Mapping and Assessing Ecosystem Services in and outside protected areas and Natura 2000

Background

In most cases, the main objective of conservation projects is the preservation or restoration of natural habitats and species. However, to achieve lasting results, it can be valuable to take a broader approach and look at the status and future trends of the ecosystem services (ES) in the area, e.g. assessing the timber, herb and food production, soil fertility, the flood prevention and water provisioning capacities of a protected area, and other locally relevant services. This can help conservationist to:

- Have an increased knowledge about the socio-economic values of the protected areas
- Become more convincing when speaking to decision makers, politicians, businessman and local communities about the importance of nature and thus protect species and habitats more effectively against development pressure
- Plan agri-environmental and other subsidies better
- Find new business opportunities based on sustainable management of ecosystem services
- Write more successive applications and win more funding

Experience of CEEweb with mapping and assessing ecosystem services

The Biodiversity Strategy called on Member States to map and assess the state of ecosystems (MAES) and their services in their national territory by 2014, assess the economic value of such services, and promote the integration of these values into accounting and reporting systems at EU and national level by 2020 (see Target 2, Action 5). This is why both EU and Member States are supportive of MAES projects, which can receive funding from interreg, LIFE, EEA/Norway grants and other sources.

CEEweb actively contributed to shaping the new EU Biodiversity Strategy. Since its adoption, CEEweb has been increasingly concentrating on Target 2 (mapping and assessing ecosystem services - MAES, Green Infrastructure, restoration) shaping EU policies and aid implementation by developing the Green Infrastructure Knowledge Hub at: www.ceeweb.org/greeninfrastructure; participating in the European Commission’s MAES and Green Infrastructure expert groups and relevant H2020 projects, organising capacity building events across Europe and other.

Large scale MAES project in Transylvania with CEEweb Member Organisation

In 2016, we started a joint project with CEEweb member organisation Milvus Group, and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences entitled ‘Mapping and Assessing Ecosystem Services in Natura 2000 sites of the Niraj and Tarnava Mica region‘. The project evaluates ecosystem services on 91 000 hectares of Natura 2000 areas along the Niraj and Tarnava Mica rivers in Transylvania,
Romania. The project is the first large scale ecosystem service (ES) assessment project in Romania and receives a grant in the amount of 402,340.41 € by the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area (EEA) 2009 – 2014 within the RO02 Programme on “Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services”. Final results of the project will be available in early 2017.

Proposal for cooperation
Based on our continued involvement we can support - together with our scientific partners - our Member Organisations and interested stakeholders in carrying out ecosystem assessment projects. These can be stand alone projects or be integrated as part of larger projects.

Activities within a typical MAES project

- Provide guidance and basic training for project partners in qualitative/quantitative ES assessment methodology and prepare them for the ES field work to be carried out
- Provide guidance and help design the stakeholder interviews and local ES preference surveys
- Provide guidance on evaluating and summarising the interviews and local ES preference to identify the most important ES and key drivers
- Jointly with partners compile the stakeholder analysis and ES preference survey report
- Provide basic economic valuation of the most important ES in cooperation with local partners
- Help organise scenario building workshop with local experts and stakeholders
- Provide guidance to have a validation workshop with experts on the outcomes
- With the help of partners, compile final report on ES with policy recommendations, that can serve as an input, e.g. into Natura 2000 management plans, local regional development plans, agri-environmental plans, project applications etc.

The ecosystem services assessment are based on qualitative stakeholder analysis (interviews), validation with experts views, scenario building with stakeholders and ecosystem services monetary valuation. The outcome of the assessment will be a set of ecosystem services that are the most important for the local stakeholders, drivers that are majorly influence how these ecosystem services might change in the future, different future scenarios in a given timeline according to key ecosystem services and drivers and derived policy recommendations on how the desired future scenario can be reached. The monetary valuation will put an imaginary price tag on the selected ecosystem services based on various local data and based on potentials.

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