



LIFE e-Natura2000.edu

## Building capacities for Natura 2000: Lessons from the project and guidelines for replicability

Over three years, six European partners have worked together to design and test new approaches to build and develop the capacities of Natura 2000 professionals. From this experience, the main conclusions and recommendations for future competence-based learning initiatives are shared here.



*The project and all actions are made possible with support from the LIFE financial instrument of the European Community*

# About the project



The LIFE e-Natura2000.edu project “Supporting e-learning and capacity building for Natura 2000 Managers” (<https://www.europarc.org/tools-and-training/life-e-natura2000-edu/>) is financed under the LIFE Programme of the European Union. Called LIFEedu for short, the project ran for 40 months, from April 2018 to July 2021. Six project partners from across Europe have explored the potential of developing new approaches and integrating innovative learning methods to improve knowledge and capacity amongst Natura 2000 managers in both public and private land. The main aim of the project was to produce and test a flexible mix of blended learning tools and methods, designed to build and develop the specific competencies required for effective Natura 2000 management practices.

## LIFEedu has achieved several significant results. The main achievements include:

- ✓ Specific core functions and capacity development needs identified for all Natura 2000 managers.
- ✓ A new Natura 2000 online Training Needs Analysis tool created to assess individual competencies and capacity building professional development needs for Natura 2000 managers.
- ✓ Three online core courses designed, developed and delivered in English, Romanian and Spanish, each purpose-built to provide competence-based learning in areas identified as being specifically required by Natura 2000 managers.
- ✓ A virtual summer school conceived, designed and delivered.
- ✓ A new App developed for Natura 2000 managers and Natura 2000 management stakeholders.
- ✓ Presentation of the project in a wide range of networking events to share capacity building experiences with diverse actors at national, (biogeographical) regional and international levels.
- ✓ Comprehensive progress monitoring, administration and management reporting systems developed and applied by all project partners.

From this experience, the main conclusions and recommendations for future competence-based learning initiatives are shared here.

Understanding  
capacity building  
needs

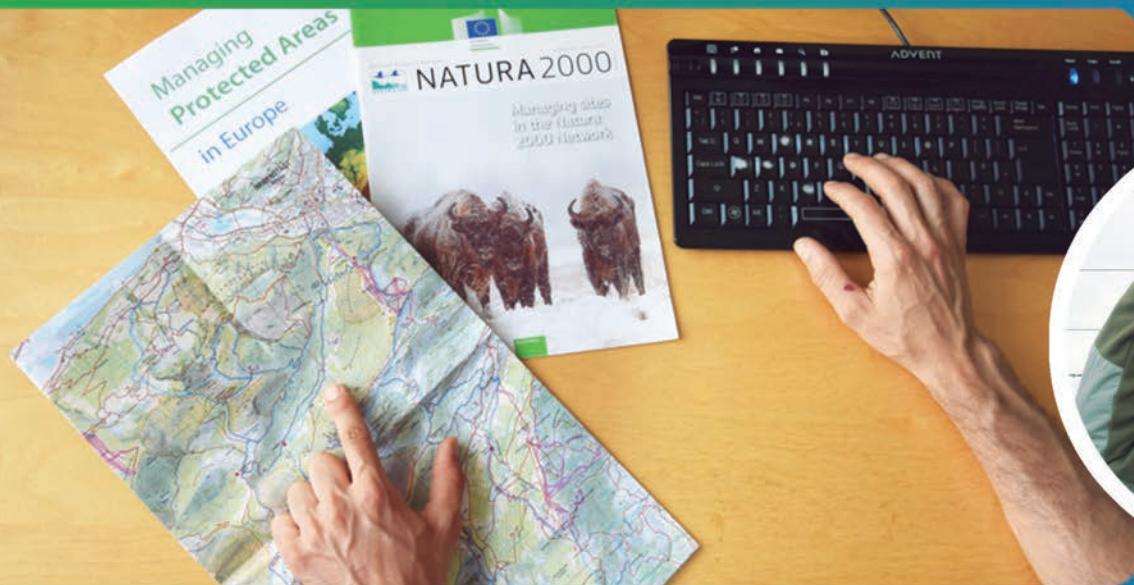
Delivering the  
courses  
- The competence  
based approach  
- Training methods

Broadening  
the 'tool pool'  
- App  
- Virtual Summer  
school  
- Networking  
- Project  
deliverables

Evaluating  
our work  
- Impacts and  
changes as a  
result of  
LIFEedu  
- Improvement  
opportunities

Recommendations  
and learning gains  
from the project

Scaling up towards a  
PAN-European  
Natura 2000  
capacity building  
programme



This summary Guidelines for Replicability is a project deliverable of the LIFE Preparatory project LIFE e-Natura 2000.edu (LIFE17PREDE003). The project is funded by LIFE financial instrument of the European Community and is implemented by EUROPARC Federation with the support of five partners: ProPark, Fungobe/EUROPARC-Spain, TESAF University of Padova, European Landowners Organisation, and the Kullaberg Nature Reserve.

**Authors:** This report was compiled by María Muñoz & Santos Casado with inputs and support from Neil McIntosh and Thomas Campagnaro.

**Design, graphics & layout:** Equipo Franja & Bárbara Pais.

**Disclaimer:** The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the European Commission.

# Understanding the needs

**Capacity building and development** focuses on meeting the professional learning needs of individuals and organisations by encouraging their engagement in lifelong learning processes. In order to be truly effective, capacity building and professional development programmes use diverse learning modes which are:

- ✓ Based on an assessment of competencies which enable learning about and identification of their priority capacity development needs.
- ✓ Purpose-built for different organisations (or teams).
- ✓ Delivered to achieve learning objectives.

To improve the effectiveness of Natura 2000 managers, before developing any capacity development programme, several questions must be answered:

- ✓ How can we know what the training needs of Natura 2000 managers are?
- ✓ What core functions require to be performed by managers and professionals for the efficient implementation of Natura 2000?
- ✓ What key competencies are specifically relevant for Natura 2000 professionals?

On this basis and by mobilizing the relevant expertise, tailor-made continuous professional development and learning programmes can be developed that will meet the specific training needs of Natura 2000 managers.

The expectations of project participants were mainly related to:

- ✓ Networking with other Natura 2000 professionals.
- ✓ Improving knowledge about Natura 2000 management practices.
- ✓ Improving technical Knowledge with online tools.



**Competence-based** approaches to capacity building are based around the acquisition of the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed for effective implementation of tasks and functions.

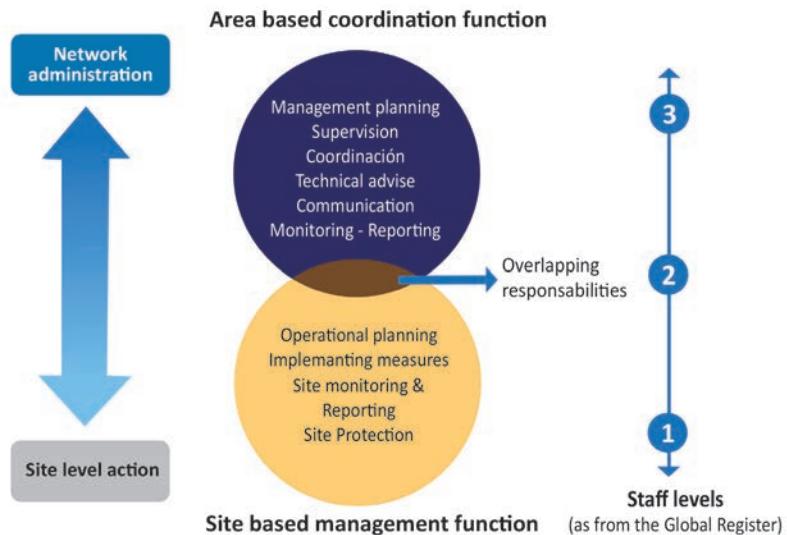
## → Knowing the training needs

The **Training Needs Assessment (TNA)** tool developed by LIFEedu is designed to help individual Natura 2000 managers to self-assess their competencies and training needs: they can use the results to learn about their priority capacity development needs and to better plan their future professional development actions.

The online tool for Training Needs Assessment (TNA) is available via the following link:

<https://propark.ro/individualtna/>

## → Core functions for Natura 2000 managers

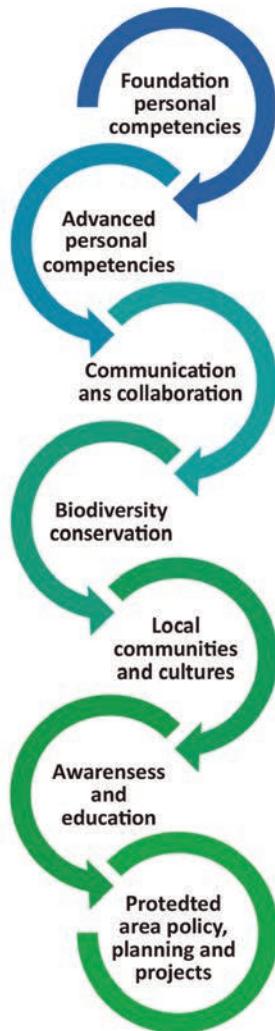


## → Competencies relevant for Natura 2000 professionals

To identify the specific competencies that Natura 2000 requires, we:

1. Analysed the Birds and Habitats Directives to identify core functions – areas of work that Natura 2000 managers are reasonably expected to be able to do in their work.
2. Prioritized the Global Register of Competencies to find the common competence categories required for the core functions of Natura 2000 site managers (and for which the project developed a set of innovative learning tools).

## Competencies identified as being particularly relevant for Natura 2000 site managers across Europe



- Demonstrate fundamental personal skills and behaviours required for day-to-day Natura 2000 work.
- Demonstrate personal skills and behaviours required for effective performance and leadership.
- Building and using the skills required to communicate and collaborate effectively.
- Ensuring the maintenance of the ecological values of Natura 2000 through management and monitoring of species, their habitats, ecosystems and natural resource use.
- Establishing systems of Natura 2000 governance and management that address the needs and rights of local communities.
- Ensuring that local stakeholders, visitors, decision makers and the wider public are aware of Natura 2000 sites, their purpose and values and how they are governed and managed.
- Providing a strategic and rationally planned framework for Natura 2000 governance and management.

Download the report “identification and assesment of competencies for Natura 2000”.

<https://www.europarc.org/tools-and-training/>

*“An opportunity to share and learn from others and have the possibility to exchange or create a team force for future projects related to Natura 2000” Matej Marušić (participant in one of the LIFE e-natura2000.edu courses).*

## Delivering the courses

The project's competence-based approach was based on identifying and assessing those competencies specifically required for the effective management of Natura 2000 sites and projects. This was used to inform the development of tailor-made courses and their content, which were central to the project's objectives and its implementation. The results of the collaborative work on competencies were used to:

- ✓ Identify three clusters of competencies of special value for Natura 2000 managers and professionals' training needs.
- ✓ Define three courses around each of those competence clusters to be developed by each of the three partners involved in this part of the project (Pro-park, FUNGOBE, and EUROPARC).
- ✓ Design the detailed contents of each of the three courses with reference to the specific competencies involved in each case.

## Training methods and results

Both online and face-to-face approaches should be considered when planning for Natura 2000 training and capacity building programmes in future: their respective advantages and shortcomings should be evaluated in terms of budgetary and logistical limitations, target groups, number of people to be reached, and specific aspects of the contents to be delivered.

There are several important considerations here:

- ✓ Learners' previous familiarity with or possible resistance to these different modes of learning, including openness to online learning tools and environments in our target groups.
- ✓ The need for practical management and field activities, which surely benefit from face-to-face training experiences.
- ✓ Individuals' tolerances to online learning – for example, short video tutorials and lectures (10-15 min) were identified as a valuable resource for on-line learning in asynchronous modalities.
- ✓ The benefits of mixing and matching ways of working that help to engage learners and retain their interest – for example, videos should be complemented with other types of resources and activities, such as discussion forums, reading materials, links to external reference resources, etc.

Capacity building is about building the professional capacity of people by encouraging them to engage themselves in a lifelong learning process by using diverse learning modes. Capacity building is not only about face-to-face training or about face-to-face and on-line training!!

# How to build a short course (based on the experience of the project's partners)

## DESIGN

### General design

- Designate a director / coordinator.
- Decide the basic programme structure: periods (months, weeks...); competencies; general contents.
- Decide who is going to develop the programme (the coordinator, the trainers...).
- Identify and contact the trainers.
- Identify an online platform (Moodle, blackboard, etc.). Hire a company / provider or install it in your server.

### Define delivery methods

#### Face-to-face course

- Define the length (3 days – 1 week).
- Select/rent a venue.

#### Online course

- Define the length: 3-5 weeks.
- Autonomous learning (as in MOOC courses) / or guided by teachers (dynamization, resolution of doubts, etc.).

#### Blended course

- Define the length: 3-5 online weeks (theory + practical assignments).
- 3 face-to-face days (mainly practical workshops).

## Evaluation

- Identify main aspects that can be assessed.
- If possible, ante and post assessments .
- Decide the criteria for completing the course (one or several criteria), for example:
  - 75%-80% weekly tasks delivered and passed.
  - Participation in at least 1 discussion.
  - Attendance.
  - Final assignment.

## EXECUTION

### Just before

- If online, upload users to the course: students / trainers.
- Send a “welcome e-mail” .
- Ask the participants for a general presentation in a forum

### Each online period (week, month...)

- “Open” the online resources.
- Dynamize: general instructions, forums, doubt resolution, etc.

## Delivery activities

### Online

- Identify and develop the activities for each online period, the more variety, the best.
- Decide if they are going to be synchronic or not.
- Presentation of the activities of the period (message in the forum, text, video...).
- Mandatory activities:
  - Theory: short videos, reading material, presentations
  - Participation in: discussion forums/chats/videoconferences/webinars, etc.
  - Collaboratory activities (i.e. Wiki) .
  - Practical work.
- Additional materials: links, videos, news, etc.
- Assessment methods (each period).
  - Tasks, tests, participation, etc.
  - Decide if they are going to be evaluated by the teachers or by peers.
  - Final assignment.

### Face-to-face

- Practical workshops (related to the online contents if blended).
- Group dynamics.
- Plenary discussions.
- Field trip.

## ENGAGEMENT AND REGISTRATION

- Promotion: brochures, e-mails, ads in specialised magazines, social media, etc.
- Application form (google docs).
- Selection, confirmation and payment.

## EVALUATION AND POST

- Evaluation (Survey Monkey, Google forms...) Post course: satisfaction.
- Make / send certificates.

# Broadening the circle - increasing the pool of tools

From the outset and as a LIFE Preparatory project, a key goal for LIFEedu was to make its methods and results available to all interested in ways to improve the effectiveness of Natura 2000 management.

To this end, a large number of networking actions, both formal and informal, have been completed throughout the project in local, national and international forums. Special attention was also given to the production of a consistent set of reporting deliverables, which guarantee that detailed and coherent information on all actions and results is available for future reference.

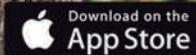
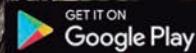
In addition, two specific actions were implemented to explore various means of broadening the circle of officers, managers, professionals, stakeholders, and landowners potentially involved in the project: a specific Smartphone App and a university-based Virtual Summer School.

You can find out more about the App and how to download it here:

<https://www.europarc.org/tools-and-training/the-enatura2000-app-connect-discuss-and-learn/>

## eNatura2000 App

Connect and Learn with  
Natura 2000 Land Managers



The project and all activities are made possible with support from LIFE and the Ministry of the Environment, Spain.



*"The plan is to share the learnings and this whole experience with the rest of my colleagues"*  
Martina Hervat (participant in one of the LIFE e-Natura2000.edu courses).

## Measuring Partners' knowledge & experience gains

### FOR PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

- Provided operational new insights and knowledge of online platforms, innovative digital tools and learning methods – e.g. Moodle, Chroma videos, smartphone app etc.

- Highlighted that competence-based approaches are critical for designing better (tailor-made) and effective capacity building training that meet measurable needs (TNAs).

- Provided in-depth knowledge of and practical experience with managing a LIFE project.

- Expanded networking and professional development. Partners benefited from the knowledge and experiences of colleagues from the other countries and EUROPARC.

At the end of the project, a summative impact assessment was completed by the partners. To do this, we used an adapted version of the Impact+ methodology, developed by the ERASMUS+ programme. Global results of this exercise are presented here.

### FOR LEARNERS

- Increased awareness and practical experience of working with innovative tools and online learning methods.

- Provided participants with deeper appreciation of the relevance of competencies and how they are applied within their work.

- Expanded networking and professional development interests. New contacts established among participants will extend long beyond LIFEedu.

- Increased motivation and interest to participate in new (continuous) capacity building activities and projects.

- New and improved skills and competencies related to different aspects of Natura 2000 management.

### OUR IMPACT

- To have identified the competencies needed for the management of Natura 2000 sites and to provide a very practical training needs assessment tool for Natura 2000 managers.

To have developed and tested new tools for online learning that would improve and increase capacity building opportunities.

- To have demonstrated the need for and value of competence-based learning opportunities for Natura 2000 professionals through innovative learning methods and formats.

### FOR EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- Demonstrated the value of online learning as a means to reach greater numbers of participants than through (solely) face-to-face capacity building events – the potential and possibilities of blended learning as a complementary and alternative approach to capacity building are now visible. Online learning is easily replicable and 'up-scalable' – once created, online tools (e.g. learning platforms and app) hold significant potential to enlarge the audience of Natura 2000 managers and related projects.

- Expanded networking at European and global levels (e.g. LIFEedu + LIFE INTEMARES + LIFE GOPROFOR + MedPAN etc., as well as the project being invited to be presented in 2 EC Biogeographical Seminars (3rd Atlantic June 2019 & 3rd Mediterranean May 2021) and also the 2019 global capacity building conference in London.

## Next steps

LIFEedu has evidenced the need for and opportunities and merits of developing dedicated capacity building programmes, tailored for Natura 2000 professionals and designed to support the achievement of EU priorities for nature. As a direct outcome of the project, the value of creating continuous professional development programmes directly linked to EU priorities for nature has been demonstrated.

*"I believe we have managed to improve our capacities, learn new tools, and continue making progress in the effective management of our natural areas and Natura 2000 sites"*

Irene Estévez (participant in one of the LIFE e-Natura 2000.edu courses).

An ambitious European training system for Natura 2000 can be envisioned as a logical development of the pilot experiences tested in this LIFE project. Such a training system should be able to:

- ✓ Develop, test and implement innovative and accessible training activities that will support the delivery of EU policy by improving the effective management of the Natura 2000 network.
- ✓ Establish a European training hub to deliver widely accessible and tailor-made learning experiences for greater numbers of Natura 2000 managers.
- ✓ Boost individual, organisational and national capacities for Natura 2000 management by providing learning opportunities for individual managers to train as trainers, mentors or facilitators and multiply the benefits for their staff.





## Learning Gains - what you can expect to achieve

New training initiatives for Natura 2000 professionals are on their way. Join the learning community of LIFEedu participants and other kindred European projects and you will:

- ✓ Increase your professional networks and gain valuable new insights.
- ✓ Access useful information, presented by inspirational experts.
- ✓ Follow courses tailor-made for your learning needs.
- ✓ Work through dynamic, well-structured modules, delivered with clear and user-friendly tools.
- ✓ Improve practical management techniques and skills and know how to apply them.
- ✓ Build specific competencies vital for effective communication with partners and stakeholders.
- ✓ Be able to apply your learning directly in your work to benefit the specific habitats you manage.
- ✓ Learn by example, share experiences with your peers.
- ✓ Be supported to share your learning experiences with your colleagues.
- ✓ Become part of a learning community of nature management professionals.

LIFE e-Natura2000.edu

<https://www.europarc.org/tools-and-training/>