

LIFE e-Natura2000.edu
(LIFE17PREDE003)

After-LIFE Plan



Supporting e-learning
and capacity building
for Natura 2000 Managers



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



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This report 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, the European Landowners Organisation, and the Kullaberg Nature Reserve.



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

Introduction

LIFE e-Natura 2000.edu (or LIFEedu for short) was an innovative three-year project which explored new tools and learning methods to improve knowledge and build practical capacity amongst Natura 2000 managers.

This After-LIFE Action Plan describes the project's approach and specifically the six ambitious and interconnected implementation actions. As an important LIFE Preparatory project, LIFEedu's objective was to design, test and deliver a set of ambitious results: based on the direct experiences, the project's externally evaluated impacts will contribute measurably to stronger and improved implementation of Natura 2000 and a larger, more ambitious capacity building programme in the form a new LIFE Preparatory project, LIFE ENABLE, which will establish the 'European Nature Academy for Blended LEarning'.

Project partners

LIFEedu mobilised partners' extensive capacity building experience in an innovative blended learning approach to improve Natura 2000 implementation. All six project partners work extensively with Natura 2000 and protected area managers, including private landowners, site managers, field staff, local communities, public administrations, environmental agencies and non-governmental organisations. The partners recognise the multiple roles required for Natura 2000 site management planning and policy implementation. The partners also recognise the changing methods of training delivery and the opportunities to engage greater numbers of Natura 2000 site managers and take advantage of new technology.

PROJECT IN A NUTSHELL *A LIFE Preparatory Project made possible with the support of the LIFE financial instrument of the European Community*

- **SHORT NAME:** LIFE e-Natura2000.edu
- **TOTAL BUDGET:** €845k
- **DATES:** start 1.4.2018 / end 31.07.2021
- 7 partners from 7 countries
- Participants from across the EU
- 6 implementation actions, 5 communication actions & 5 project management actions
- 34 deliverable inputs

europarc.org/life-e-natura2000-edu

About LIFE e-Natura 2000.edu

LIFEedu focused on capacity building for Natura 2000 managers. Taking a competence-based approach, the project enabled peers to connect and learn about what managers need to know and be able to do. The project analysed training needs and created new tools and approaches to access information and learning about the skills required for effective Natura 2000 management and policy implementation.

The main objectives were:

- *To demonstrate the need for and value of competence-based learning opportunities for Natura 2000 professionals through innovative learning methods and formats*
- *To have developed and tested new tools for online learning that would improve and increase capacity building opportunities.*
- *To have created momentum for and demonstrated the value of a larger scale follow-up project.*

Commenced in April 2018, the project was developed in response to the [European Union's Action Plan for Nature, People and Economy](#). The Action Plan was adopted following a thorough evaluation of the Birds and Habitats Directives, the so-called 'Fitness Check'. The evaluation demonstrated that there was and continues to be an urgent need to pick up the pace of Natura 2000 implementation¹ by improving the quality of management practices and the effectiveness of nature conservation objectives and measures.

Natura 2000 managers are on the 'front-line' in implementing the nature conservation needs of Europe's most precious natural heritage. The LIFEe-Natura2000.edu project recognised that the professional knowledge, experience, expertise and skills of Natura 2000 site managers and protected area practitioners require tailor-made support and that their capacity building merits specific recognition and attention. Also, recognising the diversity of types of Natura 2000 managers - from technical ecologists and biologists, to those engaged in public outreach and communication about Natura 2000 – LIFEedu worked with Natura 2000 managers working in both public and private lands across the EU. Pre-accession countries were also included in the project's target audience.

Why was LIFEedu necessary?

Developing capacity for nature conservation management in Europe involves multiple challenges.

Natura 2000 sites and protected areas need to be proactively managed in ways that address site-specific conservation management needs and objectives, as well as the ambitions of the Natura 2000 network and the effective management of species and habitats of Community interest. There is no 'one size fits all' approach for conservation in Europe – variables include species invasions, pollution, acidification, nitrogen deposition and climatic change.

Such conservation challenges require specific capacity building initiatives, especially in ways that develop new knowledge and insights about what works so that conservation management practices that can be applied according to needs and to meet local contexts. This includes a huge onus on

¹ The Natura 2000 is the largest network of Protected Areas in the world, encompassing 784.252 km² of European land area and 551.899 km² of marine area. Currently, there are 27.863 Natura 2000 sites, including Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Sites of Community Importance (SCTs). Find out more at natura2000.eea.europa.eu

nature conservation staff to take the social-economic context of a site into account in the development of management plans: this involves implementing nature conservation priorities in an effective way with as little conflict as possible, while creating broad social acceptance.

However, in practical terms for capacity building programmes, multilingualism poses a real challenge for pan-European capacity building initiatives. At the same time, across Europe, there are divergent social cultures and expectations about active participation of citizens or NGOs. Even where there are more structured forms of social engagement and proactive policies towards inclusion, the 'how' of participatory management and inclusive stakeholder engagement approaches are areas of core capacity building need. In addition, staff deficits, inequality of pay and access to financial support are material factors affecting capacity building. Across Europe, austerity policies have resulted in budget cuts for many governmental and non-governmental organisations, which has also impacted on nature conservation budgets. On top of pressures on operating budgets, especially for NGOs, core funding and funding for capacity building, especially traditional face-to-face workshops and conferences, are scarce. Given that many Natura 2000 sites are on privately owned land, private landowners are key stakeholders. Although many are making use of innovative private land conservation tools, compared with others engaged in Natura 2000 management, they often work in relative isolation – they are individual experts but have less opportunities to share experiences, increase knowledge and build the practical capacities they require.

These challenges place specific emphasis on the need for people with responsibility for Natura 2000 management, not only to be technical experts and nature conservation specialists, but also to be expert managers of people.

What do we mean by capacity building?

Capacity building is the process by which individuals (and organisations) obtain, improve, and retain the skills, knowledge, tools, equipment and other resources needed to do their jobs competently. The focus in LIFEe-Natura2000.edu project was on building Natura 2000 site managers' capacity to do their work better, smarter and more efficiently. The project targeted the full spectrum of individuals involved in Natura 2000 management in both public and privately owned land, across the EU, whether they worked as site managers, rangers, or private landowners, or come from park authorities or non-governmental organisations.

What do we mean by a competence-based approach?

Competence-based approaches to capacity building are based around proven acquisition of the skills, knowledge and attitude (Figure 1) required for effective implementation of tasks and functions. Within the context of this LIFE Preparatory project, the competence-based approach to capacity building refers to providing learning opportunities that enable Natura 2000 site managers to develop or acquire the skills, knowledge and attitude needed to effectively perform tasks required of them by the Nature Directives.

LIFEedu built on the concepts and tools presented in the IUCN 'Global Register of Competencies for Protected Area Practitioners'. The Register has transformed thinking about [competence-based capacity building approaches for nature conservation practitioners](#).



Competent Natura 2000 Managers

Competencies

The combination of observable and measurable knowledge, skills & attitude to do something well.

How an individual performs depends on their personal attributes



[Global Register of Competencies for Protected Area Practitioners](#) (Appleton M.R., 2016) – The PA Competence Register

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Figure 1: A practical definition of competencies

What do we mean by blended learning?

Nature conservation professionals require support and access to capacity building opportunities that meet their specific needs. Partners already have considerable experience and knowledge about the content to be delivered by the project. However, we also know that there is an increasing need to reach greater numbers of nature conservation professionals and to use new technologies and develop online learning. Our blended learning approach enabled participants to learn together in a variety of settings, where they interact with each other, share experiences, apply knowledge gains and work towards practical solutions for their Natura 2000 management challenges. At all times, the focus in the project was on generating maximum impacts at local levels by empowering Natura 2000 managers to improve their management practices.



The participants of the course “Competent Inclusive Communication”, led by the EUROPARC Federation

Overview of LIFEedu’s Implementation Actions

LIFEedu involved six integrated implementation actions to create and test new tools and approaches for competence-based capacity building for Natura 2000 managers.

Mobilising the experience of project partners and external experts, we analysed the requirements of the Nature Directives to identify core functions expected to be fulfilled by Natura 2000 site managers – see Figure 2. Then, taking the IUCN Global Register of Competencies for Protected Area Practitioners as starting point, we identified core competencies that meet these specific functions.

Action n.	Name of the action (obligatory):
A1	Identification and assessment of competencies for management of Natura 2000
A2	Identification of project participants and the needs and usability of training methodologies
A3	Develop a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) tool for organisations and individuals to identify skill gap.
A4	Development of a common Natura 2000 management training framework.
A5	Design, delivery and evaluation of pilot selected priorities learning experiences in Romania+ Spain+ rest of Europe.
A6	Development of Virtual Hub: supporting Natura 2000 and Emerald landowners and managers.

This work is described in detail in the LIFEedu report which can be downloaded [here](#).



Figure 2: Core function identified for Natura 2000 managers from an analysis of the Nature Directives

Precisely because Natura 2000 is a living network of places and people, Natura 2000 managers have to be more than technical specialists – they need to be able to engage and work with local communities and diverse stakeholders in order to achieve their nature conservation objectives. Effective Natura 2000 managers need to know how to apply their expertise in the context of the sites that they are responsible for. Above all, Natura 2000 managers need to be empathetic negotiators and communicators.

They need be able to know HOW to:

- Develop effective governance mechanisms and establish inclusive participatory processes to achieve the conservation objectives of their Natura 2000 sites. Participatory management needs to be learned - that needs continuity of investment & can benefit from use of new tools and methods.
- Establish and maintain inclusive, participatory management processes – taking into account the context of individual sites, people and stakeholders must be enabled and empowered to be involved in the development and implementation of management actions
- Work in practical ways that engage stakeholders in management processes – this involves respecting the needs of local communities, the economic expectations of stakeholders and the related interests of other stakeholders, such as local authorities or farmers for example.
- Communicate with and engage meaningful relationships with stakeholders. These are core fields of expertise required by Natura 2000 managers – you need to be able to know what you message is and how to communicate it in ways that engage people.
- Communicate effectively with a variety of audiences about the conservation needs and objectives of their Natura 2000 sites and protected areas, so that nature’s priorities become integrated with the fabric of wider society.
- Apply technical specialist knowledge and personal expertise in ways that take account of the changing circumstances affecting Natura 2000 management.

Therefore, effective Natura 2000 management requires:

- Know-how to develop, apply and work with participatory processes
- Ability to engage local communities & diverse stakeholders
- Specific consideration of socio-economic contexts
- Willingness & ability to think and work together with others to find solutions.



LIFEedu aimed to close the gaps between the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of Natura 2000 management. Project partners elaborated a ‘common framework’ for Natura 2000 management - the project provided a range of blended learning experiences across three core competence modules, which covered:

- Biodiversity conservation, policy, planning & project management skills – led by the ProPark Foundation in Romania
- How to work & collaborate effectively with local communities and respect cultural traditions – led by FUNGOBE in Spain
- How to communicate confidently about & advocate for Natura 2000 – led by the EUROPARC Federation in English

Working in groups, learning experiences were delivered by a mix of face-to-face workshops and a summer school, as well as a range of online and digital tools such as webinars, interactive online exercises, demonstration videos and a smartphone ‘virtual twinning’ app.

The range of delivery tools developed and tested within LIFEedu included:

- Webinars
- Demonstration videos
- Filmed 'master class' tutorials
- Workshops
- A 'Natura 2000 in Practice' Summer school
- New smartphone app – 'virtual (twinning) hub'
- Practical assignments designed to:
 - Analyse best practices to understand why they work;
 - Apply learning & replicate where useful
 - Think through problems to develop workable solutions

Evaluating experience

Not only did the project develop and use learning methods and tools to build practical capacities in such areas, as part of the learning process, the project also encouraged (and expected) the learning to be used and applied by Natura 2000 managers in their daily work. This was achieved by incorporating a series of practical tasks and assignments as part of the core competence courses. This was an integral feature of the practical courses designed to see what worked best within the project. It also facilitated the evaluation of the impacts: based on the experience of the participants and how they applied their learning in practical ways, the project was able to gather evidence about what capacity gains participants felt they had achieved and would be, as a result of the project, able to adapt and apply with confidence.



The experiences and feedback gathered from all involved in the project will enable project partners to measure and report results in highly visible ways as part of the evaluation process.

What changed as a result of LIFEedu?

The following table summarises the projects' main outcomes in terms of high, medium-high and medium-low impacts from three different perspectives – partners', learners' and external stakeholders' perspectives.

Perspective	High impact	Medium-high impact	Medium-Low impact
Project partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Operational knowledge of online platforms, innovative digital tools and learning methods – e.g. Moodle, Chroma videos, smartphone app etc. - Competence based approaches are critical for designing better tailor-made capacity building initiatives and effective capacity building training that meet measurable needs (TNAs). - In depth knowledge of and practical experience with managing a LIFE project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With further development and investment, LIFEedu's capacity building courses and tools can be adapted and replicated – for example, for organisations, area teams and groups of managers working in specific specialisms. - LIFEedu and future capacity building projects can be catalysts for networking and collaboration between other organisations, projects and partners with common goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The training needs and capacity building expectations of private landowners remain poorly defined – as such, they remain difficult to meet. - Within the period of the project, the assessment process enables us to measure how learning (e.g. practical skills and knowledge) have been applied by participants but not what the impacts of their learning will be in the long-term. - Ways to consolidate and formally accredit practical competence-based learning merit further investigation – this is a complex area and one that requires long-term thinking and more extensive consultations.
Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased awareness and practical experience of working with innovative tools and online learning methods. - Deeper appreciation of the relevance of competencies and how they are applied within their work. - Dedicated opportunities to network with peers across Europe (19 countries) and share experiences. - New contacts established that will extend long beyond LIFEedu. - Increased motivation and interest to participate in new (continuous) capacity building activities and projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TNA: Increased awareness of individual (competence-based) training needs - Variable opportunities to apply learning in their own organisation or Natura 2000 site – limiting factors included time, available resources, degree of commitment from line managers etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engagement of private land owners. - Uptake and use of the new smartphone app.

Perspective	High impact	Medium-high impact	Medium-Low impact
External stakeholders / project observers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - LIFEedu has 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. - 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Growing recognition of the importance of competence-based training that is tailored for Natura 2000 managers’ specific needs – e.g. scientific paper developed by TESAF. - An economic case for capacity building training can increasingly be made – for relatively small investments of time and money, new and improved skills can be developed which improve ‘on-the-job’ effectiveness and efficiency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The opportunity for and merits of developing dedicated capacity building programmes tailored for Natura 2000 managers and designed to support the achievement of EU priorities for nature – as a direct outcome of LIFEedu, the value of creating continuous professional development programmes directly linked to EU priorities for nature can be envisaged.

Future plans

The project’s results have demonstrated the benefits of competence-based approaches to capacity building for individuals. The LIFEe-Natura2000.edu project holds valuable lessons for all engaged in protecting Europe’s nature: whilst the focus was on Natura 2000 managers, we know that the lessons learnt can be applied in a wide variety of settings and nature conservation contexts.

LIFEedu has demonstrated that there are common needs and competence-based learning opportunities specifically required for effective nature management in a variety of settings and operating contexts. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that capacity building training programmes can be applied according to local circumstances and needs within prevailing cultures: LIFEedu achieved this and it will be pre-requisite in future capacity building projects. Also, testing how learning is applied to agreed standards whilst being adapted according to individual (site-level, organisational or personal needs) will be a core feature of the assessment processes in future capacity building projects.

In future, we aim to increase that potential and develop new approaches for individual and organisational capacity building, required to meet the major challenges impacting Europe’s nature in the 21st century. This involves investing in professional capacity building programmes to make sure that our current and future nature management professionals and their organisations have the specific competencies they need to do their work and protect our natural world.

The following table summarises how the main lessons from LIFEedu will be taken forward in future. It lists the main objectives that will be developed specifically in the new capacity building Preparatory project, LIFE ENABLE (which runs from August 2021 to July 2024) and by continuing to mobilise LIFEedu and LIFE ENABLE partners’ networks and relevant project working.

Ensuring the post-project legacy of LIFEedu

Objective 1: Mobilise relevant expertise to build bridges between academic and Natura 2000 management practitioners and increase capacity building impacts.	Timescale	How	Indicative cost
Associated Actions:			
1.1 From collaborative working groups drawing upon experience available in European projects and new partners to advise and inform the further development of course contents.	Short-Medium term (2022/2023)	Mobilise project partners' networks and relevant projects LIFE ENABLE Implementation Action A1	€€
1.2 Create a 'Train the Trainers' course for selected project participants to enable more managers to learn, develop and acquire new skills by rolling-out capacity building courses.	Medium-long term (2024)	LIFE ENABLE Implementation Action A5	€€€
1.3 Develop technical courses for managers of specific habitat types as a logical extension of LIFEedu where competence-based courses can be integrated and applied through technical management courses.	Medium-long term (2024)	Mobilise project partners' networks in prioritising those engaged in marine and forest management. LIFE ENABLE Implementation Actions A4 & A5	€€€

Objective 2: Continue to promote the practical benefits of competence-based and blended learning approaches to capacity building as a means to increase impacts by making training available to greater numbers of nature managers.	Timescale	How	Indicative cost
Associated Actions:			
2.1 With minor adaptations, replicate LIFEedu's for competence-based courses on communication, stakeholder engagement and local capacity building, biodiversity conservation and project development.	Short-medium term (2022/2023)	High level of satisfaction and involvement among course participants. High demand to be involved in LIFEedu – places available were over-subscribed 3:1	€€
2.2 Increase the scale and scope of capacity building actions through development and use of a new online learning platform (M.O.O.C.) in order to expand and meet the needs of larger numbers of participants.	Medium-term (2022/2023)	LIFE ENABLE Implementation Action A4	€€€

Objective 4: Continue to disseminate and promote the LIFEedu approach to external audiences, other relevant projects and through participation in capacity building networking events. Associated Actions:	Timescale	How	Indicative cost
<p>4.1 As part of the post-project LIFEedu legacy, continue to promote LIFEedu’s achievements in winning greater recognition of the need for competence-based capacity building programmes and courses that cover core functions specifically required by nature managers – e.g. communication and collaboration, stakeholder engagement and inclusive governance, biodiversity conservation and management planning including monitoring etc.</p> <p>4.2 In this way, reinforce the fact that investment in purpose-built dedicated capacity building for nature managers is an area of continuous need to support practical management effectiveness and ensure progress towards the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy and Restoration Plans</p>	<p>Short, medium & long term (to 2026 minimum)</p> <p>Short, medium & long term (to 2026 minimum)</p>	<p>The LIFEedu webpages will continue to be maintained for a minimum of 5 years post LIFEedu.</p> <p>End of LIFEedu project reports (e.g. Guidelines for Replicability (B3), the Layman’s Report (B5) and this After-LIFE Plan (C3)) have been expressly designed to have usefulness and purpose beyond the end of the current project. In addition, to ensure maximum value for money from the various reports, these will be used during the early stages of LIFE ENABLE to promote the concepts and principles drawn from LIFEedu, being applied and further developed in LIFE ENABLE.</p>	<p>€</p> <p>€</p>

ANNEX 1: List of key-words and abbreviations

Project title: LIFE e-Natura2000.edu = 'LIFEedu' for short

“Supporting e-learning & capacity building for Natura 2000 managers”

- **Blended learning:** the practice of using both **online and in-person** learning experiences
- **Cohort of participants:** in this project, it refers to a group of **selected** participants, which will test the learning methodology
- **Competencies:** A series of **abilities, commitments, knowledge**, and **skills** that enable a person to act effectively in a job or situation
- **Competency gap analysis:** assessment of the **difference between the current** competency level of and the **required** competency level
- **E-learning:** Electronic learning
- **Face-to-face (F2F):** meeting someone in the same place. F2f workshops, filmed f2f interviews. Face-to-face learning as opposed to e-learning
- **Module:** one of the units that together make a complete course. In this project, modules will be based on curricula proposals and will consist of a series of learning experiences or content to gain the competencies around a key topic
- **Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment):** is a free and open-source learning management system. It is used for blended learning, distance education, and other e-learning projects
- **Peer-to-peer learning:** an interactive exchange that takes place among equals providing mutual learning
- **Summer school:** a school, or a programme, that provides lessons and activities during the summer vacation.
- **Training framework:** in this project, it will indicate the content of knowledge, skills and experience needed to effectively manage a Natura 2000 site.
- **Training need analysis (TNA):** provides information about the current state of training and determines the training attitudes and preferences
- **Twinning platform (Also called Virtual twinning hub):** it is an online platform that allows online exchange among peers. In this project, Natura 2000 managers will be able to identify issues they have and seek solutions from other sites or from individuals who can assist them.
- **Video diaries:** these are videos made from the participants during their learning process to capture how this process is evolving. It can serve as an evaluation system.
- **Virtual twinning hub:** See twinning platform
- **Web-based knowledge hub :** a common environment where to share information and knowledge
- **Webinar:** an online seminar presentation held via the Internet in real time