KEY LESSONS BRIEF

INFORMATION NEEDS FOR DECISION MAKERS
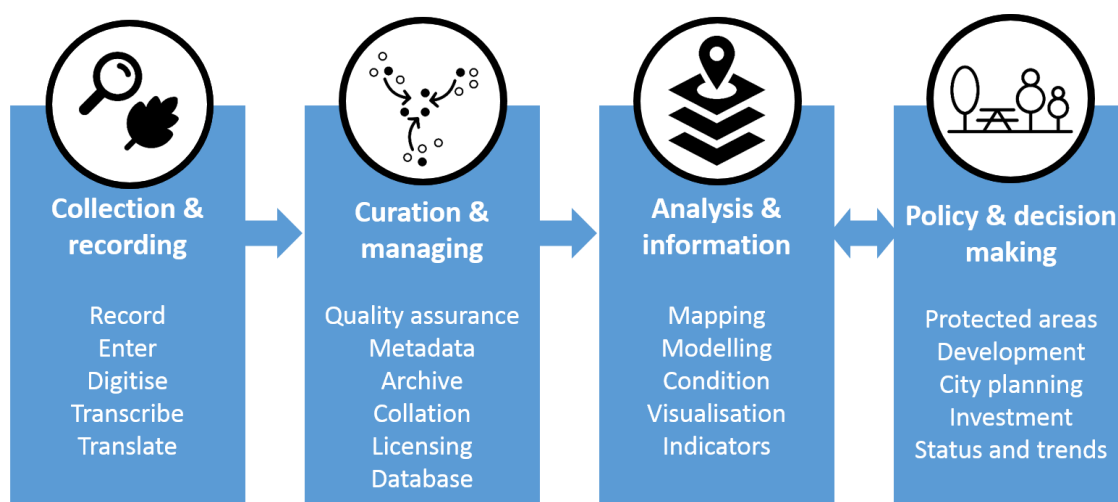
Main conclusions of BID-REX workshop

22 and 23 February 2017 in Eghezée (Namur, Wallonia).

BID-REX aims to enhance natural value preservation through improved regional development policies by **strengthening the link between relevant biodiversity data and conservation decision-making processes**. More specifically, it aims to **promote** the **mobilization of relevant biodiversity information** to **increase the impact of ERDF allocation** for **the preservation of the European natural heritage**.

In the context of nature conservation policies, biodiversity data should be correctly used by those who should take into account the effect and impact of their decisions and by those who provide it. The availability of comprehensive, sound, and up-to-date data should be a key requirement to implement policies, strategies and actions to address biodiversity loss, monitor progress towards biodiversity targets, as well as to assess the current status and future trends of biodiversity.

In this context, the 1st BID-REX workshop involved mainly regional decision-makers from different 7 European regions, and therefore the workshop provided a good opportunity to know the point of view of these actors which many times are not directly involved in projects related to biodiversity information. The main ideas that emerged in the workshop discussions can be summarized in 4 key aspects of information needs for decisions in conservation: the expression of information needs by decision makers, the importance of biodiversity information infrastructures to respond to these requirements, the effective use of that information in decision making processes, and the real impact of the information in conservation policies.

In a decision-making process multiple factors, not only the one related to biodiversity, are interacting and conditioning the final decision. In this context, **it is critical from the early beginning that the biodiversity information is adjusted to the maximum to the needs and demands of the decision-maker** to be able to maximize the impact and increase its specific weight in the final decision.

Collection & recording	Curation & managing	Analysis & information	Policy & decision making
Record Enter Digitise Transcribe Translate	Quality assurance Metadata Archive Collation Licensing Database	Mapping Modelling Condition Visualisation Indicators	Protected areas Development City planning Investment Status and trends

General framework and stages of the data processes for their consideration in the decision-making processes

The expression of 'information needs' or requirements by decision-makers is a vital stage towards informing effective implementation and action, as poorly expressed or imprecise definition of needs may lead to misunderstanding, and the provision of data or information that is not fit for purpose. Furthermore, the clear and effective expression of data and information needs might impact the inventory methodology or approach to data processing employed by the data provider, and as such it is important to discuss this at an early point in the process.

In this context, recommendations in terms of the expression of needs by decision-makers or end users of data have been identified:

- establishing a regular dialogue between applicants and suppliers

- clearly defining the needs, if necessary by formalizing them, including the desired level of precision and the degree of interpretation required. Involving decision makers and end-users of data upstream in the reflection on collection methodologies could be very useful.

- the context of use of the data should be systematically expressed by the applicants
- ensuring that the context and demand are properly understood by suppliers;
- regular evaluation of the process on both sides
- communicating problems encountered

An adequate response to these information requirements should be based on quality and reliable data properly interpreted according to the decision context. **Biodiversity information infrastructures** are tools specially suited for this purpose, allowing heterogeneous data to become standardized, shared, long-term stored, analyzed and, ultimately, trustworthy and relevant.

Data quality, data interpretation considering the context and trust in the data; key-factors for decision makers

To ensure the impact of data-related infrastructures, a number of recommendations for managers of data infrastructures were identified:

1. Clearly identify information priorities based on mandates and responsibilities
2. Make the best use of financial resources and networks to mobilize biodiversity information to inform decision-making processes
3. Quality databases must be made accessible, with accompanying interpretation, to build the understanding and confidence of the end users such that they are comfortable and confident to take it into account in the decision-making process
4. Sharing of the results of data use by the end-users could lead to increased financial resources and network development

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BOX: EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE

SITXELL (http://www.sitxell.eu) is an example of Open Data Infrastructure which provides to Municipalities of Deputation of Barcelona, biodiversity information for being incorporated in local planning and policies. With a user-friendly design, the information provided considers municipalities responsibilities; gives information to facilitate its interpretation and its successful results let to find long-term funds.

The **effective use of biodiversity information in decision-making processes** is influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic factors that interact and modulate the final outcomes. Extrinsic factors encompass from political and legal background (conservation vs. development laws) to local and regional economic context (economic feasibility of projects) and the influence of lobbies.

Intrinsic factors include the credibility of the data provider and the confidence of the information supplied, including the uncertainty assessment of that information (temporal and spatial scale, risk analyses, etc.), but also how (or when) the information is used to feed into decision-making process. **Data provider's credibility**, based on independence of political power, impartiality, objectivity, professional reputation, stakeholder consideration and transparency, was considered essential for the inclusion of biodiversity data into the decision-making processes.

Besides, there are combined extrinsic and intrinsic factors that can boost the impact of biodiversity information in decision making processes, including the development and use of 'think tanks', the communication of the value of habitats, species, and ecosystem services, and the improvement of information flows between researchers and public administration.

One remarkable combined factor is the **improvement of conservation priority setting**, especially taking into account different socio-economic scenarios with constrained budgets. Some of the criteria used for priority setting are linked to the biological information itself (e.g. legal and conservation status, importance of populations and/or distribution range, sensitivity to the impacts, feasibility of the project, etc.). Case studies highlighted that:

- taking into account of biodiversity data upstream of the decision making process lead to significant budgetary savings,
- the costs of monitoring (improving the efficiency of measures) must be weighed against the cost of non-targeted measures, compensation or possible incentives, and
- the importance of anticipating the problems of defining habitats and defining the favourable status of conservation, otherwise there would be unclear conservation objectives.

But **what is the real impact of the information in conservation policies?** During the workshop, some examples on how decisions can be improved taking biodiversity into account and using data and information provided by reputable and credible organisations were found. It was also sought to identify win-win situations have been achieved by preserving the natural heritage without loss of economic value to the projects. Discussions focused on two main topics: trust and feedback between decision-makers and data providers.

An usual dialogue between parties and a frequent satisfaction assessments of bilateral expectations, a basis for an environment of mutual trust

Mutual trust between data providers and decision makers is also relevant to prolong biodiversity information providing and its usage in decision-making processes.

Data providers must have confidence in the decision maker who must not divert the meaning of the data transmitted to him. To get it, an environment of mutual trust should be established and reinforced through an usual dialogue between parties and a frequent satisfaction assessments of bilateral expectations. Effective dialogue between the various actors, as stated previously, is very important throughout the whole decision making process. In order to develop and achieve this dialogue, the organization of public meetings can help to make acquaintances and facilitate exchanges.

Systematic feedback procedures allow decision-makers to inform data suppliers of the actual follow-up of the decisions taken and the impact of the data provided. This information enriches the dialogue between parties and promote long-term data providing. From data providers point of view, this feedback is important for the establishment of indicators and for the improvement of their data and adaptation to the decision-makers' needs through an iterative process.

BOX: EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE

ELIA and NATAGORA collaborate to minimize environmental impact of high voltage overhead lines in Belgium. After a wide dialogue, NATAGORA, an environmental association, provided maps of Birds collision risk to ELIA, Belgium's electricity transmission system operator. Thanks to this maps, ELIA added devices to enhance overhead lines visibility in priority areas to reduce bird's collision risk.
The feedback from ELIA .to Natagora's birdwatching community about the impact of its information has encouraged them to collect new data.