

Communication in LIFE projects: experiences, challenges and best practises

Brief result summary from an international online survey carried out in winter 2019.



Aim

The project LIFE Wiesenvögel currently develops a guidebook on communication about nature management measures. The aim of the guidebook is to support environmental projects in developing successful communication and outreach strategies. The survey was carried out to collect experiences, challenges and best practises of a variety of LIFE projects as a solid foundation of the compendium.

Survey participants

The survey was answered by representatives of 47 LIFE projects (35 NAT, 5 BIO and 7 GIE) from 17 different countries.

Implemented management measures

The projects stated to usually implement a combination of various different management measures within species conservation (38 projects), habitat conservation (38 projects), ecosystem conservation (34 projects) Natura 2000 conservation (31 projects) and governance (34 projects). All projects are engaged in education and training, whereas 30 projects focused on communication and information, 29 projects on awareness raising and 11 projects on behaviour change activities. Overall, 21 projects were running measures to increase acceptance and 15 projects were doing active conflict management.

Target groups and approach

Most projects stated that they usually start their communication strategies with stakeholder mappings of different extents and depth to identify their interests, needs and networks. As result, in most projects, all relevant actors and stakeholder were approached, as e.g. the public, inhabitants, landowners, authorities, scientists, NGOs, etc. It was stated that of high importance hereby is to pay attention to choose the fitting communication approach according to the specific needs of the target groups, e.g. farmers can usually be best approached face-to-face.

Communication methods

The projects are using a wide set of communication methods, ranging from rather classical communications such as face-to-face-communications, Email, press releases and exhibitions, to different workshop formats, social media campaigns, etc.

Level of transparency

The surveyed projects stated a very high level of transparency is important for them, especially when communicating aims, values and positive outcomes of the projects. The exception is the communication of environment-sensible data, such as the coordinates of bird nests. The budget of the project should be communicated in a very confined way.

Reactions

Almost all projects stated that they usually experienced acceptance of the projects from their target groups, but often not from the very beginning. Scepticism and reservation were often the first reactions but could most of the times be turned into acceptance by communication.

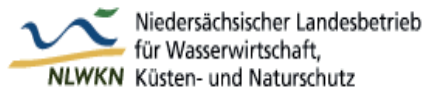
Actors and stakeholders that are often challenging

Some projects stated that the communication with farmers/landowners and animal right activists can be especially challenging. The first, as the projects may impose an economic risk and the latter due to ethical reasoning.

Contact with the media

34% of the surveyed project experienced that they at some point a third party, e.g. the local newspaper, communicated about the project in an unwanted way. The conflicts were usually solved by providing facts-based active responses and participation processes.

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Reasons of resistance

About 42% of the projects stated that they experienced resistance from target groups towards their projects, whereas 54% of them stated that this was due to the management measure, 16% due to the communication and 29% due to both.

Budget

The surveyed projects are using 2-30% of their total budget for the communication of their project. Overall, they expressed the wish to use 5-40% of the total budget (most of them 10-20%).

Conclusions

- Most projects are performing stakeholder mappings and have a large repertoire of communication methods.
- Communication in the most transparent way is of very high importance.
- Highlighting synergies and multiple benefits of projects are crucial, e.g. bird habitat conservation supports the increase of biodiversity.
- Target group oriented and shaped communication is crucial for the success of the project.
- Communicators must have professional competences and social competences at the same time. Communication trainings would often be welcomed.

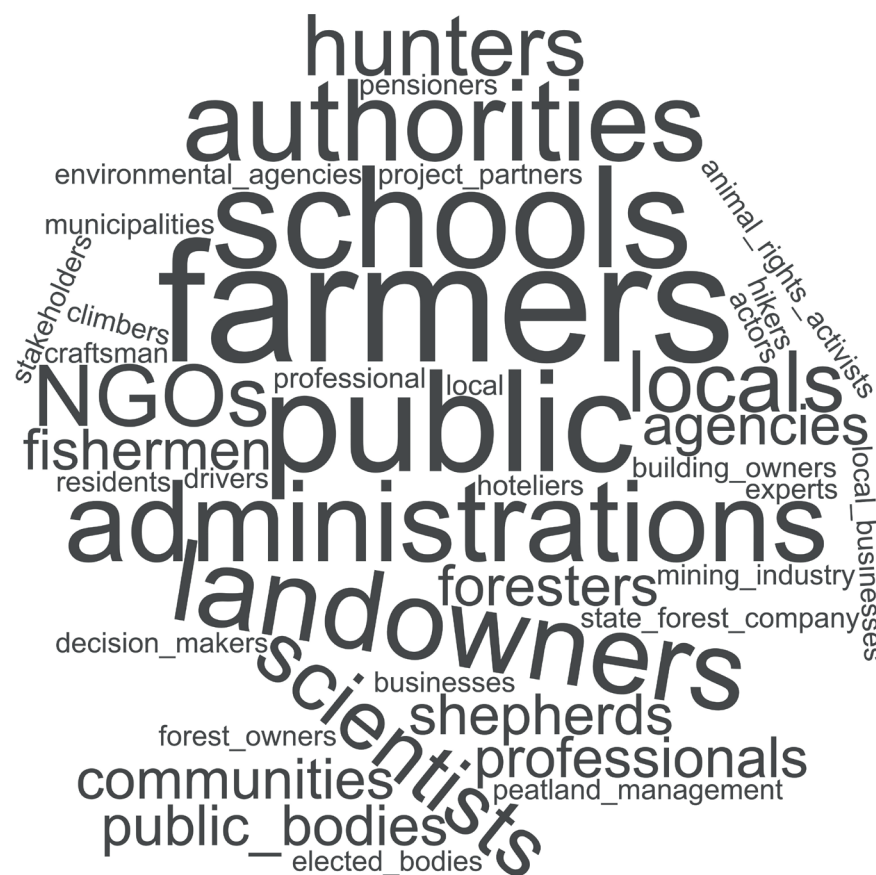
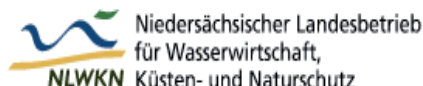


Figure: Target groups of communications of surveyed projects (wordcloud); word sizes reflect relative amounts of entries.

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