



LIFE Project Number
<LIFE16 GIE/EE/000665>

Progress Report¹
Covering the project activities from 01/11/2019² to 30/04/2021

Reporting Date³
<31/05/2021>

LIFE PROJECT NAME or Acronym
<NaturallyEst LIFE>

Data Project

Project location:	Estonia
Project start date:	<15/09/2017>
Project end date:	<15/03/2022>
Total budget:	654,350 € (total eligible budget 652,300 €)
EU contribution:	390,810 €
(%) of eligible costs:	59.91% of total eligible budget

Data Beneficiary

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Please refer to the “Guidance to draft a progress report (new template from March 2019)” that you will find under the LIFE Website page <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/life-reporting>

¹ Progress Report without any payment request (for Progress Reports with payment request, use the Mid-term Report template)

² Project start date in the case of the first Progress Report, otherwise date since the last reporting period

³ Include the reporting date as foreseen in Form C2 of Annex II of the Grant Agreement or as modified in agreement with EASME

Section 1 - Overall assessment of the achievements and as to whether the project objectives and work plan are still viable (2 pages max)

The project main objectives and work plans are viable and mainly developing according to the initial plan. Below are brief overviews about the project actions.

Preparatory actions: A1 Stakeholder database, A2 Focus group meetings – completed. Main impact for project’s core actions – better focus for the core actions.

B1 (Natura 2000 helpdesk) 75 cases by 04/2021 (30 cases were expected in the application). The number of cases in the helpdesk exceeds expectations. The main impact of the helpdesk is to prove for the environmental decision- and policy makers (but also for NGOs) that there is: a) need for the environmental legal counselling and b) an effective method for this kind of counselling. Natura Helpdesk has also mapped the main types of problems and questions that private persons and companies need to solve and thus the long term impact of this action is hopefully improvement of practices in the environmental policies

B2 (Case studies) Analysis is in progress, topics are selected and divided between analysts.

B3 (Natura 2000 handbook) First draft is completed and ready for revision. The main impact of actions B1-B2-B3 is only revealed in longer perspective than project life span – hopefully resulting in better practices for environmental legal framework. The analysis of helpdesk cases, case studies and handbook can be used as example input for designing the more “human scale” practices of environmental law. However, the result of those actions is also the main tangible input for the future planning of the afterLIFE activities.

B4 (Communication trainings for nature conservation spokespersons) - completed, course descriptions for the future replication submitted to the external monitor. In the application 30 people were planned to go through the training, in practice 14 leading environmental officials from the Environmental Board and 19 environmental spokespersons from the non-governmental organisations and other organisations were engaged in the communication trainings. Results and impacts: many environmental officials who have participated in the communication trainings have integrated the communication planning into their work practices. ELF has been invited to the processes of public involvement of the management plans (Matsalu Natura2000 area), management rules (Võhandu Natura2000 area) and creation of strategical communication plans (management practices of seminatural habitats). There has also been a follow-up communication training for the environmental officials carried out by the Environmental Board. There has also been a lot of follow-up cooperation between ELF and the officials who participated in the training resulting in qualitative leap in Environmental Board. In the group of nongovernmental spokespersons the main result is that the participants with very different level and experiences could freely share their best practices. As many different methods were introduced, people got various additions for their communication “toolboxes”. There was a follow up plan of making those meetings regular in order to further improve the communication skills but COVID19 pandemic has put this plan onto hold.

B5 (Open-air events “Natura 2000 and our community”)

In application 36 events was planned. In April 2021 23 are completed, 12 more are planned to happen during 2021. After trying several approaches we have realised that in organising community events we need to involve community already into planning and cooperate in storytelling about nature values. Either with single events (Veski N2K site) or with umbrella events (World Wetland Day events) the results were best if we handed over the planning and invitation to a local person. The group events of World Wetland Day were successful because the key persons - nature guides were highly motivated to raise their service into a new level. As a result new target groups (common people living in or close to Natura 2000 areas) were hooked up into the discussions of the Natura 2000, its benefits and possibilities for local communities. Even though it was a very simple activity – go into your closest protected area with your

neighbours and learn something of nature's values – the hikes were perceived as a novel experience for most of the participants (according to the short synopsis we asked from the tour guides). As result of one good experience the local people are now more eager to go to the local Natura2000 areas themselves. The nature guides have gained experience of storytelling Natura 2000 values for a new target group – local people without specific previous nature knowledge. Short term impact is that nature guides were able to reorientate during the pandemic, long term impact is a new normality where storytelling about nature's values is perceived as something normal. In average of about 20 people have been participating in the actual events and many more in virtual events. We planned to engage about 1500 people in the events but the number might be a bit lower in the and as the COVID19 pandemic has put restrictions into the actual coming together. Thus, we have engaged over 650 participants into one single virtual event (Kahoot quiz), but we needed to restrict the participation of the World Wetland Day hikes.

B6 (Study tours), all 5 study tours completed

Two tours were organised for the managers of seminatural habitats (wooded meadows and coastal meadows). The participants were from different target groups – mostly the managers of the seminatural habitats and the environmental officials but also the environmental NGOs were present. The managers could share their practices and ideas with each other and they could also present their problems in a more informal atmosphere for the environmental officials. In the wooded meadow study tour also the environmental minister was present that gave more credibility for the event and hope and trust for the managers that their problems can be heard on national level. Two tours were organised to understand the forest issues in different areas – south Estonia and north Estonia Natura 2000 sites – the main topic was the cutting practices and legal framework of forest management in the protected areas and how to improve them. Environmental Board officials and environmental NGOs as well as local communities were targeted in those study tours. In north Estonia also the National Audit Office was present as they are conducting an analysis of the forest management impacts. The final study tour was due to COVID19 pandemic situation made as virtual seminar of Natura 2000 values from old maps. The topic was raised from some of the community meetings where local people expressed interest in how to better learn their home area nature values. The Environmental Board has also expressed motivation to make a seminar of how to use cartographical sources to define long term nature values. In cooperation the virtual seminar was held and it was very popular – more than 260 people participated in seminar but more than 320 people asked additional materials after the seminar. The aim of the studytours was to introduce a novel method for solving conflict issues in the environmental field. Whether there will be a long term impact of continuing practice of study tours as conflict solving tools, remains to be learned from period after the project ends.

B7 (Citizen science campaigns) 2nd campaign about the forest lichens is in progress and is planned to be launched in June 2021. The main impact as we can see from the first successful campaign is that the project has created a new standard for the citizen science campaigns in Estonia. The important characteristics of this new standard are that it must be simple and easily doable for many target groups – also those that have no previous experience or habit to watch or measure nature. The new platvorm we created proved that if technology is supportive, more people will participate. Long term impact is to encourage the citizen science campaign makers to look over their action model and design process from the perspective of the participant.

B8 (Enhancing learning by volunteering in Natura 2000 areas) During 2020 4 volunteer conservation camps were held: 2 in Palupõhja in the framework of “Summerschool of conservation camps”; 1 in Sühavva which is a place that emerged during one helpdesk case and 1 in Piirissaar. Also two additional long term volunteers Kristin Nugis and Kirke Raidmets were engaged in the project.

Administrative actions:

C1 (Monitoring of social change) A report of the middle-level monitoring of the project is completed and submitted to the Project's external monitor during the monitoring visit. KPI numbers were revised during the monitoring visit in April 2021 and proved to be viable – indicator code “humans influenced by the project” is mostly exceeded by the project actions already now, except in the action line of dissemination of project's results to the other Eastern European countries.

D1 Communication and dissemination of the project and its results

The due date of following milestones has arrived: Citizen science campaign presentation meeting to Estonian universities and museums, Article about Natura2000 handbook written and sent to EU networks for publication on webpages, Open-air events and study tours' design meeting and presentation to state Environmental Board, Ministry of Environment and other Estonian stakeholders. Citizen science campaigns were presented in “Everyone's nature observation” seminar on 22nd of April, Open air events and study tour design meeting will be held in joint seminar in August 2021. The article about handbook will be compiled and sent out when the handbook is ready for dissemination.

D1.1 Website is active and up to date (Visits during 1.03.2020-15.03.2021. Project page: 3601, Talgud: 902, Nurmenukk: 35 000, Volunteer blog: 100, Youtube videos : 4298)

D1.2 Roll ups are ready and presented in the main office of Estonian Fund for Nature

D1.3 Layman's report - planning has started

D1.4 Networking with other LIFE and non-LIFE projects:

Alltogether 6 other LIFE projects were contacted with. GrassLIFE, LIFE Living Natura, LIFE to Alvars, LIFE Connecting Meadows, LIFE Mires Estonia, EstBatLIFE), also a presentation of lessons learned was done in Nordic-Baltic LIFE platform meeting in 2021. In February 2021 The Art of Communication on Nature Management Measures, Cowslip citizen science campaign was introduced and idea of all-Europe “EU Looking for cowslips” campaign 2021 was shared and contacts sought.

The whole action has been severely affected of COVID19 pandemic situation as many events were cancelled and travelling to meet other LIFE projects was forbidden.

Delayed or cancelled network meetings due to COVID pandemic:

IUCN congress, Europarks communication seminar, Ceeweb Academy, Visit to Lithuanian LIFE OSMODERMA, Visit to Germany LIFE living Natura 2000

E1 Project management: there is no change in project's core team, project management answers to the project's needs.

Section 2 - Identified deviations, problems and corrective actions taken in the period (max 2 pages)

None of the delays described below will affect timely completion of the project – we expect to reach the planned goals and complete the actions by the end of the project.

B2 deliverable and milestone “12 case studies published”. Due date of this deliverable is 31.05.2021 but as elaborated during monitoring visit on 16/03/2021 the case studies have taken more time but will be completed by 08/2021.

B3 deliverable and milestone “Handbook” in Estonian (+ translation to English), due date of these deliverables (handbook + translation) is 31.12.2020. The reason for both of the delays are related to restructuring of the responsible partner EELC and the unexpectedly large content of the handbook. Neither of the delays cause no significant impact for other project activities. After restructuring of the project partner EELC, the actions are estimated to be completed by 08/2021 as new lawyer Triin Jäädmaa is hired into EELC. The main impact of this delay is that

there will be less time for dissemination. The main dissemination channel is nevertheless electronic and the project's homepage is going to be operative also after the project period.

B5 (open air events): originally the responsibility of OÜ Looduskiri (NatBus), the partner has left the project in the end of 2020 and ELF as main coordinator has overtaken the tasks. The exit process was long and painful – *de facto* the partner Looduskiri was excluded from the project's actions in mid-2019, *de jure* all the contracts were finally signed in 2020. An extra staff member Hedvig Liblikas was hired to complete the tasks, however, the pandemic situation made it impossible for Hedvig to get into the workflow and she left the project in 08/2020. The main impact of those delays for the project's goals and other actions is the stress and constant "headache" of all the project team. Since then the project managers have been constantly brainstorming how to achieve the objectives set for this action. However, the solution we have found is the cooperation with the local nature tourism and nature guides. Together we have developed a format of local hikes into the Natura 2000 areas and the cooperation has proved to be very successful. In this light the stressful times with partner and employee have lead us to a new and possibly better solution. We plan to apply this format during the 2021 if the pandemic situation is reversing. All events are planned to be completed during the project and in large scale there is no significant impact to the project's goals, however, the pandemic situation might cause the planned 2-day events (30 events were planned to be 1-day and 6 events were planned to be 2-day events) change into 1-day events, since it is much more difficult to ensure the safekeeping and distance holding in 2-day events.

B6 (Study tours): similar to previous action, study tours were originally the responsibility of OÜ Looduskiri (NatBus). As by the end of 2019 the partner had not organised any tours then the action was already delayed. ELF as main coordinator has overtaken the task and organised the study tours by involving other ELF colleagues (from mostly forest and seminatural habitats teams) and Environmental Board into the topic search. There is no significant impact of this delay to the project's goals. Altogether the virtual seminar enabled to engage 10 times more people and spread the knowledge of how to define long term nature values, therefore the project team considers the event to be a success story as it has significantly good impact for the project's goals. Therefore the activity B6 is completed.

B8 (volunteer camps and long time volunteers): we planned to host 4 people as long time volunteers via the European Voluntary Service in 2020. However, the pandemic situation has crossed out this plan in 2020 and the unstable situation is continuing in 2021. This impacts the scope of positive stories about Natura 2000 site management lessen the number of media stories of conservation volunteering. There is no impact to the other project activities. As a counter measure we plan to host a few volunteers from Estonia, Kristin Nugis and Kirke Raidmets have agreed upon to keep a blog for that. Overall the problem is that young people are considering blogging as out-of-date action and blogs are not anymore a good communication channel for youngsters. We are planning to enliven the instagram feed instead. If the pandemic situation allows there is a plan to recruit also some foreign volunteers.

D1.4 Networking with other LIFE and non-LIFE projects: Since travels and international events have been on complete stop since 03/2020, we could not attend the planned events in order to disseminate the project's results. This is a rather large negative impact on the project's dissemination ability. It has not a significant impact on other actions.