



Socioeconomic monitoring

Action D.3.

LIFE to Alvars project

Environmental Board

September, 2019

LIFE to Alvars project is implemented with the contribution of the LIFE+ financial instrument of the European Union

Introduction.

LIFE to alvars project increased awareness about the Natura 2000 network and alvar habitats. Other positive effects like employment growth and enhancement of ecotourism (and income from that activity) were also expected results of this project. Socio-economic monitoring is designed to detect the effect of the project activities to the chosen indicators. Added socio-economic value and ecosystem services were assessed on different levels. Direct/indirect benefit of biodiversity and ecosystem services of restored habitats on tourism section and locals were assessed via indicators 1A, 1B and 2C. Following indicators were chosen to monitor the socio-economic effect of the project:

INDICATOR 1: Local benefit and business capacity

A) Added economic value to local enterprises via increased tourism

Questionnaires were distributed for local enterprisers to measure the economic effect of enlarged habitat area and improved biodiversity (ca 50 questionnaires) on their visitor amount/duration of stay.

B) Added economic value to local farmers

At the beginning and at the end of the project number of livestock, sales of organically produced meat products and employment rate in local farms was measured.

C) Incorporation of local people to restoration work was monitored and assessed via questionnaires filled by the contracted participants. The survey will take place towards the end of the project period.

INDICATOR 2: Knowledge and awareness

A) Increased knowledge about alvar grasslands and general attitude towards restoration works among local people was assessed via survey among contracted participants and land-owners.

B) The knowledge of Estonian general public was assessed by the number of people reached through dissemination activities during the project (media coverage, lectures and field-trips for land-owners and contractors, printed booklets, visitations to the web-page and learning center).

C) Increased knowledge of tourists was assessed through questionnaires to measure the effect of cultural and recreational services offered by landscape.

Two very extensive stages was carried out for socio-economic effect of the project. Both of these reports are available on the projects website and more information can be found from there

(https://life.envir.ee/sites/default/files/pictures/Socioeconomic_study_I_LIFE_to_alvars_11092017.pdf ; <https://life.envir.ee/sites/default/files/pictures/Life%20to%20Alvars%20Project%20-%20Socio-economic%20analysis%20report%20II.pdf>).

Results of the socio-economic monitoring

Socio-economic monitoring of the project was carried out in two phases. First phase was completed in 2017 and second in September 2019. In order to assess the socio-economic impact of the project, several indicators were assessed.

It was planned to assess the local benefit and business capacity through the increased tourism. Initially 50 local tourism entrepreneurs was planned to question. This task proved to be more difficult than planned as no contact was reached via e-mail questionnaires with the local entrepreneurs. Questionnaires was sent out to 70 tourism entrepreneurs and only 3 answers was sent back. It was decided that the effect of the project to the local tourism will be assessed through the visitors instead. Local and foreign tourists were questioned. All together 140 answers for the questionnaires was collected and analysed.

Added economic value to the local farmers was measured through the interviews carried out with farmers participating in the project. In collaboration with Estonian Agricultural Registers and Information Board it was estimated the raise in the meat production and employment rates in the participating farms. Data shows that there was a significant raise in the number of livestock (sheep and cattle) owned by the farmers participating in the project and through that a significant rise in the production of meat. 2744 more animals were in the registry owned by the farmers participating in the project when comparing the number of animals in 1. September 2014 and 1. September 2019.

Cattle	1171
Sheep	1562
Coats	11
All	2744

Table 1: Number of animals more owned by the farmers 1. September 2014 compared to 1. September 2019.

14 farmers participating in the project are new farmers. They did not own any cattle, sheep or coats in 1. September 2014 and they owned grazing animals in 1. September 2019. We can conclude that at least 14 new farming jobs were created with the project.

Incorporation of local people was measured through interviews with entrepreneurs and land owners. All together 21 interviews were carried out.

During the interviews and the different analysis, we saw how Life to Alvars project impacts the life of local stakeholders. Firstly, we saw that the actors are driven by a strong desire to restore and maintain alvars habitat. This will be related to childhood memories, will to restore the historical look, re-establishing the grazing tradition. On these points, the project impacts positively their social life. It brings back the historical look and help the farmers get subsidies for managing a semi-natural habitat. The project creates more grazing areas and give opportunities for new farmers to start their activities. Also, we see an increase in the number of restoration companies specialising in alvar restoration. These were created by locals for the project or expend their restoration work to alvars. Furthermore, it helps create more jobs and extend the job time because part of the restoration work is done during winter and, during the cold season many jobs can't be done – e.g. tourism businesses are closed. For farmers, the increase in grazing area opens the possibility to increase their livestock. Thus, we see a fair number of farmers breeding their animals to increase the herds but also the 'alive market

animal' is in a good shape. This 'breeding for selling' is more profitable than to sell animals for meat at the moment. Indeed, the meat consumption is mainly from pork (from the German influence) but becomes more orientated to a cleaner, greener, and closer consumption. The project help establishing this old (if we look back before the Soviet time, people were eating the meat grazed locally and on alvars from some) meat consumption tradition. In general, the project helps increase the incomes of actors. Nowadays, the restored and managed alvars have seen its particular nature coming back. The plants like orchids are growing and flowering for the happiness of local people. Elderly people see birds that weren't seen for many years flying and nesting on alvars. Alvar grassland is a source of biodiversity and the restoration helps its increase. Finally, a part of the project impacts the local culture. Indeed, during the restoration, the workers have found interesting cultural ancient places: an old oven used to cook limestone, old quarries, abandoned farmers and wells, stone fences in Saaremaa, thousand-year-old graveyard, etc. These places are important for local and it is up to them to do something with it like in Muhu where a cultural trail was created. Among with cultural sites, few touristic places have been restored on the islands: Sääre Tirp, Üügu Pank, Pussina Pank and more. These sites are a part of the island attraction. The restored place now brings more tourism and offers a nice, open and clean view with animals grazing in the background. In brief, Life to alvars project impacts the local's actors in different ways. These impacts gathered during our study are mostly positive. We have here a bias that would need to be overcome during the 2018– 2019 impact assessment. Indeed, we interviewed actors that were involved in the project and see benefits to be part of it, we haven't spoken with actors against the project or actors that are neutral actors – e.g. citizens. We find one main negative impact, shown as a negative retroaction loop in all the territorial metabolism. It is the dependence to subsidies. The actors cannot be part of the project if they don't get the subsidies. Otherwise, Life to Alvars is very beneficial to local actors in Hiiumaa, Saaremaa and Muhu.

Increased awareness and knowledge about alvar grasslands among general public was assessed through number of people reached through dissemination activities (media coverage, lectures and field-trips for land-owners and contractors, printed booklets, visitations to the web-page and learning centre). It was estimated that 500 000 people was reached through the dissemination activities.

Based on the questionnaire result analysis we can say that alvars are generally known by Estonians, whether they are the inhabitants of the archipelago of western Estonia or the inhabitants of the continent coming to the archipelago as occasional visitors. This general knowledge is surely linked to the cultural aspect that the alvars represent since they come from a practice traditionally used in Estonia. Furthermore, and probably for the same reason, the Estonian population believes that alvars are an important environment for Estonia and that their preservation is also important, although neutral opinion is also observed about alvars grasslands. The appearance given to the landscape by semi-natural environments such as alvars is particularly pleasing to Estonian visitors who appreciate the open spaces and the view unobstructed by this type of environment. Thus, with respect to Estonian visitors, the Life to Alvars Project did not have a negative effect on their opinion about the archipelago's landscapes, and could even be beneficial for those who like to visit these types of backgrounds for hiking, biking.

As a very big honour to our project- LIFE to alvars was presented with a Natura 2000 award in the socio-economic benefit category in 2018. In September 2018, Natura 2000 award local event was organized in Estonia. Commission member Sylvia Barova personally expressed the

gratitude to the farmers and conservation entrepreneurs participating in the project. The event was broadcasted in the evening news of Estonian television.

Conclusion.

To complement the findings of socio-economic monitoring, we can say that the Life to Alvars Project has achieved its goal of restoring 2,500 hectares of alvar meadows. This was achieved by allowing about 600 private landowners of alvars (about 1050 hectares) and about 60 farmers to be involved in the project, thus supporting the rehabilitation of traditional alvar management through grazing thanks to installation of necessary infrastructure.

Regarding the biological study in alvars, studies carried out by the University of Tartu show that the restoration of alvars and their management by grazing has improved several ecosystem services compared to alvar overgrown with dense shrubs and quite young forested alvar. Thus, pollination, pest regulation, forage amount and quality, overall biodiversity and cultural services are supported by open alvar grasslands (Prangel, being published). Moreover, it has been measured that the habitat conditions of several species of plants, butterflies and birds, some of which are protected, have been improved by alvars' restoration.

Project Life to alvars seems to be moderately well known, but with regard to the communication objectives of the project, this result does not seem very far from the expected one. In addition, some aspects of the project are still debated on the territory. Moreover, the investigations of the local population and Estonian visitors have shown a positive feeling towards the alvars and their preservation. On one hand, this feeling stems from the fact that alvars are a cultural heritage for Estonians. On the other hand, the restoration of the alvars creates open spaces offering pleasant views of the sea and places to walk.

As the Life to Alvars Project comes to an end, the goal for the project's stakeholders will be to continue the management of the restored alvars and maintain the collaboration between them. The financial support that some will receive should help achieve this goal. However, it will be necessary to remain vigilant as for the evolution of the alvars which will be quickly overgrown again if the territorial dynamics and the relations between actors change to the detriment of the alvars.