - Reports are not designed for IPs, is there too much focus on concrete results?
 - Reporting of complementary projects not entirely clear
- Changing interpretations over the years (e.g. 2% rule)
- Sometimes changing views between monitors and the CINEA – slow process
- Is there still too much focus on approval of minor changes? Seems differences between countries
- Challenges with the personnel – temporary contracts, risks in staff changes (partly because not possible for career steps and 2% rule)
- *Changing the reporting format – form a group from projects, Ext. Mon and CINEA to solve the reporting*
 - Easy to fill in online boxes, quick for technical part and clear well designed parts for impacts
 - What information is relevant and to who
 - Use of the reporting results for others; dissemination to other projects...

3.2.3 Timeline, budget and dissemination: Identify and discuss the best elements

Group NAT1

- Communication: integrated within communication team (full number)
- Presentations at lots of events,
- Integrated helps with dissemination of results
- Constructive communications with the Commission
- Distribution budget between partners in Full Proposal and during the course of the project (flexibility)

Group NAT2

- Mostly working well
- eSigning work currently mostly well – if not blue-ink leads to extra work

3.2.4 Timeline, budget and dissemination: Identify and discuss the weakest elements

Group NAT1

- International cooperation: partly due to Covid (also communications with partners, key stakeholders, farmers, etc. essential)
- Actualization of estimated project timelines: Company Actions sometimes more important than project itself but no one is working on the CA (management of the CA! Time, persons).
- Progress CA is also a problem.
- Actions that cannot be finalized before end of project.
- Amount of feedback received from project external stakeholders: political situation (conflicting objectives)

Group NAT2

- COVID has had impact on dissemination and even outreach to project partners
- Bureacracy is sometimes impacting the willingness to join LIFE project again... usually related to too small budget
- Financial contribution (60%) seems not a problem and can be balanced inside the consortium
- Sometimes difficulties finding the man power for commitments – possibility to change the budget or even responsibility between beneficiaries
- Double reporting threat related to complementary funding – requires resources from the project management
- Projects makes their own reporting formats for complementary projects and funding
- Are projects (programs) too long? – how are the projects allowed to change over time in rapidly changing environment – flexibility focus on objectives rather than actions

3.2.5 Targets achieved and impact: Identify and discuss the best elements

Group NAT1

- Flexibility and ability to bring in Company funding
- Integrated approach helps with exploitation of results
- Diversity of actions
- Small grants, big effects!

Group NAT2

- IPs facilitate new project development...
 - New LIFE traditional projects from the demonstration results of IPs (e.g. freshwater pearl mussels)
- IPs are helping the full implementation of the PAF... but in reality small parts... some parts of the PAFs are fully implemented though
- Some projects have very limited amount of concrete actions (more done with complementary funding)
- Involving new stakeholders very successful – new target audiences and good trainings
- IPs facilitate in adopting new policies and methodologies

3.2.6 Targets achieved and impact: Identify and discuss the weakest elements

Group NAT1

- Lack of scientific or academic partners and expertise
- Integrated project is sub-optimal. Single indicators are not integrated.
- Measuring nature effects can take longer than 6–8 years (weakness of the system).
- Effects depending on (local) situations and external factors (climate, war, etc.).
- Conflicting policies

Group NAT2

- Concrete environmental impacts - does is mean other than expected impact of the project... e.g. impacts on climate
 - Impacts are foreseen only in the long run....

3.2.7 What would you do differently if you had the chance?

Group NAT1

- Much more time and funds for planning the integrated effort at the start of the project (concept note and full proposal – team). Planning-period and concrete actions.
- Wider staffing (coordination and communication)
- *Greater flexibility is desirable in the event of changes in the actions that do not affect the project objectives*

- Salaries and benchmarking (based on strategic plan – Finland!)
- Connecting complimentary funding: what is complementary funding?
- Involve public bodies – motivation, shortcomings
- Too many actions, too ambitious in proposal to be a “winner” (super proposal). Project becomes a nightmare! Are the outcomes useable?

Group NAT2

- Setting up Internal monitoring tool for reporting (makes it easier to draft the interim reports)
 - Keep it simple, only highlights, track problems
 - More flexible reporting
 - Tracking small changes to report about / getting approved
 - Regular follow-up of the beneficiaries
 - Budget forecast system – better budget planning
- Setting more realistic ambitions (e.g. Number of management plans)
- Complementary actions / funding
 - Focus groups for CA.
 - Complementary actions: more focus on concrete actions
- Grant Agreement: written by consultants but not enough involvement of the practitioners
 - Balance between objectives and details (not too many)

3.2.8 Feedback and wishes to the EU Commission / CINEA

Group NAT1

Keep

- Flexibility
- Local monitoring teams
- Integrated approach
- Duration (6–10 years)
- Guidelines

Modify/delete

- KPI's
- Best practices
- Simplify reporting
- Interaction with Commission: modify rules / times for answering, response (helpful!)

Consider

- More networking/exchange knowledge between projects.
- Coordination of meeting of IP's by CINEA? Spain?
- Promoting LIFE projects on higher level
- Change of budget due to eg. Inflation
- More flexibility Commission (eg. Covid)

Group NAT2

- IPs are useful and successful (WE LOVE LIFE 😊)
- More trust to the coordinating beneficiaries with less reporting
 - Audits safeguard good management
 - KPIs streamlining / adapting to IPs
- Facilitating / funding learning mechanisms between IPs
 - Yearly meeting Ips (e.g. Funding call? – Technical assistance like for the biogeographical seminars)
 - Virtual regular meetings between IPs (technical vs content)
- Analysing the complementary funding for IPs in 5 years time (ex – post monitoring)
- Use best practices from Interreg, Horizon Europe, etc. regarding reporting
 - Keep it simple
 - Focus on highlights
- Realistic expectations of the COM (e.g PAF)
- Higher Involvement (again) of COM (DG ENV) would be highly appreciated

3.2.9 Discuss the explanations about the weakest elements – How could we improve the practices within Life strategic projects

Group NAT1

- Communication between projects: expert appointed by CINEA for best practices, ecosystem services and socio-economic impact? Guidelines, best practices.
- Determine the commitment and involvement of partners in advance, this applies in particular to the partners where the pilot project take place.
- Simplify KPI's and/or reporting
- Synchronise reporting for different purposes; monitor and/or commission, etc.
- Keeping monitor as a reference

- Reporting based on Pillar approach (good examples?). Keep it the same during project period based on clear instructions. Count also for (changes) PAF (or take the change in consideration in proposal).
- Effects depending on (local) situations and external factors (climate, war, etc. by integrating monitoring and evaluation in the conservation actions)

Group NAT2

- FAQ page for Integrated projects
- KPI: needs some streamlining for IPs
- Administrative burden for small partners (100–200k)
- Third party agreements (in SNaP: 200k 50k/partner)

3.3 Results by CLIMA groups

We received self-assessments for 16 CLIMA Life integrated projects. The group discussions were conducted in two groups:

Group 5: Climate change CLIM1 (mitigation)

Group 6: Climate change CLIM2 (adaptation)

The outcomes of the two CLIMA groups' brainstormings are as follows:

3.3.1 Project organization and cooperation: Identify and discuss the best elements

Group CLIM1

- Organization of the projects are clear and fixed somewhat unflexible, however adaptable
- Helpful and flexible monitors, a real support
- General project atmosphere is good because real engagement and respect

Group CLIM2

- 'Organising the project' AND 'General project working atmosphere' are related
- Time helps to become better: newer LIFE-IPs may score lower than older ones, over time participants become almost family
- Mixed reviews on cooperation with the monitors. Too much intensity, AND too little intensity. Varies a lot, expertise, regionally
 - Some of us: very positive, 'they are the only ones who fully know what we are doing, more than in the ministry'.
 - Others: more difficult, high turnover of staff, we have to explain the project to the new monitors over and over again.

3.3.2 Project organization and cooperation: Identify and discuss the weakest elements

Group CLIM1

- Project bureaucracy caused by reporting requirements that is not in function of implementation – too detailed repeated reporting

- Budget & complementary projects are quite distant because they are run by third parties, not all information available – limited resources for reporting

Group CLIM2

- Project bureaucracy is high!
- Huge gap between what the EC is asking on complementary funds and the reality in member states.
- *KPI should be adapted to the strategic and integrated LIFE projects, they are more 'soft' projects on transformational change.*

3.3.3 Timeline, budget and dissemination: Identify and discuss the best elements

Group CLIM1

- Flexible system, even somewhat unexpectedly (EU-project), even it should stay with the same scope
- Dissemination for example creating excellence centre that is sharing experiences
 - Project partners can share their experience during frequently meetings

Group CLIM2

- Distribution of budget between project partners: not so much an issue. Reduction of LIFE-subsidy during application was more the issue.
- LIFE-funds are easy to reallocate in time and between partners and between cost categories

3.3.4 Timeline, budget and dissemination: Identify and discuss the weakest elements

Group CLIM1

- Estimated project budget: condition changed (inflation, personal costs), especially corona and energy crises were not calculated in
- No adequacy between estimated and real costs, project leaders have to improvise
- Success online – even good figures of contacts less estimated impact
- General public contact difficult

Group CLIM2

- Dissemination with complementary actions is challenging
- Little international (i.e. outside Europe) dissemination, no cooperation (too time demanding, a project in itself), some communication at i.e. COP Glasgow

3.3.5 Targets achieved and impact: Identify and discuss the best elements

Group CLIM1

- Methodology inspired to a new framework of working together
- Pilot approaches would not happen without IP (energy technologies...)
- Open fields (and regions) by IP, that other way would not happen
- future projects spin offs are been obtained
- Exploitations of benefits are possible by lessons learned (even if project not finalised)

Group CLIM2

- Achievement of project targets and success of chosen project strategy: straightforward process as we followed the national strategy

3.3.6 Targets achieved and impact: Identify and discuss the weakest elements

Group CLIM1

- Project targets ambitious, slower in implementation than expected
- Solutions identified but not implemented because it depends on policy making

Group CLIM2

- Difficult to monitor targets and impact for a strategic/integrated 'soft' project
- Difficult to quantify environmental benefits of the LIFE-IP
- Impossible to differentiate what LIFE-IP has achieved, and what is the result due to other incentives
- Low score on benefits, yes in concrete physical results, but we do have a large impact on a wider scale, difficult to quantify

3.3.7 What would you do differently if you had the chance?"

Group CLIM1

- Better correspondence to the expectations and goals to the budget, preparing for possible budget cuts in the negotiation phase
- Cut the number of partners (10–15)
- Better coherence of partners and concrete activities to better benefit the network
- Better reformulation of the plans at the project start
- Partners would better correspond to target groups to better disseminate/ transfer the solutions and lessons learned
- One person managing the complementary actions

Group CLIM2

- More time to prepare the application: focus to build a common willingness
 - Climate change adaptation : doesn't attract stakeholders/Lack of political will
- Right balance on issues to be tackled ("part" of implementation not "full" implementation of national plan):
 - Some would have included also droughts
 - Some would have been more selective on issues tackled (climate hazards, ecosystems)
- Internal governance issues: better equilibrium between Beneficiaries (less and with more budget)
- More Human resources dedicated to coordination & reporting
- Add a "Political" Steering committee above Beneficiaries steering committee

3.3.8 Feedback and wishes to the EU Commission / CINEA

Group CLIM1

- Better instructions and guidance, budgeting and planning on complementary actions management, real impact and motivation of following complementary actions
 - Could the complementary projects be interpreted as mobilisation of funding during the project by the project partners?
 - Complementary projects important at the strategic level, but the the amount of bureaucracy should be diminished – report only with the interim reports

- KPI systems should be more flexible and modified for IP's / strategic projects in particular, the indicators should better motivate and be applicable also elsewhere than in bureaucracy
- More advanced, simple, digital management/platforms of documents
- More meetings related to lessons learned on other Life IP projects, regarding especially the strategic aspects
- A toolbox: templates/frameworks/instructions for a model website / reporting / notice boards.

Group CLIM2

- Objectives:
 - Better equilibrium between Commission criteria (theory) and Project targets (real life), especially in terms of "full" implementation of national strategy, complementary funds, impacts (KPI) and international cooperation
- Financial&administrative:
 - Less administrative burden, electronic & digital system, clear rules and justificative documents
 - Learn from other funding mechanisms ; streamline
 - Double reporting from NEEMO and Life IP to CINEA (+external audit): why ? Added-value ?
 - Technical report more adapted to Life Strategic Projects
 - (Location of the CINEA visit for Strategic Life (without concrete implementation?)
- Feedbacks from NEEMO & CINEA to our Reports and Projects (less scholar/more link with european strategies)
- Experiences from other projects: more events like this one !
+ platform+network

3.3.9 Discuss the explanations about the weakest elements – How could we improve the practices within Life strategic projects

Group CLIM1

- Reporting could be better targeted to Life IP's in specific, reports should also be in a format that could be used in dissemination to motivate
- Integrated approach should be better enhanced among the participants – live meetings for sharing experiences inside a project, international meetings between different projects, also including CINEA
- Newsletters for more efficient communication

- Management training (communications, reporting etc.)
- Results should be targeted for new societal solutions for the future (some reporting could be transferred to more emphasis future plans)

Group CLIM2

- To share objectives of LIFE Programme (environment, nature, etc.; anti-corruption; value-added vs other funds; international cooperation...) so that we can discuss the more efficient ways to organise the Life strategic projects and meet these objectives
-> working group with Life Strategic projects, CINEA, NEEMO
- Examples : External audit by national companies

4 Summary

In this project 54 Life IP project self-assessments were analyzed, and 50 of them were physically present in a collective “What did we learn?” workshop. A general sentiment both in the Life IP project self-assessments and in the Workshop was that these projects have been highly useful, and thus project leaders encourage the Commission to continue supporting this type of projects, which are very necessary nowadays.

In a quantitative assessment of the IP project self-assessments we analyzed the data 1) by Life subprogramme; 2) by Life IP starting year; 3) by number of projects per country; 4) by country groups determined by national innovation environment; and 5) by geographical country groups.

In the analysis by Life subprogramme the results show no remarkable differences between Life subprogrammes. This can be viewed as a very positive outcome. There would be an issue if one of the Life subprogrammes would be noticeably weaker than the others.

Analysis by Life IP starting year show no remarkable trend between the years 2014–2020. However, it seems like time helps to improve project organization: older LIFE-IPs are scoring there a bit higher than newer ones.

Analysis by number of projects per country show that the amounts of projects per country have no significant effects to the average self-assessments.

When the self-assessments of the 54 Life integrated projects are analyzed by the four European innovation performance groups (as defined by the European Innovation Scoreboard study in September 2022), a clear trend can be found. High quality national innovation environment apparently supports success of Life IP projects. The aspects with the highest difference between the highest and lowest innovation performers are 1) Development of new cooperation networks; 2) Ability to solve problems and issues faced along the way; 3) Opportunity to develop further future projects; 4) Success of communications and dissemination in seminars & press releases; and 5) Development of methodologies (research, technology, conservation methods). All these aspects indeed are the characteristics that one would expect to be found in a well working European innovation system.

When analyzing by geographical country groups, the country groups were selected in order to have equal number of projects in each group. The results per geographical country group show remarkable geographical differences. The average self-assessments in each of the three sections are remarkably the highest in the country group 3 (Finland, Sweden, Denmark). This is not surprising, since these three countries also happen to be the three countries that were measured by the earlier European Innovation Scoreboard study to have the best national innovation environment. This gives further evidence that apparently national innovation environment strongly supports success of Life IP projects.

In the quantitative analysis, the two highest average scores are Cooperation with Commission monitoring consultant and General project working atmosphere. It is a very positive outcome that the General project working atmosphere has been excellent. Well motivated and happy workers tend to deliver the best project results. Other questions that received very good assessments are Organizing the project, Suitability of the number of partners in project consortium, Ability to solve problems and issues faced along the way, Ease of agreeing on the ownership/exploitation of project results, and Success of cooperation with partner organizations and Development of methodologies (research, technology, conservation methods). Naturally, all of these aspects are very important for achieving a successful project.

Naturally, due to the gigantic size of IP projects, there are many things that can be made better for the future. The quantitative results show that clearly the most challenging part of Life projects is the Amount of project bureaucracy (in relation to reporting to the Commission). Other aspects that received relatively low scores are Dissemination cooperation with complementary projects, Actualization of estimated project timelines, Accuracy of estimated project budget, International cooperation in the project, and Concrete environmental benefits from the project.

4.1 Project organization and cooperation: the best elements

Mostly Life IP projects have had very good experiences in project organization. Time helps to improve project organization: older LIFE IPs often score higher than older ones. It was pointed out that over time project participants become almost family.

Co-operation with monitoring teams have generally been fluent and very useful. The project monitors are experienced people, give good advice and reply quickly. They help project leaders in understanding the project bureaucracy.

General project atmosphere is often very good in Life IPs because of real engagement and respect. It was pointed out that good team spirit must be created in the very beginning,

new people must be integrated carefully, and people must be connected also outside meetings. Moreover, it is always important to celebrate successes in the project.

There are good experiences in using IPs as a platform for new co-operation: for example with NGOs and scientific communities. Liaising with partners works often well through Life IP complementary funding.

4.2 Project organization and cooperation: the weakest elements

Commission bureaucracy is generally seen as the weakest point in all Life self-assessments (average score: 3.1). Reporting requirements, tools and format received a lot of criticism – there is too detailed repeated reporting. KPIs are especially very challenging. The main points of concern:

- Project bureaucracy caused by reporting requirements that do not reflect implementation
- The interim report has a lot of repetition -> need to re-organize the document
- Reporting is too frequent, too long, overlapping
- Report structure is not adapted/suitable for an integrated approach – is there too much focus on concrete results?
- Reports are repetitive, not clear to whom is reported and how the results are used
- Commission is slow to respond, delaying decision-making
- Move away from paper – hardcopy -> electronic
- Tools are outdated (Word, Excel etc)
- KPIs: database not user friendly
- KPIs should be adapted to strategic and integrated LIFE projects: IPs are more 'soft' projects on transformational change. KPI systems should be more flexible and the indicators should better motivate and be applicable also elsewhere than in bureaucracy
- Simplifying KPI reporting and monitoring, list available already at application stage
- KPIs and pillar approach are seen as difficult and separate from project content – perhaps better if it would be possible to fill them in during the project

There is a need to change the reporting requirements, tools and format. It is advisable to form a specific working group from projects, external monitors and CINEA to solve the abovementioned challenges with reporting and KPIs.

4.3 Timeline, budget and dissemination: the best elements

Life IP projects are long endeavours with an iterative nature, so naturally there is frequently a need to change original timelines and budget. Fortunately, according to the Life IP respondents, there is a good amount of flexibility of the budget categories and timelines/deadlines. LIFE IP funds are considered rather easy to reallocate in time and between partners and cost categories. If needed, there is a good possibility to improve the strategic plan, solve problems better and really implement the plans.

LIFE IPs give an opportunity to learn from other countries and therefore the situation in the whole of Europe will be improved. Communication and dissemination online can be very effective. This way project partners can easily share their experience during frequent meetings. Project leaders think that it is important to join forums/common spaces that can help networking. It was suggested that it would be great if CINEA / LIFE unit could provide this.

4.4 Timeline, budget and dissemination: the weakest elements

Life Integrated Projects have large budgets, typically 15-20 M€. However, when you start looking in terms of time (typically project lasts 7-8 years) and partners (typically 15–20 partners), the budget is not necessary that large. It is very common for many projects to struggle with the accuracy of estimated project budget. This is so especially when taking into account inflation – there is sometimes a considerable difference in prices compared to the time when the project preparation was done.

Response times of CINEA is sometimes slow which can lead to difficult situations for IPs (delayed timelines)

Some project managers suggest that there should be higher first payment and lower final payment. Today, final funding is received from the EU after the project is over, but some partners might be part of the project only for the first phase for example. It is difficult

to get NGOs to join LIFE IPs also because of the large share of own funding and low overheads.

Dissemination with complementary actions is often very challenging in the Life IP projects.

COVID has had impact on dissemination and even outreach to project partners.

4.5 Targets achieved and impact: the best elements

The top-down strategical methodology of LIFE IPs inspires participants to find a new framework of working together. They bring all organizations to work with a common goal, involving new stakeholders. Often there is tremendous success in cooperating with partner organizations. A long enough project period gives enough time to cooperate and make things happen – this also creates new network possibilities. LIFE IPs can help develop new projects with the same partners in the future.

Achievement of project targets and success of chosen project strategy is often a rather straightforward process, since projects are following the national strategy. However, often it is difficult to achieve the “full” implementation of a strategy/plan. Especially in Nature projects IPs are seen as helping the full implementation of the PAF – but in reality some parts of the PAFs are fully implemented.

4.6 Targets achieved and impact: the weakest elements

Project targets are ambitious and slower to implement than expected.

Solutions are identified but not implemented because it depends on policy making.

It is difficult to monitor targets and impact for a strategic/integrated ‘soft’ project.

It is also often difficult to quantify the environmental benefits of LIFE IPs. It is impossible to differentiate what the LIFE IP has achieved, and what is the result due to other incentives.

4.7 What would you do differently if you had the chance?

Here are common points from the project leaders themselves regarding project planning, human resources, reporting, and partners & stakeholders:

Project planning:

- More time to prepare implementation: focus on building a common willingness
- Have a right balance of issues to be tackled (often "part" of implementation of national plan, not "full" implementation)
- Less milestones, deliverables and indicators in the proposal. Many are too ambitious and then difficult to manage
- Be transparent regarding the budget with all partners from the planning stage
- Have a financial buffer to cover inflation

Human resources:

- Employment of new personnel started with the project, would be better to have them in the team from the beginning;
- Add a "political" Steering committee above Beneficiaries' Steering committee
- More human resources dedicated to coordination & reporting and communication
- One person managing the complementary actions

Reporting:

- More flexible reporting: keep it simple, only highlights, track problems
- Setting up an internal monitoring tool for reporting (makes it easier to draft the interim reports)
- Tracking small changes to report about / getting approved by CINEA
- Budget forecast system – better budget planning & reporting

Partners and stakeholders:

- Regular follow-up of the beneficiaries
- Project needs tools/processes in case a partner does not deliver their actions
- Pre-financing should be paid according to the budget share of partner (proportionate allocation); but small beneficiaries might get problems with cash flow
- Each IP needs to organize an international event/conference – coordination in terms of themes, topics and schedule is important

4.8 Feedback and wishes to the EU Commission/CINEA

LIFE IPs are very valuable and necessary projects and they are very well appreciated by the member states. Here is what to keep, modify/delete and to consider for the future:

Keep

- Strategic, integrated approach
- Duration (6-10 years)
- Flexibility
- Local monitoring teams
- Guidelines about good practices in the implementation of the project

Modify/delete

- Simplify the reporting, and improve digitalization of reporting. A portal for online reporting with more advanced, easy-to-use digital management/ platforms of documents
- Use the best practices from Interreg, Horizon Europe, etc. regarding reporting
- Make especially the reporting on Complementary Actions less complicated
- Redefine KPIs for IPs. Simplify the KPI reporting, understanding what the KPIs mean for the LIFE impact as a whole, make the final list of KPIs available at the application stage
- Increase dissemination materials coming from the EU

Consider

- More networking/exchange of knowledge between projects. Organize meetings for project coordinators to exchange knowledge, experience and best practices
- Promoting LIFE projects on a higher level
- Change of budget due to eg. Inflation

- Define Complementary Actions more clearly. Also not always clear on how to report on CAs.
- More trust to the coordinating beneficiaries with less reporting
- Reduce administrative burden for small partners (100–200k)
- Have a common platform to share ideas and solutions among IP's
- Create an FAQ page for Integrated projects

REFERENCES

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Annex 1. National Roadmap for strategic Life projects: Case Finland

We present here the principles and operations of Finnish LIFE multiannual national strategy, i.e. the Roadmap for strategic Life projects. We have executed the LIFE national strategy Roadmap already two times:

1. In 2013-14 for Integrated Life projects 2014-20:
2. In 2019-21 for Strategic Life projects 2021-27

100% of the projects in these roadmaps have received the EU funding.

Why National Roadmap?

There are several good reasons to build up a national Roadmap:

- Strong top-down planning on national level helps to execute the national strategies. These strategies can be strongly supported by LIFE.
- Comprehensive national planning helps the timely coordination of preparing projects in different sub-programmes and strategy preparation processes.
- Preparation of each project needs notable amounts of worktime. Planning in advance will help the organizations to reserve enough resources.
- Life strategic projects will help mainstreaming environment-, biodiversity- and climate targets in your country in a practical way.
- A wide national dedication to the selected strategic projects is crucial for the success of the project. This has been a major factor in the Finnish success rate so far. Main role of the Ministry is to motivate and stimulate different national organizations to start genuinely working together for the common goal.

Creating a national Roadmap

There are five steps to build a national Roadmap:

Step 1: Identifying most relevant national strategies

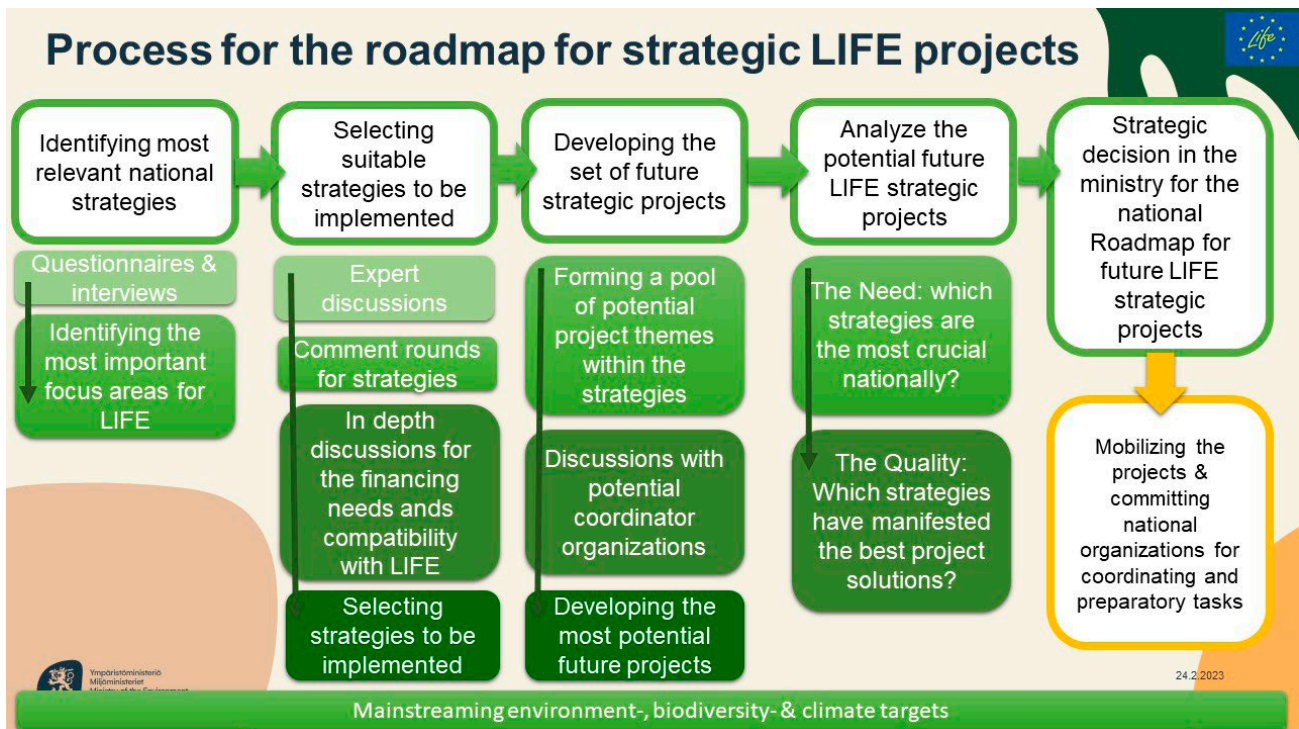
Take a good, brutally honest look to the mirror:

- Where your country has been weak in implementing EU legislation?
- What strategies you have at your hand with great potential for future development?

Identify 5-10 strategies to start working with. All departments of the Ministry have to work together here.

Step 2: Selecting suitable strategies to be implemented

After identifying 5-10 strategies start working with them by having in-depth discussions for the financing needs and compatibility with LIFE. Make all departments of the Ministry committed to the process.



Step 3: Developing the Solutions

Open the process nationally, allow ideas to flourish. Have several workshops where the identified strategies are brainstormed openly with all the potential stakeholders. For each potential strategy, develop the national solution (i.e. outline of the potential strategic Life project). At this stage you can also define, what organizations can take a leading roles in each potential strategic Life project.

Step 4. Analyze in the Ministry these two aspects

1. The Need: which strategies are the most crucial nationally?
2. The quality of the Solution: which strategies have manifested the best Life project solutions?

Step 5. Decide the national LIFE strategy Roadmap

Based on the Analysis, make the decision in the top of the Ministry on which strategies and on what timeline you will proceed in your country. The decision-making process should be as transparent as possible. Inform the national LIFE strategy Roadmap well to all the stakeholders that have participated in the whole process.

Step 6. Mobilizing the projects

Mobilizing the projects & committing national organizations for coordinating and preparatory tasks.

Timeline for Strategic LIFE -projects	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	
Freshabit 20 M€	2,9	2,9														
Circwaste 18,5 M€	2,3	2,3	2,3													
Canemure 15,3 M€	2,2	2,2	2,2	2,2												
Biodiversea 19,9 M€	fp	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5							
PlastLIFE 18,8 M€		cn fp	2,7	2,7	2,7	2,7	2,7	2,7	2,7							
Priodiversity Life 50 M€			cn fp	6,3	6,3	6,3	6,3	6,3	6,3	6,3	6,3					
ACE Life (20 M€)			cn fp	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5					
"Water basin management plans" Life (20 M€)				cn fp	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5				
Climate change adaptation" Life (20 M€)					cn fp	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5			
Strategic programme to promote a circular economy (20 M€)						cn fp	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	
Combined annual (mean) budget	7,4	9,9	9,7	16,2	16,5	19	21,5	<i>2028 Next funding period</i>								
% growth in relation to 2021		134	131	219	223	257	291									
		cn	Project preparation, cn=concept note submitted													
		fp	Project preparation, fp=full proposal submitted													
		2,7	Project ongoing, number indicates the mean annual budget in M€													

Annex 2. Life integrated projects 2014–2020

Acronym	Lead Partner Country	Priority Area	Year
BNIP	Belgium	Integrated Projects For Environment	2014
LIFE IP GESTIRE 2020	Italy	Integrated Projects For Environment	2014
Living River Lahn	Germany	Integrated Projects For Environment	2014
Malopolska Region	Poland	Integrated Projects For Environment	2014
LIFE-IP RBMP-NWRBD UK	United Kingdom	Integrated Projects For Environment	2014
FRESHABIT	Finland	Integrated Projects For Environment	2014
LIFE BELINI	Belgium	Integrated Projects For Environment	2015
PREPAIR	Italy	Integrated Projects For Environment	2015
CIRCWASTE	Finland	Integrated Projects For Environment	2015
EU LIFE IP C2C CC	Denmark	Integrated Projects Climate	2015
Atlantic region DE	Germany	Integrated Projects For Environment	2015
DELTA Nature	Netherlands	Integrated Projects For Environment	2015
LIFE IP RICH WATERS	Sweden	Integrated Projects For Environment	2015
LIFE-IP INTEMARES	Spain	Integrated Projects For Environment	2015
LIFE-IP ZENAPA	Germany	Integrated Projects Climate	2015
NATUREMAN	Denmark	Integrated Projects For Environment	2016
PAF-NATURALIT	Lithuania	Integrated Projects For Environment	2016
LIFE IP BE REEL!	Belgium	Integrated Projects Climate	2016
LIFE IP 4Natura	Greece	Integrated Projects For Environment	2016

Acronym	Lead Partner Country	Priority Area	Year
LIFE-IP SMART WASTE	France	Integrated Projects For Environment	2016
LIFE-IP-RBMP-Malta	Malta	Integrated Projects For Environment	2016
LIFE IP NADAPTA-CC	Spain	Integrated Projects Climate	2016
LIFE IP Marine Habitats	France	Integrated Projects For Environment	2016
GRIP on LIFE-IP	Sweden	Integrated Projects For Environment	2016
RBMP-DUERO	Spain	Integrated Projects For Environment	2016
Zero Emission LIFE IP	Italy	Integrated Projects Climate	2017
LIFE-IP GRASSLAND-HU	Hungary	Integrated Projects For Environment	2017
LIFE-IP AZORES NATURA	Portugal	Integrated Projects For Environment	2017
LIFE IP CleanEST	Estonia	Integrated Projects For Environment	2017
LIFE IP CLEAN AIR	Bulgaria	Integrated Projects For Environment	2017
LIFE-IP AdaptInGR	Greece	Integrated Projects Climate	2017
LIFE IP CARE4CLIMATE	Slovenia	Integrated Projects Climate	2017
LIFE-IP: N2K Revisited	Czech	Integrated Projects For Environment	2017
LIFE-IP NATURA.SI	Slovenia	Integrated Projects For Environment	2017
LIFE IP IRIS AUSTRIA	Austria	Integrated Projects For Environment	2017
LIFE-IP HUNGARY	Hungary	Integrated Projects For Environment	2017
LIFE-IP CANEMURE-FINLAND	Finland	Integrated Projects Climate	2017
LIFE-IP Waters of Life	Ireland	Integrated Projects For Environment	2018
LIFE-IP ForEst&FarmLand	Estonia	Integrated Projects For Environment	2018
LIFE GoodWater IP	Latvia	Integrated Projects For Environment	2018
LIFE-IP SK AQ Improvement	Slovakia	Integrated Projects For Environment	2018
Finance ClimAct	France	Integrated Projects Climate	2018
LIFE-IP URBAN KLIMA 2050	Spain	Integrated Projects Climate	2018
LIFE IP Physis	Cyprus	Integrated Projects For Environment	2018
LIFE-IP CEI-Greece	Greece	Integrated Projects For Environment	2018
LIFE IP ARTISAN	France	Integrated Projects Climate	2018
LIFE IP PAF-WILD ATLANTIC NATURE	Ireland	Integrated Projects For Environment	2018
LIFE-IP LatViaNature	Latvia	Integrated Projects For Environment	2019
IP LIFE PL Pilica Basin CTRL	Poland	Integrated Projects For Environment	2019

Acronym	Lead Partner Country	Priority Area	Year
LIFE IP Peatlands and People	Ireland	Integrated Projects Climate	2019
LIFE IP CLIMAZ	Portugal	Integrated Projects Climate	2019
LIFE IP North-HU-Trans	Hungary	Integrated Projects Climate	2019
LIFE IP GrassBirdHabitat	Deutschland	Integrated Projects For Environment	2019
LIFE-IP REVERSEAU	France	Integrated Projects For Environment	2019
LIFE IP PAF AII4Biodiversity	Netherlands	Integrated Projects For Environment	2019
LIFE- IP NATURA 2000 SK	Slovakia	Integrated Projects For Environment	2019
LIFE-IP C-MARTLIFE	Belgium	Integrated Projects For Environment	2019
LIFE-IP EKOMALOPOLSKA	Poland	Integrated Projects Climate	2019
LIFE IMAGINE UMBRIA	Italy	Integrated Projects For Environment	2019
LIFE-IP COALA	Czech	Integrated Projects Climate	2020
LIFE IP RESTART	Slovenia	Integrated Projects For Environment	2020
LIFE-IP CYzero WASTE	Cyprus	Integrated Projects For Environment	2020
LIFE IP BUILDEST	Estonia	Integrated Projects Climate	2020
LIFE Waste To Resources IP	Latvia	Integrated Projects For Environment	2020
LIFE-IP BIODIVERSEA	Finland	Integrated Projects For Environment	2020
LIFE-IP AQP-SILESIA-SKY	Poland	Integrated Projects For Environment	2020
Biodiv'Est	France	Integrated Projects For Environment	2020
LIFE-IP CE Beyond Waste	Danmark	Integrated Projects For Environment	2020
LIFE IP EnerLIT	Lithuania	Integrated Projects Climate	2020
LIFE-IP NL-NASCCCELERATE	Netherlands	Integrated Projects Climate	2020

Annex 3. Life IP Workshop participants

Acronym	Sarake1
LIFE IP BUILDEST	Estonia
LIFE IP EnerLIT	Lithuania
LIFE IP BE REEL!	Belgium
LIFE IP CARE4CLIMATE	Slovenia
LIFE-IP ZENAPA	Germany
LIFE-IP EKOMALOPOLSKA	Poland
LIFE-IP CANEMURE-FINLAND	Finland
LIFE IP NADAPTA-CC	Spain
LIFE IP ARTISAN	France
EU LIFE IP C2C CC	Denmark
LIFE-IP NL-NASCELERATE	Netherlands
LIFE-IP COALA	Czech Republic
LIFE Waste To Resources IP	Latvia
LIFE-IP HUNGARY	Hungary
LIFE-IP AQP-SILESIA-SKY	Poland
LIFE-IP C-MARTLIFE	Belgium
PREPAIR	Italy
CIRCWASTE	Finland
LIFE-IP MALOPOLSKA	Poland
LIFE IP RESTART	Slovenia
RBMP-DUERO	Spain
LIFE-IP RBMP-NWRBD UK	United Kingdom
LIFE IP IRIS AUSTRIA	Austria
LIFE GoodWater IP	Latvia
LIFE IP CleanEST	Estonia

Acronym	Sarake1
IP LIFE PL Pilica Basin CTRL	Poland
LIFE BELINI	Belgium
LIFE-IP-RBMP-Malta	Malta
Living River Lahn	Germany
LIFE IP RICH WATERS	Sweden
LIFE-IP 4 NATURA	Greece
LIFE-IP GRASSLAND-HU	Hungary
LIFE IP PAF All4Biodiversity	Netherlands
LIFE-IP LatViaNature	Latvia
NATUREMAN	Denmark
LIFE-IP NATURA.SI	Slovenia
LIFE- IP NATURA 2000 SK	Slovakia
LIFE IP PAF-WILD ATLANTIC NATURE	Ireland
LIFE-IP BIODIVERSEA	Finland
DELTA Nature	Netherlands
GRIP on LIFE-IP	Sweden
LIFE BNIP	Belgium
LIFE-IP INTEMARES	Spain
FRESHABIT	Finland
LIFE-IP Waters of Life	Ireland
Atlantic region DE	Germany

Annex 4. Life IP Workshop agenda

Programme – Workshop on EU Life Integrated Projects – What did we learn? 12–14.9.2022

Monday 12.9.2022

1 PM Welcome session and introduction to the topics of the Workshop,

[Ministry of the Environment of Finland, Helsinki](#)

1.00 - 1.15 PM	Minister opening speech
1.15 - 1.45 PM	Commission welcome words
1.45 - 1.55 PM	Event focus: purpose & agenda of these days
1.55 - 2.15 PM	Life IP national strategy and roadmap 2022–2027
2.15 - 3.00 PM	Coffee break
3.00 - 3.30 PM	Finnish IP Projects in short: Life IP Canemure, Circwaste & Freshabit
3.30 - 3.45 PM	Practical details

4 PM Transportation to the main venue: [Majvik Meeting and Congress Hotel](#)

7 PM onwards private sauna and light dinner on the grounds of Majvik

Tuesday 13.9.2022

9.30 AM Workshop part 1: *Collective experiences of working on Integrated Projects*

9.30 - 9.45 AM Introduction to the workshop I

9.45 - 9.50 AM Split into thematic working groups

9.50 - 11.50 AM Group work

Coffee served from 11 AM

11.50 AM - 12.50 PM Working group results

1.00 PM Lunch

2.30 PM Workshop part 2: The future of Integrated Projects

2.30 - 2.45 PM Introduction to workshop II

2.45 - 4.15 PM The future of Life Integrated Projects: What can we do better?

4.15 - 5.00 PM Coffee break

5.00 - 5.30 PM Working group results

5.30 - 6.00 PM Commission commentary

7 PM Dinner in the Art Nouveau Castle on the grounds of Majvik

(dresscode: smart casual)

Wednesday 14.9.2022

Field visit centered on the Finnish Freshabit Life Integrated Project, presented by Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife Finland: Koskenkoski dam, Kosken Kartano, a manor house and farm specializing in organic pasture-fed Hereford cattle & sustainable farming and biodiversity practices, Latokartanonkoski rapids

Annex 5. Life project self-assessments questionnaire

Questionnaire to project leaders/coordinators: Life Integrated Project Self-assessment

Project name: _____ – _____

Project leaders/coordinator: _____

Please evaluate the following aspects in relation to your project success by ticking the corresponding box (X) on a scale of 1-5. Scale: 5 = excellent, 4 = good, 3 = satisfactory, 2 = below average, 1 = weak.

Project organization and cooperation	5	4	3	2	1
Organizing the project					
Steering group operation					
Coherence of project internal human resources					
Cooperation with Commission monitoring consultant					
Suitability of the number of partners in project consortium					
Budget and amount of complementary projects					
General project working atmosphere					
Amount of project bureaucracy (in relation to reporting to the Commission)					
Timeline, budget and dissemination	5	4	3	2	1
Actualization of estimated project timelines					
Ability to solve problems and issues faced along the way					
Accuracy of estimated project budget					
Distribution of budget between project partners					
Ease of agreeing on the ownership/exploitation of project results					

Dissemination and communications with project partners					
Dissemination cooperation with complementary projects					
Success of communications and dissemination online: project web site & social media					
Success of communications and dissemination in seminars & press releases					
International cooperation in the project					
Actualization of project publication plan					
Amount of feedback received from project external stakeholders					
Targets achieved and impact	5	4	3	2	1
Achievement of project targets					
Success of chosen project strategy					
Success of cooperation with partner organizations					
Development of methodologies (research, technology, conservation methods)					
Development of new cooperation networks					
Exploitation of results					
Impact of project results					
Concrete environmental benefits from the project					
Synergies from complementary projects relevant to project targets					
Opportunity to develop further future projects					
	0	0	0	0	0

For aspects evaluated as 1 or 2 on the scale, please comment on why that is:

What would you do differently if you had the chance?

Feedback and wishes to the EU Commission/CINEA:

Annex 7. Collection of individual project leaders' responses

1. For aspects evaluated as 1 or 2 on the scale, please comment on why that is:

The reporting tools are excel, word and explanations by e-mail and letters. As the project evolves, the amount of documents increases. It is not always easy to follow even inside of the project what was the exact wording of previous reports and grow the reports from phase to phase through different documents. The same questions may be asked twice by the monitors. We are used to it and consider it as an inevitable part of the work and repeat the answers. Maybe there could be a reporting database in the future? We really appreciate that CINEA accepts digitally signed documents as a positive shift in reporting.

Ambitious timeline was set in the application to complete the milestones and deliverables. The involvement of relevant specialists, experts, managers, working groups and commissions (in some cases), also approval procedures are time consuming processes and were not considered into timescale during the project preparation. Still it is possible to achieve all the milestones and deliverables by the end of the project, but the timeline may have shifts.

Individual partners have a strong communication strategy. For the joined communication, we are identifying the right opportunities and target groups to add another layer communication, without confusing people.

Ensuring complementary projects adhere to guidelines re: logos etc. has sometimes been problematic. This is ultimately outside of project control and has meant links back to LIFE IP are not always explicit.

The Water Management Commission should have covered the Steering Group role as the Commission is competent body in RBMP issues. Instead Steering Committee is another body consisting of organizations which are only slightly engaged to the water management.

I rated timeline and budget realization within expectations as weak, because almost all actions experienced delay (although a few went more quickly than expected I have to add). And budget was almost always an underestimate of the real cost(s).

The project started on January 1, 2021. Our institution was established in 2018. Unfortunately, there is a lack of ordinances and bylaws that fit into project management. Management guidelines are being created on the basis of our project.

Regarding the communication strategy, unfortunately the project website is still under construction so this aspect is catching up.

Amendment or interim report are hard work. We hope that with simplification it will be easier.

We had misunderstood and slightly overlooked the links with the complementary actions at the beginning of the project.

In general, the major weaknesses of this project have been in the areas of project coordination and dissemination. Recently, we have incorporated two partners as new beneficiaries of the project in order to solve the problems we had. Therefore, we are working on our weaknesses and strengthening them step by step.

The rules for financial reporting are highly time-demanding and require lots of documents from several offices of the participating administrations.

The project has not foreseen enough budget (mainly personnel cost) to implement the dissemination strategy. This is also partially due to the fact that each region (3) has a own Natura 2000 policy. This makes one overarching communication / dissemination strategy more difficult. On the other hand, thanks to the project, one region has developed a more clear communication / dissemination strategy and is starting to implement this strategy in full (after 5 years = change management?).

Since it is a national based project with implementation of a national strategy it's only natural that international cooperation of the project is limited also COVID-19 had impact on our international corporation and involvement in international dissemination activities.

We involve external stakeholders into different activities and receive feedback regularly, but we planned a to achieve much higher involvement of stakeholders into implementation and understanding off IP itself & complementary action activity. Current situation is the result of COVID-19 and partially of the political situation in the past. With new government which is more open to collaboration with NGOs we plan to enhance that in next years of implementation.

Two reasons for this, one biological, the other political: 1) improving the conservation status of marine habitats is very complex to measure, and sometimes very slow at large

scales. Our assessment tools measure very broad parameters (e.g. habitat area) that do not respond immediately to management actions. It will therefore take many years to observe real positive effects of the project on marine habitats. 2) Our country implements Natura2000 mainly through the prevention of degradation risks. This is done through authorizations conditioned on a favorable environmental assessment. However, this major tool is not correctly implemented in our country at present. The result is that uses (fishing, shellfish farming, pleasure boating, nautical events, industrial uses, port construction, etc.) continue to alter marine habitats.

The political position of the State services is still very favorable to the economy and unfavorable to the environment. This is due to a lack of training, a lack of understanding of the link between uses, impacts and habitats, a lack of knowledge of the ecosystem services provided by marine habitats, but also because of the pressure of certain lobbies that have a strong political weight (fishing, industrial ports, yachting).

A transfer system for exchange of budgets between partners should increase the flexibility and accuracy of reaching the targets for the project. Concrete actions should be in the project to a larger extent to have sufficient pilots for working with and developing new methods.

Amount of project bureaucracy (in relation to reporting to the Commission)

The commission is asking a lot in terms of reporting and delivering documents etc. The reporting seem to be based on BG47 rather than trust. Especially when beneficiaries already did their own audits, it seemed that things were double checked, which is only good for consulting agencies.

Dissemination cooperation with complementary projects

There were already so many field project (C-actions) within the integrated project that the focus was on the dissemination within these projects.

Synergies from complementary projects relevant to project targets

The focus was on the actions of the integrated programme, there was synergy from complementary action, but not because it was planned, it just happened 'in a natural way'.

Actualization of estimated project timelines: due to national developments with regard to nitrogen, climate and pressure on rural areas, we are forced to adjust the original plan of approach.

Dissemination and communications with project partners: the large (13) number of partners complicates communication at the start of the project and it takes time to keep all partners continuously motivated due to different priorities and activities of the partners

Due to program changes resulting in amendments, the international cooperation in terms of other (LIFE) programs has appeared to be too much to include into the workload at this stage.

International cooperation in the project: Our project consists of a consortium of exclusively national partners

So far, the project and its activities has started in an effective manner, with good cooperation between the partners and according to planned budget and timeline. The first steering committee meeting is yet to be held.

We experience the amount of project bureaucracy in relation to reporting to the commission as enormous. And it is ever increasing over time: again and again unexpected new requests for additional information and supporting documents, often highly detailed. It creates relatively large and partly unnecessary overhead costs (in budget and time) as we think the reporting process can be organised much more efficiently, without compromising effectiveness.

The amount of project bureaucracy seems too high. For example: A financial audit took almost two years to complete and then not all information provided were considered. An appeal against the audit findings was necessary, which then led to an acceptance of the claimed costs.

The expectations of lead partner and some other differ in some things from the realization of our partner, who is preparing communication actions and media disseminations. Our expectations were higher than the real picture currently is, so we are working on solutions how to improve this.

One partner is very much focused on its own interest and intends to work on the results that are limited to its own focus, but not for the interest of the IP/national strategy.

Relative to other EU funded programs, administrative burden is higher

Estimation of some project timelines was too ambitious and did not take into account inflationary pressures

The only reason for the low grade is that the project is mostly brainwork. The concrete buildings and infrastructures and implementation of methods, ideas and plans developed in the project are in complementary projects and subsequent projects.

Difficulty to find the right Steering organization with large number of Beneficiaries.

Lack of human resources (and some Associated Beneficiaries) to coordinate the whole project at a sufficient quality level

Too many partners and 1 action with different AB creates a complicated project

Too big amount of complementary funds was announced (difficulty of OFB to leverage these amounts)

Difficulties to communicate within the partnership because of the high number of AB and their different roles in the partnership

Weak dissemination cooperation with complementary projects (Regions, Water Agencies, etc.) in Phase 1 (except the 10 Pilot sites).

We haven't started yet international cooperation in Phase 1 (except participating on-line to International events).

The synergies are too weak in Phase 1 and shall be developed in further phases.

In the project management team fluctuation is nearly intolerable.

Actualization of estimated project timelines: The initial project targets were formulated with a high rate and performance for realizing building renovations (+- 10 000 residential units). The decisions made by citizens in a very complex project development context (financial, technical, and organizational) results in a much longer project timeline than the initial estimated timeline for the renovation processes. - Achievement of project targets: Even though a range of successes are been obtained, the quality of most results are not always in line with the project targets. The initial aimed targets were too optimistic formulated, why now alternative ways have to be looked after for achieving the project targets.

2. What would you do differently if you had the chance?

Note: References to specific projects, project organizations or countries has been removed.

We would need more Human resources and amount overheads (for communication and animation).

A lot of the dissemination activities were projected for the 2nd phase of the project when the actual implementation was kicking off. Unfortunately the pandemic, its uncertainties and continuous changes took us by surprise. This meant that dissemination activities had to be organized differently and, in some cases, shifted to later stages of the project.

Develop more detailed activity descriptions, with more described tasks and activities, and targets/results to be reached.

Project was elaborated by the different team as implementation team. Therefore, there are still many questions regarding action content.

It would be good if in project elaboration process developers would have an opportunity to see key performance indicator webtool and see which indicators would be mandatory to fill in in 9-month period after project has started.

Since there is significant inflation, cost estimations have changed and already at the start of project implementation it causes problems for partners/beneficiaries who must implement, for example, prototypes, demonstrations etc. Therefore, in project elaboration process there should be provided opportunity to cover some percentage of cost inflation by grant. But, understandable that it is difficult issue for all sides – program operator and for beneficiaries.

Would include a professional environmental awareness/communication organization as project partner.

Looking forward towards the workshop for improving the project.

Calculate a larger budget for public relations work, more active design options for joint events with the EU-COM (e.g. platform meeting)

Embed a monitoring and evaluation framework at the outset of the project.

At application stage, place greater emphasis and value on non-GES benefits, e.g. changes to working practices that will have a sustainable impact on GES (post changes being made)

Change the timing of spending. We forgot to add a lag period to start up the project and the cooperation between the partners.

The distribution of the budget among partners. I would couple it to conditions of actual achievement before giving an advance. The larger positive result of the group can mask the “weaker input of some. By consequence the “best of the class are not rewarded, while the “weaker are not punished (still receive budget).

Stronger involvement of decision-makers in the institution.

Frequent changes in the decision-makers are not helpful for project implementation.

I would add time for one-to-one personal and partner discussions and theme-related responsibilities. But in general the project has been very successful and everything has realized very smoothly.

I would specify the minimum number of eco-manager jobs in the commune. Currently, there is a need to increase number of eco-manager in many communes. I would increase the availability of training for all municipalities from the start of the project. Initially, only the project partners participated in the training.

To involve innovative solutions/methods (TBD on later stage of the project implementation) into the project activities with respective budget

The problems we have encountered could not really have been foreseen and we have had to adapt to the problems that have arisen. We should have had more staff from the beginning to be able to run the project more smoothly.

Coordinating partners more effectively if we had the means to do so. (e.g.: We often ask for the deadlines to be respected, but in cases, partners do not meet these requirements, so our work is delayed. We can only send more and more reminders, but we cannot influence them more forcefully, and it is causing extra work for the coordinating beneficiary- new gant diagram, update of deliverable/milestone table etc..)

Some partners perform their tasks exceptionally well, while others contribution is less effective. As a coordinator, it would be good to somehow reward those partners who perform well. By this even lower performers could be motivated.

We would definitely allocate more project money to the E-Actions. We have a large share of money in the C-Actions (construction) – but these actions could also be co-financed with complementary funds. For the project’s E-Actions it is difficult to get financing

outside of the LIFE-Project, so we are limited to the project budget. The project's output and impact could be significantly improved with more funds for the E-Actions.

Design the connection between the IP-project and the targeted plan better, so that the project's effect can be followed up even if the national water status classification changes over time.

Ensure that all beneficiaries have a sufficiently large budget – if the budget is too small the LIFE-administration/ financial accounting becomes a too large part. In this case better to have “partners participating/ networking without a budget?

Consider building a website, designed to simplify beneficiaries technical and financial reporting.

We would simplify some steps required for the reporting. For example, uploading the documents on a web application would simplify the process and allows to save time, as currently happens for other EU programmers.

A lot of the dissemination activities were projected for the 2nd phase of the project when the actual implementation was kicking off. Unfortunately the pandemic, its uncertainties and continuous changes took us by surprise. This meant that dissemination activities had to be organized differently and, in some cases, shifted to later stages of the project.

More quality instead of quantity regarding complementary projects

I would suggest a wider staffing of the coordinating partner of the project.

Hiring additional staff to coordinate the complementary funds in a better and more coherent way (e.g. liaising officer/relation manager with the managing authorities)

Invest more in communication towards stakeholders / stakeholder management (communicating management plans, species action plans, funding opportunities but also invest even more in setting up coalitions with (local) stakeholders. We have done such thing in the second half of the project and this seems to work.

Even invest more in personnel cost instead of external assistance. With the new SNaP we have up to 70% of personnel cost foreseen because investment funding is more easily to obtain at regional level. Additional staff is a political sensitive issue.

Project preparation should take more time, project should be paired in more detail with the thoroughly defined roles and obligations of each project partner. Defining of

KPIs should take in the project preparation phase with a possibility to change baseline situation after preparatory actions.

Reduce the number of actions or their ambition for the same deadline. Our project was presented in a highly competitive call and to ensure its approval many and ambitious actions were included, which implementation is feasible and very much needed but need more time than expected. This is the reason for the delay in the implementation of some of them.

Reporting to the EU. Currently reporting on integrated projects is done as for traditional projects, whereas the number and ambition of actions and budget is considerably higher. This requires a different reporting method, which should be designed specifically for integrated projects, easing the reporting burden while adequately informing of project progress.

Although this is not under the control of the project, ensure adequate personnel in project organizations. Currently both institutions are understaffed, or additional staff is not included in the EU financing.

Greater flexibility is desirable in the event of changes in the actions that do not affect the project objectives

As coordinator, I regret not having been able to organize the project before it started.

I would have recruited a slightly different team. I would have started in phase 1 (2 years) to make a good diagnosis of the reasons that explain the lack of efficiency of Natura2000 at sea in our country with a small specialized team (4 to 5 agents), then I would have put all the forces of the project afterwards to act on the three causes that we know today

We have spent too much time treating wounds while the environment continued to deteriorate. We need to treat the disease, not put on little band-aids. We need to fix the problem at the source. That's what we're doing now, but we've lost some time.

Coordinating partners more effectively if we had the means to do so. (e.g.: We often ask for the deadlines to be respected, but in cases, partners do not meet these requirements, so our work is delayed. We can only send more and more reminders, but we cannot influence them more forcefully, and it is causing extra work for the coordinating beneficiary- new gant diagram, update of deliverable/milestone table etc..)

Some partners perform their tasks exceptionally well, while others contribution is less effective. As a coordinator, it would be good to somehow reward those partners who perform well. By this even lower performers could be motivated.

More careful delineation between project beneficiaries and other stakeholders, and better resources for project management from the beginning would have enhance project implementation. These issues could be tackled on the way, though.

Much more time for planning the integrated effort at the start of the project.

Fewer milestones and deliverables at the start of the project.

The integrated effort requires far more personnel resources than planned.

Because of the long duration of the programme, there was a big turn-over of staff at all levels of the programme. Maybe I would reduce the duration of the programme.

I would try to simplify the financial structure with all the partners and would improve financial management.

Determine the commitment and involvement of the partners in advance, this applies in particular to the partners where pilots take place. The design, implementation and organization of the pilots also require a great deal of attention to avoid surprises during the duration of the project.

At this T46 it is quite difficult to propose something. This requires an internal evaluation, which can be shared in the workshop congress.

We may not have applied for LIFE-funding. We are new in LIFE and experience a lot of implicit customs and unclear and/or old-fashioned conventions that seem to have accumulated over time, adding new aspects without removing elements that have become superfluous in the present time, and without streamlining and reducing the vast number of rules. It has become almost impossible to familiarize oneself with this complexity. The administrative burden is too high. LIFE would gain from rethinking LIFE funding from the roots and thus creating a modern funding system that effectively and efficiently contributes to its goals.

In consideration of the scope of the project, the budget - especially in terms of personal costs - is too low. Due to the restrictions resulting from COVID-19, the performance of the project was reduced, and the project had to be prolonged, which puts further stress on the budget. Also, the incentives LIFE projects are able to provide to third parties are still

too low. Providing incentives to externals can be a key for a successful project as well as a powerful tool. Therefore, the conditions and processes, under which money is paid to third parties, should be more flexible and not limited to a defined sum.

Probably less partners would be better solution for the operation of a project. More and better discussion among partnership how will we work and what are their obligation and rules of Life program.

Partners are different organizations with different focus and areas of work which is sometimes challenging to coordinate.

Be more flexible / disruptive at the halfway through the project (stop some action, reinforce others)

Hard to find the most appropriate partners in a very large ecosystem of actors / stakeholders (financial institutions). A more flexible roadmap could help favoring cooperation et opportunities: instead of finding participants to our project, we should in some cases provide time and budget to other ambitious initiatives.

Factor in inflationary pressures

Don't start a project during epidemic! (lack of face to face interactions and workshops slowed the relationship building and progress)

Today we know that we should also have integrated the subjects of drought and perhaps temperature increases.

We should have had a political steering group built on top of the steering group.

We should have had a bigger budget for communication and dissemination.

More Human Resources for the Coordinating Beneficiary (with some permanent staff to ensure continuity between preparation and implementation phases)

Less Associated Beneficiaries

A minimal amount of budget (and homogeneous) to join the partnership

1 Action = 1 Beneficiary to limit the transaction costs

Select some type of issues (agriculture, forest, water, urban, etc.) or some types of actions (training, projects, resources, etc.) to focus on

Closer existing links between the Coordinating Beneficiary, the National Plan chosen and the complementary projects

1 International action / Partner already identified at the Grant Agreement phase

The project's Grant Agreement has been revised together with the submission of the 1st interim report, which allowed for improvements for some project actions and activities. However, if we were to resubmit a project proposal, we would:

Include more ministries/central government departments in the consortium to improve uptake/impact of project results (i.e. beneficiaries with more crucial role in the implementation of the targeted strategy).

Revise the distribution of tasks among partners to improve consistency and continuity of different work streams.

Link the project pilot applications with revision of the respective technical guidelines/regulations (i.e. include relevant partners and activities).

As an IP coordinator I'm much confronted by the frustration of project managers from beneficiaries because the project targets are too ambitious formulated at the start, and they have no resources to realize them in time, budget and result. The resources for getting creative solutions to obtain these results are not always possible at their level (only operational and not at policy level). This results in very time-consuming supporting actions from the coordination to get things right.

3. Feedback and wishes to the EU Commission / CINEA

More assistance for communication meaning, starting the project with an initial communication kit (not only the LIFE flag but also with kakemono, rollup...).

The communication with the Commission monitoring consultants has been very fruitful and constructive. The guidance provided by the monitors has been positive enough for the project to maximise on its potential to reap further environmental benefits. We truly believe that this guidance enhances the project management operations.

As we are the first Integrated project in Latvia, project monitors rarely have time for detailed consultations before preparing and submitting reports, which leads to a wasted

work and need for changes later. Other integrated projects consult with us and gain understanding on how to do certain things – prepare reports, changes etc.

Thanks to CINEA for precise and open communication with project coordinating beneficiary. We are still at the beginning of the road but already we see how good CINEA project advisers are working!

The reporting may be a consideration topic (please see bullet two boxes above).

Fewer changes in reporting requirements

Grateful for providing assistance to the project.

Work that CINEA have undertaken to simplify the LIFE IP administration is welcome and will make it easier for projects to achieve success.

Engagement with CINEA has been with ease and professionalism, and I believe that those involved take a genuine interest in results which is appreciated.

We are grateful to CINEA and Neemo for all the feedback, support and rapid and friendly answers to all our questions.

EU Commission/CINEA could organize meetings for project coordinators to exchange knowledge, experiences, and best practices.

The regular networking among relevant LIFE projects, opportunity to exchange know-how, experience, methodology and update on the project status.

Very tough deadline for the Interim reporting (mostly in the case of financial auditing of the beneficiaries)

Complicated financial reporting / calculation of financial resources

We thank you and encourage you to continue supporting this type of projects, which are so necessary nowadays.

The Coordinating Beneficiary does not have the means to effectively motivate the beneficiaries.

More financial help at the beginning of the project would be useful. We did received help from the financial monitor, it wasn't a problem with its quality, but I think a detailed

training would help a lot in preparing financial reports. This is a significant item for all partners in the life of the project and causes many problems if it is not filled properly.

Complementary Actions: We have the feeling, that the ECs expectations regarding complementary actions and policy impacts of IPs are very high. However, it is difficult to influence other policy areas, such as agriculture with its funding instruments or spatial planning, as there are different legal frameworks and political decision-making mechanisms in place and the IP itself has little direct influence on them.

Reporting/Pillar Approach: more detailed information on the expected structure for the reporting using the pillar approach is needed. The pillar approach becomes very complicated, when you try to cover all different aspects and interactions of all the different actions and “squeeze them into a pillar structure. In our interim report, we therefore ended up with a traditional action-by-action-reporting to be able to get all information covered in a comprehensible way.

Monitoring Visits/Excursions: It turns out to be a lot of work and also cost-intensive to organize an excursion for the external monitoring team for each visit. In our project the first construction measures (C-Actions) only start in phase 2, so in the first 3 project years there were no construction results to show – the necessity of yearly excursions (in relation to the organizational work and also the costs) can be questioned.

Please review the task of external auditors, engaged by CINEA. Our experience is that external auditors working with IP-projects, ask for much more evidence than financial monitor recommendation.

Review the possibility to simplify/ standardize financial reporting of personal costs. In our project there are many different beneficiaries, that all needs different sort of documentation to certify personal costs, this administration takes a disproportionate amount of time for both beneficiaries and coordinating beneficiary.

Examine to use another base than Excel for financial reporting. It is terrible easy that it becomes formula errors in Excel...

Needs to simplify the phases of setting up the project and reporting the expenses and the results.

Simplify the KPI reporting phase.

More flexibility in Personnel costs reporting: e.g. the possibility of being able to report even freelancers in the Additional Personnel category and/or more flexibility in justifying

increases in the daily costs (even above 20%) resulting from leaves, illnesses or promotions of the staff involved, especially on long-term projects that usually see a large turnover of staff and the possibility of contractual improvements.

The Integrated nature of the project works very well, and the scope to seek out complementary funding provides an opportunity to build on successful pilots and experiments.

It is important that the project has the flexibility to adapt as the policy and practice changes.

The long duration (9years) of the project is really attractive for local stakeholders and communities, who have assurance that they will be provided with medium- long-term support.

The communication with the Commission monitoring consultants has been very fruitful and constructive. The guidance provided by the monitors has been positive enough for the project to maximise on its potential to reap further environmental benefits. We truly believe that this guidance enhances the project management operations.

Excellent cooperation/support with/from the external NEEMO monitoring team.

IPs are large projects which means that detailed technical reporting is time consuming. Better to focus on reporting about synergies, results, leverage effect etc. Only technical reporting in case actions are not going as planned (and of course explaining why and how to mitigate). Undoubtedly each project has its own project managing system / log. It could be a good idea to agree about technical reporting templates once the project starts (project based template instead of a generic template)

IPs and SNaPs are great instruments to speed up the implementation of Natura 2000

Avoid having multiple changes in staff following up the project. In general these are long running projects (6-9 years?) and it is important to know the history of the project but also to follow up regional Natura 2000 policy

It was of added value that also the Commission DG ENV/ Nature unit was involved since several policy processes run in parallel (art 12/17 reporting, PAF, ...). We strongly recommend to keep this link.

Clearer expectations of expected impact of the project.

After the confirmation of the interim report and financial report certificate or confirmation which costs are eligible would be helpful - so that the pre-paid funds could be used by national budget. Until a formal confirmation of the amount of costs that are 100% eligible, paid funds cannot be included international budget and are "waiting on the special budget line - and will be waiting until final report.

Strong leadership is required from the competent authorities, as well as good political involvement in the project by regional authorities and all others with different competences on the marine environment, both at international, national and regional level.

Peculiarities of the marine environment: insufficient knowledge for most species and habitats, huge and deep areas, mechanisms for monitoring and surveillance currently in place, more time is needed to obtain results.

Scientific knowledge is a pillar for the effective management of the marine Natura 2000 Network, not only through studies and research but also with the active involvement scientists in participatory processes with stakeholders.

Progress in participatory culture, learning from the experiences acquired in the elaboration of management plans and other processes. Based on feedback and results, the processes in course are being improved. Again, the methodology designed requires more time than usual statutory participation mechanisms, both for the implementation, monitoring and integration of results in concrete conservation measures.

The importance to work on capacity building and governance following participatory processes. Both are strategic measures that are being applied to catalyse a process towards the full implementation of the PAF and contribute to ensure long term sustainability.

The need for networking to ensure exchanges of information and practices, connection between MPAs to ensure coherence and connectivity at all levels. The official approval of the Master Plan of the Network of Marine Protected Areas will open new possibilities to networking. At international level, projects such as the INTERREG MPA Networks and Ocean Governance, together with participation in marine events.

Success in the system designed and applied for the integration of funds, based on the fact that a single entity is responsible for the management of environmental and Structural Funds.

The limited number of civil servant staff at the central services in the Ministry (7 people) continues to be a challenge in view of the high number of marine protected areas (100) and the huge marine surface to be managed (about 13 million ha).

The project has been fundamental to realize a good part of the PAF of the region. The actions have involved numerous stakeholders and a good training and communication on the importance of biodiversity has been made as well as numerous concrete actions of protection. We hope to have activated a virtuous cycle on the territory that to be effective will be must constantly solicited. For this reason, it is important to constantly publish call LIFE or other calls (SNAP) to always have the opportunity to count on EU resources. Since the LIFE IP had to move complementary funds, it is important that biodiversity is strongly included in the objectives of the other European programs in a clear and usable way for the managing bodies of RN2000 or by the region itself.

On the subject of conservation status assessment: It would be very interesting to be able to share more between countries the protocols for monitoring marine habitats. This work is very complex but we lack a little cooperation on the subject.

On the effective implementation of Natura 2000, the new European regulation on restoration will help us, but Europe must continue to put pressure on the States for a real effective implementation of management and conservation measures. This must be done through a strong revolution of ideas because too many people still think that ecology is not compatible with the economy, that environmental rules constrain the economy, whereas it is often the opposite. We must share good experiences, cases where good management of ecosystems has benefited everyone, where fishermen fish better following protection rules, where coastal infrastructures have been moved back to better live with the risk of flooding, where tourism has brought a region to life thanks to the quality of the environment that has been preserved or recovered, ...

In our country, most of the environmental policy comes from the European impulse. We have difficulty being good managers of our environment. We expect from Europe and from CINEA in particular support, impulse, and sometimes a kick in the butt (sorry) to move in the right direction.

The Coordinating Beneficiary does not have the means to effectively motivate the beneficiaries.

To continue supporting projects with transboundary components regarding both habitats, stakeholders and sector authorities and connecting these.

Simplify the administration!

Really stupid to have to resend the Amendments in paper format (earlier submitted in digital format).

Also a lot of extra work with the LEF at a very inconvenient time, the reporting period.

The external audit was extremely time consuming and asking for verifications and data that is not in consistence with the Life-regulations.

The slow and sometimes erroneous communication with CINEA through the monitoring consultant is sometimes frustrating. Also, the on-the-fly development of guidance for IP projects as we were already running was frustrating.

The KPI system is very cumbersome and gives a poor picture of the project's results

Reporting with QES is not possible from our country

Good integrated projects are often not possible due to regulation via CAP, for example grazing, fencing that includes both forest areas and open grassland.

The integrated approach is challenged by the fact that projects are evaluated as cost-effective on the basis of individual parameters and not according to an integrated multi-parameter approach

The objectives of an integrated programme are quite abstract and working with a field lab makes outcomes more fluid. The EU asks in the reports for concrete results, which sometimes simply is not possible. The working method is more or less 'organic', this is not in line with the reporting requirements.

In terms of financial management and substantive reporting, we see major differences with, for example, an EU program called Interreg. Here we see a large degree of digitalization and efficiency in the design and reporting forms that we do not find back in LIFE, where often Excel forms are still used. Better coordination and innovation in terms of administration software in this area is desirable.

The split into phases sounded interesting at the beginning. However, we observed that it has a low impact on the project progress. The amendment process for each phase is quite heavy, and for some partners it generates confusion and mistakes. The interim report (IR) process is an interesting work to do, since it is a good balance of the project each two years. Nevertheless, the technical report template in itself is quite heavy. Since there is a technical review each year with the Monitors (NEEMO, in our case), the technical progress

reporting could be related to it. Then, the IR could be focused only (or mainly) on the impacts and the strategy without reporting again on technical actions.

LIFE could make better use of digital means. The use of paper is not good for the planet and not necessary anymore. LIFE could learn from the positive experiences of other EU funding programmes, like H2020 and Horizon Europe.

Most of the time, the project managers of the local partners are so busy in their working day with advancing regional projects and their networking work that writing posts for publication on the project's social media networks suffers from it. The CB often gets to know about events and actions worthy of promotion some time after they have already taken place, so that the relevance of the posted contributions can often not be guaranteed. Furthermore, not all partners have their own social media accounts; sharing posts via partner accounts could significantly increase the reach of the general project accounts. Therefore, it is questionable whether focusing communication on online media is the right approach to inform and activate stakeholders.

Compared to the effort required to maintain social media accounts, the outreach is too low. If LIFE intends to put considerable effort into online communication, then each project should have an appropriate and correspondingly higher budget for this.

Cooperation between lead partner and Cinea is crucial as well as clear communication when there are questions/problems. So far we have good experience and both monitors and desk officers were very helpful.

The real flexibilities and possibilities to change actions, targets, KPI, are not well known by beneficiaries at the beginning of the project, so that there is a risk of self-censorship.

Reduce the administrative burden – specifically surrounding timesheets.

We have generally been happy with the collaboration with CINEA and have experienced that we have achieved the desired attention from the Commission.

In the financial area, we would like the templates and procedures we have developed to be made available to us at the start of the project. A total overview of the reporting format from start of the project would have been very helpful.

We would have liked to have had the same monitors throughout the project

More frequent exchanges with European partners sharing same issues (coordination&steering, technical (on climate change adaptation and Nature Based Solutions), financial, etc.);

Consider reviewing/improving the concept of complementary funding for integrated projects to avoid spending time in detail reporting of a high number of projects. For example, consider promoting mainstreaming of complementary activities/priorities across project-relevant funds to improve the project impact on the implementation of the targeted plan/strategy and track progress.

Consider further facilitating opportunities of experiences sharing between LIFE-IPs targeting similar strategies/plans/subjects.

Answers to questions could come faster and be more specific.

Both the strategy and the operational plans should already have been agreed at the start and some stakeholders should already be contractually involved. The EU Commission/CINEA should introduce letter of intent and other contractual obligations as a starting point. For BJ48 if you want to renovate 50 apartment buildings the agreements with all stakeholders should already have been made at the start.

A diverse and coherent beneficiary involvement should be agreed before with potential dissemination profiles. The EU Commission/CINEA should look during the grant agreement negotiations that the proposed beneficiaries are diversified and demonstrate a real dissemination potential. For instance, mostly a choice is made for a project consortium from always the same beneficiaries that are already involved with other similar actions and are not chosen for their potential for dissemination (although probably with the most expertise).

If the EU Commission/CINEA find that a country wide approach is interesting, they cannot contract only two of them, leaving a third without resources. The Grant Agreement should be coherent with the EU intention of covering all the country areas, even it takes time to agree with all parties.

EU Commission/CINEA could organize meetings for project coordinators to exchange knowledge, experiences, and best practices.

Annex 8. Photo highlights from the Workshop on Life Integrated Projects, 12–14 September 2023, Finland

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