

# Lombardy's LIFE Gestire2020 Project to Safeguard Biodiversity

## Case Study Database

A compilation of good practices and lessons learned to bring innovative subnational solutions to global problems



## Introduction

The LIFE “Gestire2020” Integrated Project is a coordinated effort that confronts the main challenges concerning biodiversity in one of the countries with the higher population density in Europe, Lombardy, Italy.

The project is managed in four mainstreaming themes:

1. Capacity building and governance
2. Habitat and species conservation
3. Monitoring
4. Communication

A peculiar characteristic of the project is “integration” in a wide approach. One of the main objectives is to merge policies, programmes, plans and funds from different sources and pathways.

Agriculture has a priority role in the conservation of biodiversity and, in some cases, the interconnections among other sectors are often critical. In this fragile balance, LIFE Gestire2020 created the role of the technical facilitators: experts on biodiversity and project development that support farmers on finding funds for biodiversity conservation.

Since 2017, 146 initiatives have been financed, with the assistance of technical facilitators, adding about 15M Euros.

## Project Summary

LIFE IP “GESTIRE2020” (IPG2020) is an innovative and experimental project for the conservation of biodiversity in Lombardy, co-financed by the European Commission in the framework of the LIFE+ Programme.

IPG2020 aims to implement an integrated strategy for the Natura 2000 network in Lombardy.

The Natura 2000 Network comprises all the protected areas with habitats and species of high conservative value in the whole UE.

IPG2020 is set up in 6 lines of action:

- Improve the governance and management models of the Natura 2000 regional network through an increase in capacity building activities of stakeholders involved in managing of the regional network
- Implement concrete actions for the conservation of habitats and species
- Implement concrete actions for the conservation of animal species
- Prevent and contrast the spread of invasive alien species
- Monitor conservation status of protected habitats and species
- Build and strengthen ecological networks to better connect protected areas

## Key Information

### Location

Lombardy, Italy

### Areas of focus

Governance, conservation of habitats and species, invasive alien species, capacity building, monitoring, communication

The area of focus is related to human land activities, such as agriculture

### Founded in

2015

### Investment

17M Euros provided through Life Funds and other Partners and 83M Euros provided through Complementary Funds

### Aichi Biodiversity Targets addressed

Strategic goal A, C and E and Target 1

### Sustainable Development Goals addressed

SDG 15 Life on land

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## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Lombardy is the fourth-largest region of Italy. It is bordered by Switzerland and by the Italian regions of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna and Piedmont. The population of Lombardy is over 10M people, which means a high rate of human density, especially in the flat lands. Conserving biodiversity is challenging balance between social and economic development and environmental necessities.

Anthropic pressure due to land fragmentation, pollution and invasive alien species is endangering the habitats and the local species. Climate change is increasing the pressure, pushing the suitable habitat to higher levels and to the north side.

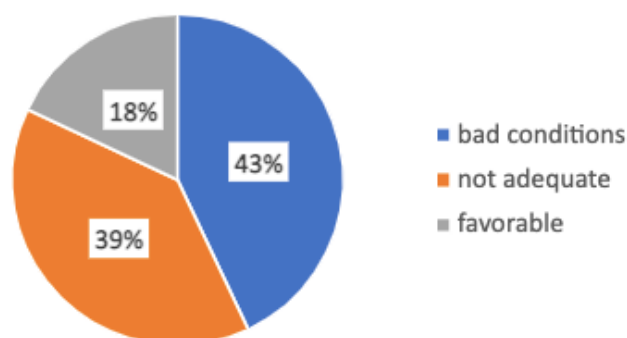
In the Alpine biogeographical region, 43% of N2000 sites are in bad conditions, 39% in a not adequate condition and the remaining 18% in a favorable condition. On the continental side, the most anthropized, the situation is 30% in bad condition, 43% in a not adequate condition and 27% in favorable condition.

The region is rich in biodiversity and thanks to the LIFE IP "Gestire2020" (IPG2020), Lombardy is able to

protect the Natura 2000 network and the biodiversity of its territory. IPG2020 is a strategic and complex project, which aims to improve the knowledge and management skills of the Natura 2000 sites, implement projects to improve the conservation status of habitats and species particularly protected or at risk of disappearance, implement ecological corridors, fight against invasive alien species and raise public awareness on issues related to the protection of biodiversity.

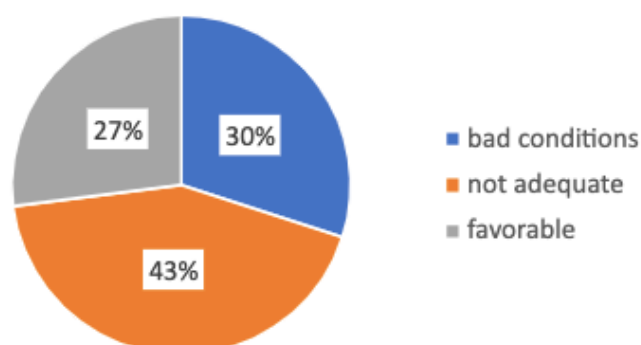
Among the strengths of the project are the numerous partnerships it has developed. In the present Case Study we will explore the alliances formed with Lombardy's Agency for Forest and Agriculture (ERSAF), Lombardy Foundation for the Environment (FLA), State Forestry Corps (CCF), World Wildlife Foundation (WWF), Lipu-BirdLife and Comunità Ambiente to launch an Integrated Project, co-funded by EU Commission and launched in 2016. The project intends to address the challenges of integrating biodiversity considerations and agriculture. In particular, the main challenge is raising farm productivity and sustainability and, at the same time, to create and maintain habitat and species.

Alpine Biogeographical Region



Condition of N2000 sites located in the alpine biogeographical region

Continental Biogeographical Region



Condition of N2000 sites located in the continental biogeographical region

## KEY ACTIVITIES AND INNOVATIONS

Life IPG2020 is an 8-year-long project working to develop initiatives in four wide thematic areas: capacity building and governance, restoration of habitat and species, monitoring and communication. In the following document, we'll introduce the "technical facilitators", experts that provide support to local farmers and management bodies of the Nature 2000 (N2000) network of protection areas in the territory.

The technical facilitators' key activities are:

- Networking between offices in the public administration Stakeholder engagement
- Research and monitoring of funding opportunities
- Practical support to farmers and management bodies of N2000 network to prepare projects for grants

Their aim is to overcome the limitations that constrain the full access of the beneficiaries to funding opportunities. In the current programming of EU agricultural and environmental policies, Technical Facilitators are playing an important role, more than in the past, and this trend would seem to be confirmed by the post-2020 process at a European and global level. All these processes and policies have led to the availability of many different types of funds (public, private, regional, European, ...) that can potentially help safeguard biodiversity.

For this reason, especially for those who managed resources, like farmers and N2000 management bodies, it's necessary to know how to best exploit all the funds.

In fact, on the one hand, this recent race to finance the environmental issues is undoubtedly economically positive but, on the other, the paradigm by which the allocation of an adequate amount of resources is

sufficient to achieve the objectives is not automatically met. The case of Greening is emblematic: after a few years of application, the European Court has already stated that it is unlikely that this mandatory payment will have a significant impact on the environment and the climate. The main cause may lie in the lack of scientific consideration, the different local needs, the lack of a logical link between environmental payment and expected results. Technical Facilitators also support the stakeholders (management bodies of N2000, farmers, trade associations, professional associations, ...) for a scientific approach to face local needs in order to apply them in the territories and in the ways that would guarantee greater environmental benefits.

"Technical Facilitators" are the professional figures that face this gap through:

- Identifying the available funds
- Share those opportunities with the farmers and stakeholders
- Provide farmers and stakeholders with specialized technical support
- Steer their use where most needed and in the most appropriate ways

After the first years of activity, the involvement of stakeholders has increased. A total of 249 projects have been submitted for an amount of about 24 million € (see graph in page 10). Among these, the Rural Development Plan (RDP) has been the most exploited fund (120), which involved both the environmental and the agricultural themes; 56 were the individual projects that involved the CARIPLO funds (included in a few larger projects). At the end of 2019, 146 projects were financed involving about 15 million €, gathering both public and private funds.

Beyond the economic importance, this experience



will have the important role of suggesting and influencing the methods of disbursement of funds for better efficiency in the safeguarding of biodiversity.

One of the good practices of the project relates to the importance of matchmaking funds and public-private partnerships. For example, through the financing of complex projects, such as Measure 16 of the RDP and the private funds of the CARIPLO Foundation, the Technical Facilitators have been able to combine public funding and private co-financing, environmental issues and agricultural themes, resulting in these projects reaching a greater chance of success. As an example, by doing this, the RDP financed a project that has the double objective of improving the environmental and economic sustainability of farms (new plants for the effluent biological stabilization and the improvement of the existing plants, functional restoration of springs) and valuing the natural resources, the landscape, the environment, the culture and the sustainable tourism (creation of new spaces, new roads, restoration of wetlands that represent precious habitats for the flora and animal biodiversity). Similarly, two big projects (from 300 hundred and 1 Million Euros) are going to be realized with the CARIPLO funds and another three are currently under evaluation. They involve a large area, which will get both agricultural and environmental benefits.





## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The environmental impact of the whole LIFE IPG2020, and specifically the role of the Technical Facilitators, will be effective in the medium to long term. Although this aspect would require an in-depth analysis, Lombardy can already determine that many projects are successfully being implemented thanks to the support and assistance provided by the Technical Facilitators.

Some examples of the projects financed thanks to this kind of support have achieved both economic sustainability of agricultural activities and the biodiversity target they set to achieve. Among some of the initiatives launched are:

- Recovery of fountain springs to ensure water supply for crops and the core habitat of wetlands (these projects, mainly financed through the RDP, involved more than 20 farms, 4 municipalities and other associations, cooperatives and consortia);
- Supply of 50 electrical fences to help the shepherd protect their herd from protected species, such as wolves and bears, thus indirectly contributing to

the conservation of these large canivores;

- Control of invasive alien species through the controlled grazing of goats and sheep helps safeguard particular species such as orchids and dry meadow habitats (Project “Natura Vagante”);
- Projects concerning forest management that combine the cutting of trees of different ages and the release of dead plants to support bat life and several species of birds;
- Training and education on best practices and lessons learned within the IPG2020 project to reinforce a new approach to land management for 1000 civil servants of public administration.

By working with an integrated approach, the Technical Facilitators play a key role in ensuring that all initiatives are aligned with the broader vision of benefiting both the local farmers and the biodiversity and nature impacted by their activities.



## SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS

The Technical Facilitators' actions generate economic benefit to farmers that jointly develop a project. The aim is to promote a change of mindset in the consultant approach to environmental funding opportunities. At the very beginning, environmental grants and funding for biodiversity was perceived by farmers as less interesting. The farmers were more interested in richer grants of other measures (RDP). Technical Facilitators support farmers on the discovery of new opportunities.

Some of the initiatives to secure a long-term economic impact of the presence of Technical Facilitators are:

- Raising awareness of the economic potential of the Natura 2000 sites, with the aim of highlighting the economic potential deriving from tourism and what concerns it.
- Promotion and support of agro-environmental activities by organizing workshops and meetings with local farmers;
- Promotion of biodiversity as an essential link to an increase in quality production and the promotion of the short supply chain.
- Knowledge creation and sharing on the relevance

of innovative agricultural practices to increase in productivity in territories where the agricultural activity is difficult (I.e. abandoned, marginal and mountain territories);

- Creation of green jobs, an increase in the demand of specialized skills related to the management of the Natura 2000 sites; and,
- Payment for Ecosystem Services, to sustain healthy ecosystems and, at the same time, guaranteeing economic and social benefits to farmers.

Social benefits include:

- Public awareness on the benefits of Natura 2000 sites;
- The ecosystem services provided by environmental goods can be a valid tool for social inclusion, tourism and economic development that would contrast the depopulation of difficult territories through new opportunities for incomes
- More resilient local communities;
- Safeguarding and use of local and traditional knowledge.

Photo by Sergio Canobbio





## POLICY IMPACTS

The most important result is the demonstration that biodiversity can be, and it is, a transversal theme. Then, it's important to notice how a multisector approach can gather relevant funds for a common objective.

After 4 years of activities, the experience gathered shows important challenges interfering with a more effective access to funding. The experience gathered from the field was shared with the European Commission to highlight the limitations of ongoing grants and to overcome them in the next programming period.

As for the National-Subnational alignment, the results of the work of the Technical Facilitators was shared with the Ministry of Environment. The Life IPG2020 approach taken to engage local farmers and promote biodiversity conservation was shared with other Italian regions to replicate the approach. In October 2019, a group of 19 colleagues belonging to Abruzzo, Lazio, Molise and Sardinia visited the Life IPG2020 project for two days of meetings. The visit was managed by the officer of the national Ministry of Environment that chose Life IPG2020 as a case study for best practices and replication.

Photo by Marco Tessaro



## FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY — PARTNERSHIPS

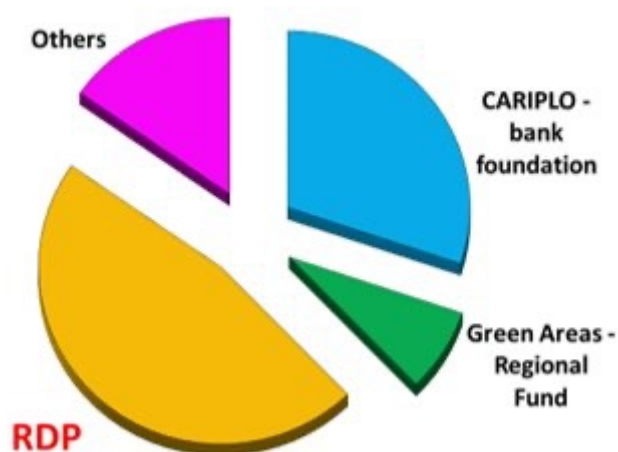
The financial sustainability of the IPG2020 project is based on its ability to seek and secure complementary funds. In fact, it is a requirement to raise 83 M € from non-LIFE sources as complementary funds. This is one of the project's biggest challenges, but it is also the added value of this project that aims at using Life funds with the goal of directing other funds towards biodiversity conservation. In 2020, the IPG2020 reached half of the project's duration, and the experience at this point is positive as we noticed an increased number of projects in terms of value, a growing interest by stakeholders and a raised awareness of biodiversity values in policy makers and locals alike.

The “European Green Deal” and the “EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030” made a strong call to the agriculture and productive world to cooperate for biodiversity integration. Therefore, mainstreaming biodiversity and its considerations are at the basis of the long-term sustainability approach of the Technical Facilitators' role.

On the financial side, Technical Facilitators' costs are provided by the project IPG2020. For the future, we envision that the costs will be included into the balance of the projects they support.

The ongoing dialogue and engagement with all the agencies involved in funding programmes has been a key factor for the project's success. The close interaction of all agencies involved is a necessary process to integrate biodiversity considerations into the different programmes and planning activities.

The work of the Technical Facilitators is certainly a positive element that allowed the engagement of stakeholders within and outside the government. Particularly important is their role as the essential link between governmental institutions and local farmers, as their work provides support through their technical knowledge and their design skills, and it can also be useful as a linking tool between fund managers and users. Their approach is thus based on a double direction which, on the one hand, favors a better use of the funds and, on the other, contributes to an improvement of the calls (funding opportunities) through proper bottom-up suggestions.



Outcome of the projects (financed, not financed, under evaluation): 24.310.013 Euro.

### RDP Measures involved

- Measure 1 - formation, information
- Measure 4 - Environmental investment
- Measure 8 - Forestry
- Measure 10 - Payments for environmental commitments
- Measure 12 - Natura 2000 compensations
- Measure 13 - Mountain agriculture
- Measure 16 - Cooperation



## REPLICATION AND APPLICABILITY ●

The experience of the Technical Facilitators can easily be replicated into regions with similar challenges as Lombardy. The core principles of their work are:

- Network through offices, environmental agencies and, more importantly, with project partners;
- Prioritize public-private partnerships. Life IPG2020 is co-financed by CARIPLO Foundation;
- Strengthen links and stakeholder engagement;
- Take an integrated approach and mainstream biodiversity;
- Think long term.

The IPG2020 involves very different kinds of areas (mountains, planes, rivers, lakes, ...) that can be found in several places in the world. That makes IPG2020 a model that can be replicated. In fact, at the European scale, the other regions can use the same European funds that represent the huge percentage of the whole of the economic resources. The professional figures employed as Technical Facilitators in this project can also be found in other countries. Two delegations of foreign colleagues, 9 from Cyprus (Life Cyclamen) in 12/12/2017 and 19 from Slovenia (Life Capacity Building) in 11/09/2018, visited IPG2020 while developing their proposals. The IPG2020 approach has been presented to the European Commission and made available to other countries. Therefore, this method can be exported outside Lombardy, adapting it to different territorial and administrative contexts.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about this project, please visit  
<https://naturachevale.it/en/>

You can also contact us at [info@regions4.org](mailto:info@regions4.org) to set up an informative meeting, solve doubts and get support in implementing similar projects.



Case  
Study  
Database



RegionsWithNature

## ABOUT

Regions4 (formerly known as the nrg4SD) is a global network that solely represents regional governments (states, regions and provinces) before UN processes, European Union initiatives and global discussions in the fields of climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development. Regions4 was established in 2002 at the World Summit in Johannesburg and currently represents over 40 members from 20 countries in 4 continents. Through advocacy, cooperation and capacity building, Regions4 empowers regional governments to accelerate global action.

For more information visit: [www.regions4.org](http://www.regions4.org)

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