

Towards an open and collaborative scientific society in Europe: who owns and who may use ecological data?

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The general conclusion from the Art 17 reporting for the Habitats Directive and the Art 12 reporting for the Birds Directive is that we key data are missing as well as information for 'traditional' nature management. The data users have committed themselves to reaching different sustainability objective and reporting on this such as ecosystem goods and services, health and resilience. However, it remains questionable if this is achievable, realistic and serious with the present lack of fundamental data. There is a big gap between the available data and the policy commitments that Europe has committed itself to. Any policy commitment, vision or target, needs addressing seriously and in a sustainable way data collection, monitoring and the research that is needed for it (European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity, 2009).

Biodiversity is used at all levels of society and information is provided by a wide range of players. At global, European and national level coordinating institutions exist that act as clients and coordinators of data monitoring. These organisations mostly have grown historically as institutions have been created on an ad hoc basis to deal with problems and issues as they have emerged. They have been developed in a historic political and scientific situation that has changed over time and the institutions have changed with them. Therefore, there is now a wide variety in institutions that is, however, inherent, given the complexity of governance arrangements, the multiple levels of governance and the broad range of interests (UNEP-WCMC, 2009).

The major clients that use biodiversity information are the Conventions (CBD, CMS, Ramsar) including the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the European Commission and its institutions and the national and regional governments. These four levels of institutions are interlinked through mutual exchange and all make use of each others reports and knowledge.

The data providers are more dispersed. They are partly organised as national or regional agencies. Beside the national and regional agencies it can also be that data are collected by universities (Northern Ireland, Sweden) and in many cases NGO's collect data on special species groups such as Birdlife International and the European Butterfly Foundation.

At present in several countries common data infrastructures are being developed and linked partly to the global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF, <http://www.gbif.org>). Examples of national data-infrastructures are among others in the Netherlands: <http://www.nlbif.nl/> and <http://www.gegevensautoriteitnatuur.nl/>, in Sweden: <http://www.artdata.slu.se/english/> and in Norway <http://www.artsdatabanken.no>.

The big question for Europe now is how to change this conglomerate of different approaches and interests into a harmonised system that can offer high quality data to be used in national European and global reporting and assessment?