

REPORT

‘Assessment of Territorial Impacts of the EU Life+ instrument’

Disclaimer:

This report does not seek to reproduce all the contributions to the consultation, but rather to synthesise the main points. The information it contains is purely for illustration purposes. The report does not represent the official position of the Committee of the Regions or of its administration.

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1. Consultation report

1.1 Introduction

The consultation on ‘LIFE Impact Assessment’ seeks to identify how local and regional authorities (LRAs) perceive the LIFE+ instrument, including: (i) any potential expectations that LRAs have of the EU, expressed as proposals for future policy initiatives; (ii) their own experiences and best practices in the LIFE+ instrument. Specifically, it aims at getting LRAs’ opinion on: *‘the important environmental problems locally and at the EU scale; the weaknesses in existing EU environmental policy and the limitations locally in implementing EU policy/legislation effectively; and the potential role for a future EU financial instrument for the environment, building on the current LIFE+ Programme’*¹.

The Committee of the Regions, in cooperation with the Directorate General Environment (DG ENV) of the European Commission (EC), launched the ‘LIFE Impact Assessment’ consultation on February 2011, with an initial deadline of 11 March and a subsequent extension to 15 April 2011. A total of 40 questionnaires were submitted by LRAs from 12 EU MS, as indicated in Table 1. The list of respondents is presented in Annex I.

This report summarises the results of the consultation, critically analysing the responses received. In addition, a set of conclusions and policy recommendations are drawn, taking into account the input from the consultation.

Table 1 – Breakdown of LIFE consultation contributions by country

AT	2	FI	-	MT	1
BE	-	FR	1	NL	1
BG	-	GR	1	PL	-
CY	-	HU	-	PT	4
CZ	-	IE	-	RO	-
DE	4	IT	10	SE	1
DK	-	LT	-	SK	1
EE	-	LU	-	SI	3
ES	11	LV	-	UK	-
Total: 40					

The replies to the questionnaire are intended to facilitate the assessment of the territorial impacts of the future LIFE+ instrument. The results of the consultation will feed into the future LIFE+ programme impact assessment, which is currently under preparation by the EC.

¹ LIFE Impact Assessment Questionnaire, CoR 2011.

1.2 Survey results analysis

The main outcomes of the survey are presented in table 1, below:

Table 1 - Main outcomes of the survey

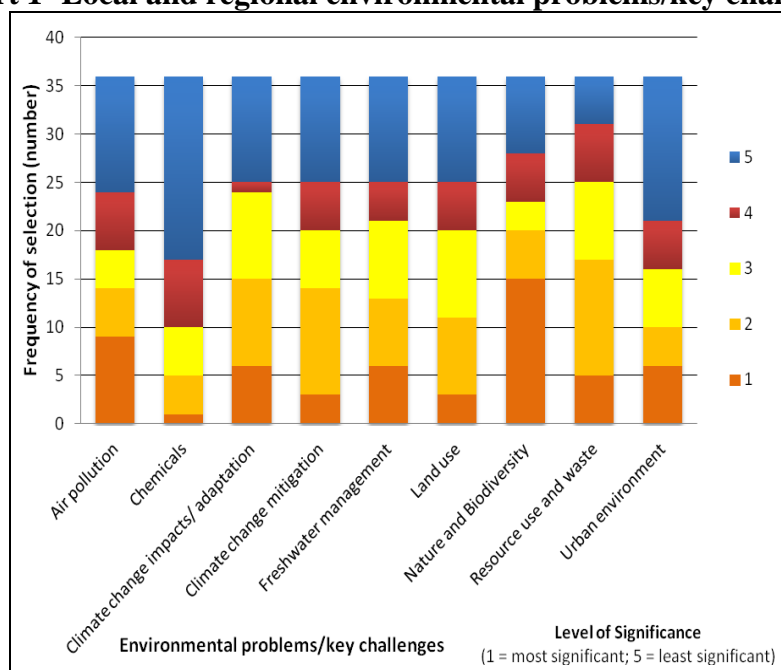
Aspects	Main outcomes
Environmental problems in the EU Member States, at central, local and regional level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The three most significant environmental problems/key challenges are: ‘Nature and biodiversity’; ‘Resource use and waste; and ‘climate change impacts/adaptation’. ▪ Local environmental problems are considered common within each MS. ▪ Trans-national links to local environmental problems are rather weak. ▪ The regional level is considered the most effective in improving the implementation of EU environmental policy.
Problems with implementing EU environmental policy/legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The two most frequently faced problems in local/regional implementation of EU environmental policy/legislation are the lack of financial resources and the conflicting priorities (e.g. between development and the environment). ▪ The two most effective ways of improving local environmental policy and its implementation are: ‘to raise awareness of the environmental problems and the need for solutions amongst different actors’; and ‘to promote innovation in techniques that enable improved environmental management, especially by competent authorities’. ▪ The development and implementation of environmental policies is highly affected by weaknesses in: the integration of environmental policies into other policy areas; policy development and implementation leading to variable and inadequate levels of environmental protection; and the use of various EU funding instruments available to support environmental investment.
The need for a specific EU financial instrument for the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ EU level action on the environment is justified by a wide range of reasons, notably: to remedy MS failures in the transposition, implementation and enforcement of EU environmental policy; and to share the burden of increasing the effectiveness of MS policy in meeting EU objectives. ▪ EU funding is widely considered as a resource which can be used to address local/regional environmental problems. ▪ The LIFE instrument along with the Cohesion policy and the Structural Funds are the main funding sources used to address local/regional environmental problems. ▪ ‘Funding nature conservation actions’, ‘drawing up of environmental management plans’ and ‘demonstration projects aimed at promoting behaviour change among policy makers and/or environmental/local agencies’ are the main purposes for applying for LIFE ▪ Completing forms/application and obtaining match funding are the most burdensome aspects of the LIFE application process. ▪ The LIFE instrument is likely to remain in the future a popular option to address local environmental issues.
The potential added value of ‘Integrated Projects’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The added value of Integrated Projects is highly appreciated. ▪ Integrated projects are considered quite feasible. ▪ A wide variety of problems could be addressed by integrated projects, notably in the fields of ‘freshwater management’, ‘nature and

Aspects	Main outcomes
(also addressing suggestions for the future LIFE instrument)	<p>biodiversity’ and ‘resource use and waste’.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local/regional interest in applying for an integrated project in the future is in general positive. ‘Action grants’ are considered the most effective mechanisms to be used in the future LIFE instrument. The new LIFE instrument should primarily address EU countries and include minor allowances for third countries required to serve specific EU policy objectives. The idea of narrowing the focus of the future LIFE instrument is <u>not</u> widely supported.

1.2.1 Environmental problems in the EU Member States, at central, local and regional level

‘Nature and biodiversity’ issues were identified as the ‘most significant’ environmental problems/key challenges by 42% of the respondents. ‘Resource use and waste’ along with ‘climate change impacts/adaptation’ were also specified as highly significant; about 69% and 67% of the respondents, respectively, related these issues with the top three significance levels (i.e. scored from 1, most significant, to 3). Chart 1 shows the frequency of selection (number) of each listed problem/challenge per significance level.

Chart 1 -Local and regional environmental problems/key challenges



‘Please specify the five most important environmental problems/key challenges, which are occurring in your municipality/region, in their order of significance: Rank 1 to 5 (where 1 = most significant and 5 = least significant)’² (36 respondents).

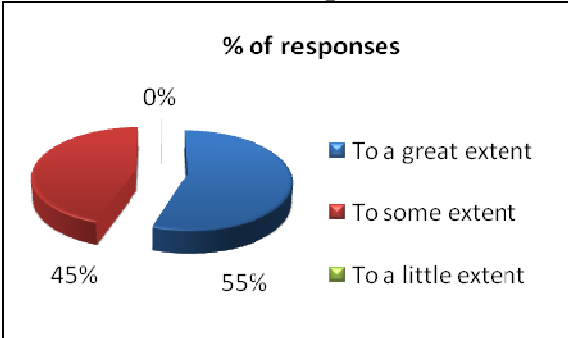
² The question was partly misinterpreted by most of the respondents, who gave a score from 1 to 5 to all listed environmental problems/key challenges instead of selecting the five most important ones and ranking them from 1 to 5; therefore the graph shows the scores received by each listed problem/challenge as opposed to their ranking (a score of 5 was attributed to the few problems/challenges receiving no score from the respondents).

On the other hand, problems related to ‘chemicals’, and the ‘urban environment’, were less frequently given a high significance score (only 27% and 44% of respondents, respectively, placed them in the top three significance levels); however, ‘urban environment’ was ranked in the top level of significance by 17% of respondents, hence any interpretation of results should be made with caution³. Similarly, ‘air pollution’ was indicated as most significant by 25% of the respondents, but only half of the respondents placed this issue in the top three significance levels.

Other significant issues include: ‘freshwater management’, receiving a score of 3 or above by 58% of the respondents and ranked in the highest significance level by 17% of respondents; and ‘climate change mitigation’, receiving a score of 3 or above by 56% of the respondents and ranked in the second highest significance level by 31% of respondents.

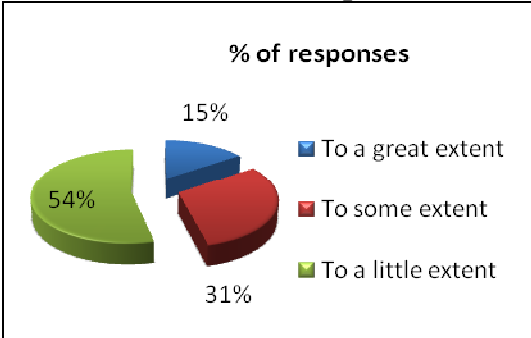
All respondents considered that, to a certain extent, they face the same environmental problems as other regions and municipalities in their respective countries, with 55% of them believing that these problems are common to a great extent (Chart 2).

Chart 2 - Similarities of local environmental problems



‘To what extent are environmental problems in your region/municipality common to other regions and municipalities in your country?’ (38 respondents, 38 responses)

Chart 3 - Trans-national links to local environmental problems



‘To what extent are the environmental problems within your region/municipality the result of environmental problems in other countries?’ (38 respondents, 39 responses)

Most respondents (54% of responses) identify a weak cause-and-effect relationship between their local environmental problems and those occurring in other countries; two thirds of the remaining respondents believe that these problems are to some extent related (31% of responses), while only one third of

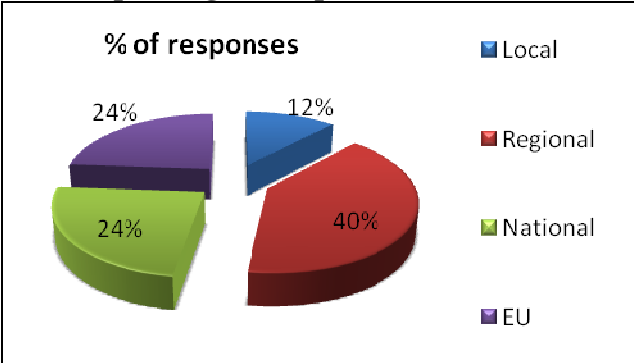
³ Due to the relatively limited number of respondents and the potential for bias resulting from a possible predominance of respondents from rural areas.

them (15% of responses) consider that such a link exists to a great extent (Chart 3).

Replies may indicate a need to support collaboration of LRAs within each MS, in projects addressing local environmental challenges. At the same time, they may be a sign of limited potential for the development of cross-border cooperation projects targeting local environmental problems; though it should also be considered that other motivations, such as exchange of good practice and prospects for knowledge transfer and capacity building may increase LRAs’ interest for such projects.

40% of responses indicate that regional level improvements in the implementation of EU environmental policy/legislation are most effective in addressing the identified environmental problems occurring in the respondents’ region/municipality (Chart 4). The national and EU levels were also indicated as important in this respect (24% of responses), contrary to the local level, which received only 12% of responses.

Chart 4 - Spatial levels improving the implementation of EU environmental policy



‘Given the environmental problems that are occurring in your region/municipality, what do you think would be the most effective spatial level at which to improve the implementation of EU environmental policy/legislation’ (38 respondents, 42 responses)⁴

1.2.2 Problems with implementing EU environmental policy/legislation

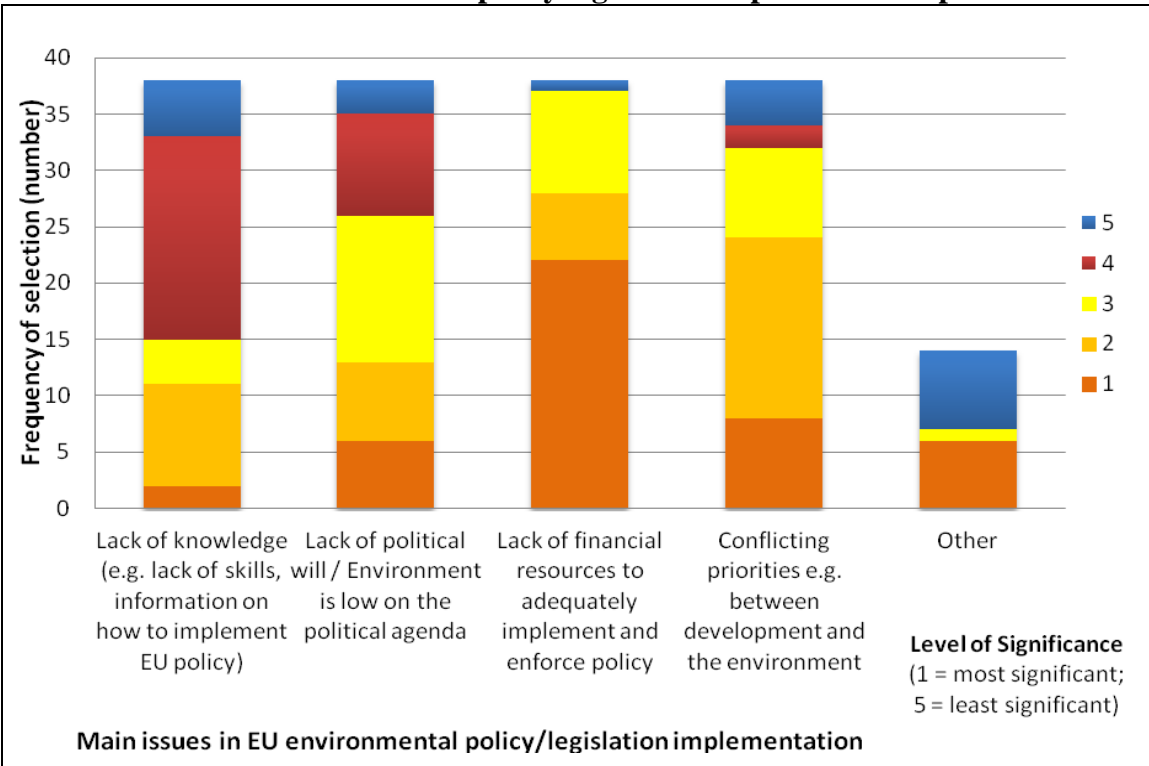
Among the issues the respondents considered significant in terms of implementing EU environmental policy/legislation, the two most frequently faced are ‘lack of financial resources to adequately implement and enforce policy’ (identified as the ‘most significant’ issue by 56% of the respondents and placed in the top three significance levels by all but two respondents) and ‘conflicting priorities, e.g. between development and the environment’ (selected as ‘most significant’ issue by 20.5% of the respondents and as second most significant by 41% of the respondents). Chart 5 shows the frequency of selection (number) of each listed issue per significance level.

⁴ Three of the respondents selected more than one spatial level.

On the other hand, according to the survey, the ‘least significant’ issue in terms of implementing EU environmental policy/legislation is the ‘lack of knowledge’: 46% of the respondents consider this issue as ‘least significant’ and 13% as ‘second least significant’.

Other issues mentioned by respondents include the lack of technical and human resources, the lack of a relevant policy framework at the national and regional levels, as well as the lack of knowledge and awareness by the general public; when selected, ‘other’ is almost always given the top score, though often without being further specified or clearly explained.

Chart 5 - EU environmental policy/legislation implementation problems



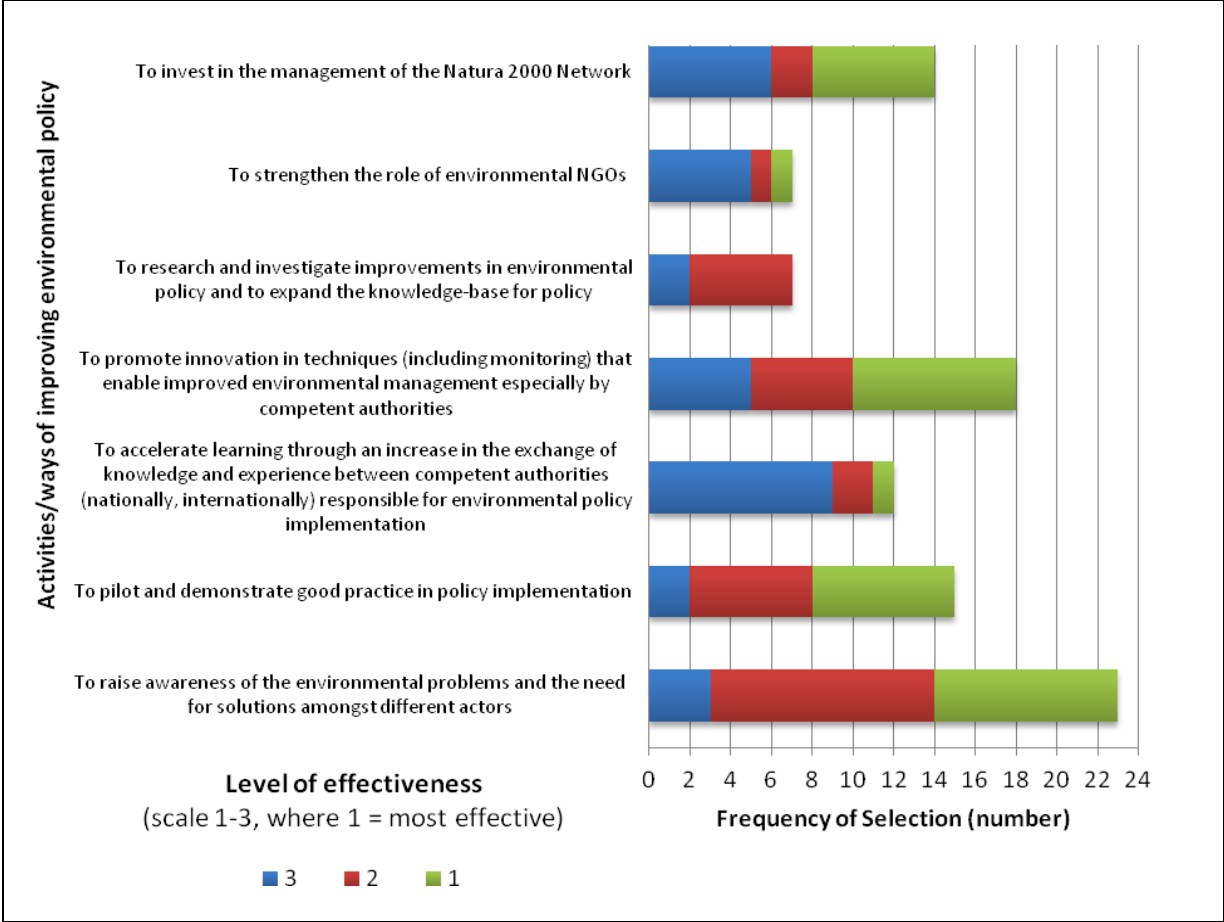
‘What are the main issues your municipality/region faces in terms of implementing EU environmental policy/legislation? Please rank the following in order of most significant from 1 to 5 (where 1 = most significant)’⁵ (39 respondents)

Raising awareness of the environmental problems and the need for solutions amongst different actors (selected as most effective by 28% of the respondents and as second most effective by 34.5% of the respondents) and promoting innovation in techniques (including monitoring) that enable improved environmental management especially by competent authorities (selected as

⁵ The question was partly misinterpreted by most of the respondents, who did not rank the listed issues from 1 to 5, but instead gave the same score (from 1 to 5) to several issues; therefore the graph shows the scores received by each listed issue, as opposed to their ranking. Also, some respondents scored issues with 0 (mainly ‘other’); these responses have not been considered in the graph.

‘most effective’ by 25% of the respondents and second most effective by 16% of the respondents), are the two most effective ways of improving environmental policy and its implementation in their municipality/region, out of the seven approaches listed in the questionnaire. Chart 6 shows the frequency of selection (number) of each listed activity per level of efficiency.

Chart 6 - Improving local environmental policy and its implementation



‘In your opinion, which three of the following activities would be the most effective ways of improving environmental policy and its implementation in your municipality/region?’ (32 respondents)

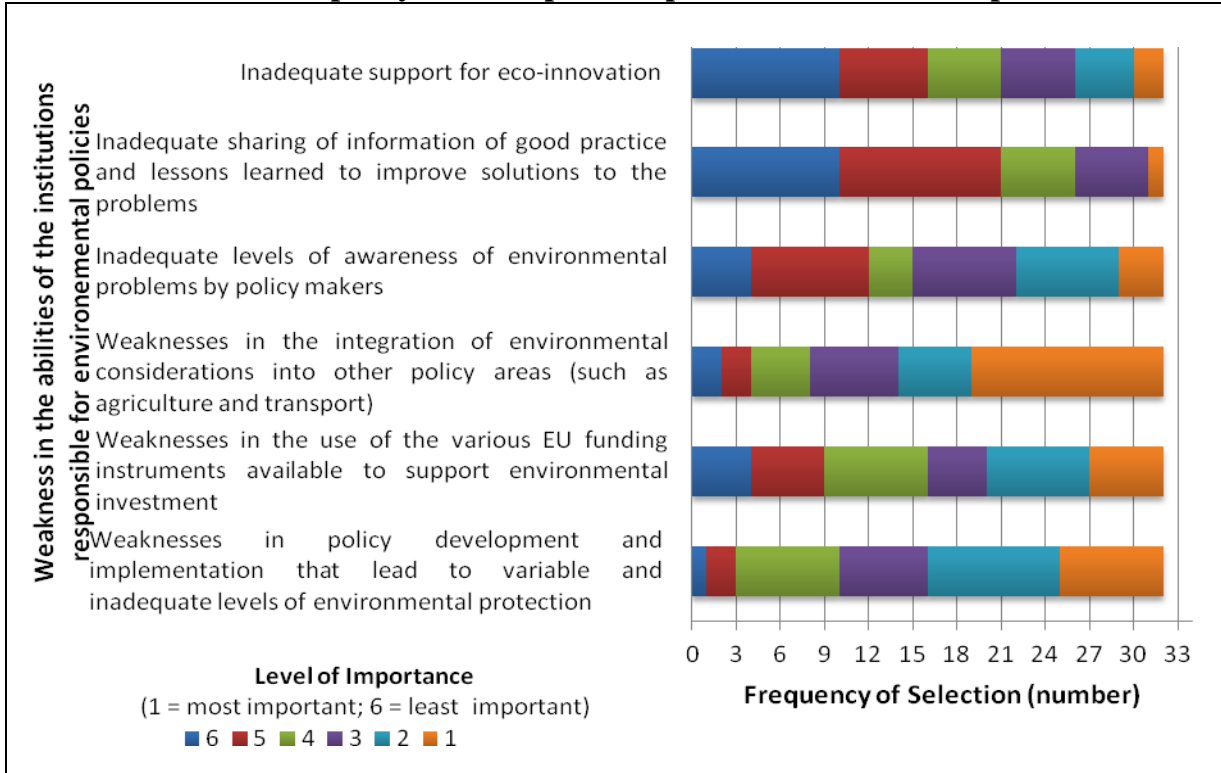
According to the respondents, other effective approaches in that respect include the piloting and demonstration of good practice in policy implementation (selected as ‘most effective’ by 22% of the respondents and as second most effective by 19% of the respondents) and ‘Investing in the management of the Natura 2000 Network’ (selected as most effective by 19% of the respondents and as third most effective by an equal percentage of respondents).

On the other hand, the least effective of the approaches listed in the questionnaire in terms of improving environmental policy and its implementation are considered to be ‘to research and investigate improvements in environmental policy and expanding the knowledge base for policy’ (not

selected by any of the respondents as the most effective way), ‘to strengthen the role of environmental NGOs’ (selected by only 6% of the respondents as either second or third most effective way) and ‘to accelerate learning through an increase in the exchange of knowledge and experience between competent authorities responsible for environmental policy implementation’ (selected by less than 10% of the respondents as either second or third most effective way).

Furthermore, the following weaknesses are considered as highly important for competent institutions to adequately develop and implement environmental policies: a) the integration of environmental considerations into other policy areas (selected as most important weakness by 40.5% of the respondents and as second most important by 15.5% of the respondents); b) policy development and implementation that lead to variable and inadequate levels of environmental protection (selected as most important weakness by 22% of the respondents and as second most important by 28% of the respondents); and c) the use of various EU funding instruments available to support environmental investment (selected as most important weakness by 15.5% of the respondents and as second most important by 22% of respondents). Lower importance is given by the respondents to the inadequate levels of awareness of environmental problems by policy-makers, with 22% ranking this weakness as second most important and an equal percentage as third most important. Chart 7 shows the frequency of selection (number) of each listed weakness per significance level.

Chart 7 - Capacity to develop and implement environmental policies



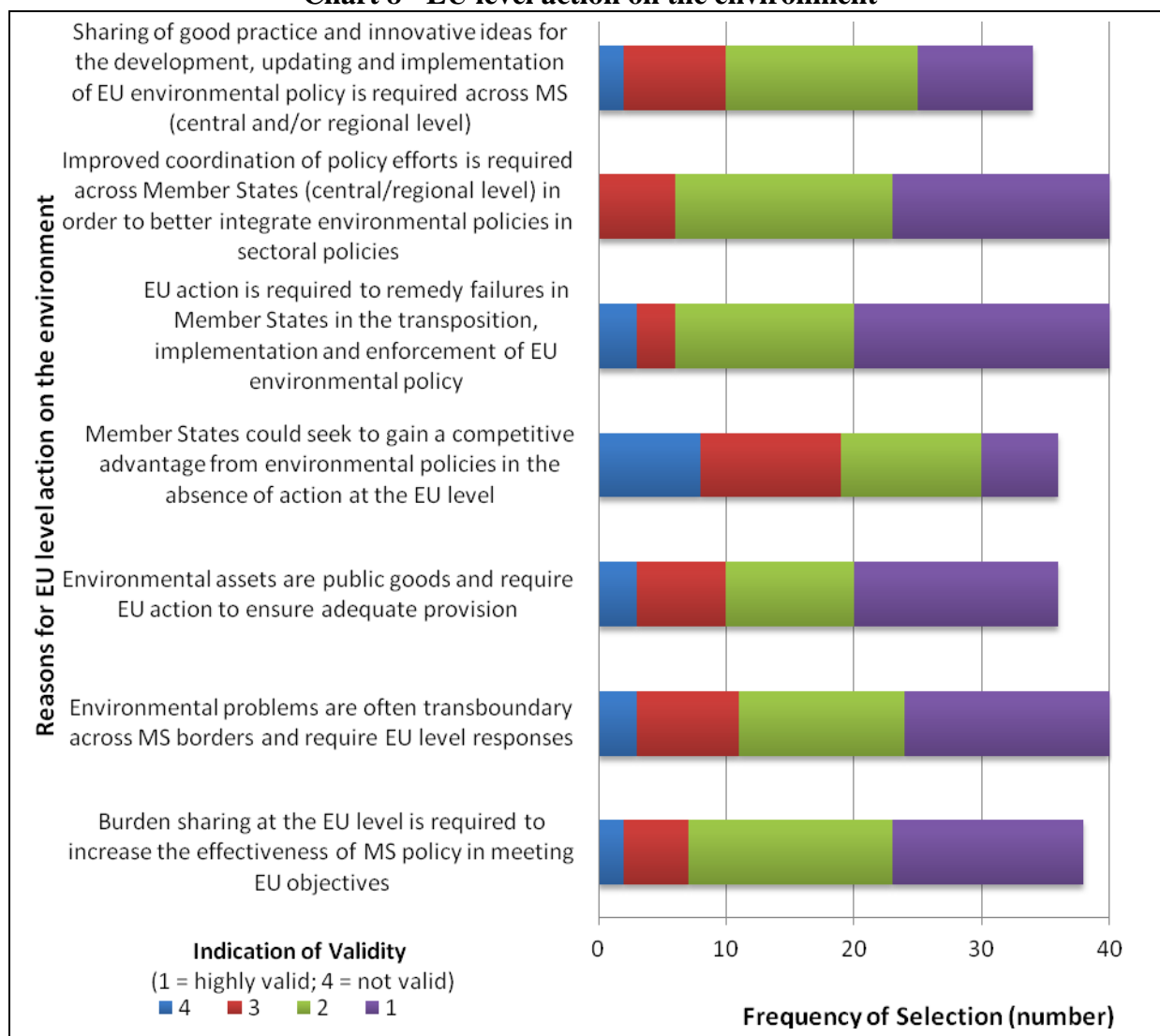
‘The list includes a number of weaknesses in the abilities of the institutions responsible for environmental policies to develop and implement policies adequately. Please review them in light of your experience in your municipality/region and rank them in order of importance’ (32 respondents)

Moreover, the consultation indicated ‘inadequate support for eco-innovation’ and ‘inadequate sharing of information of good practice and lessons learned to improve solutions to the problems’ as less important issues, with more than 80% of the respondents ranking them among the three least important weaknesses and 31% of the respondents considering them as the least important of the six listed weaknesses.

1.2.3 The need for a specific EU financial instrument for the environment

According to the majority of respondents, a wide range of reasons justify EU level action on the environment, as indicates the selection of the top two validity levels for all but one of the reasons listed in the relevant question of the survey. Chart 8 shows the frequency of selection (number) of each listed reason per indication of validity.

Chart 8 - EU level action on the environment



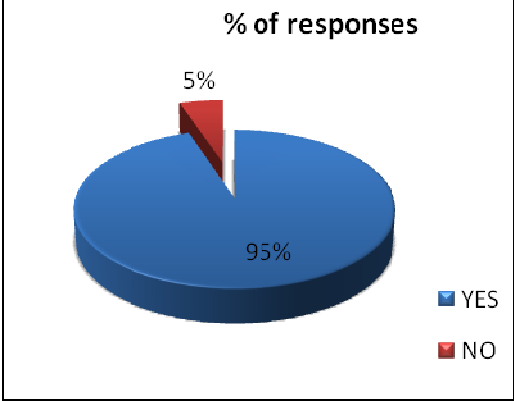
‘To what extent do you consider each of these different reasons for justifying EU level action to be valid?’ (40 respondents)⁶

One of these reasons, i.e. ‘EU action is required to remedy failures in Member States in the transposition, implementation and enforcement of EU environmental policy’ was considered highly valid by 50% of the respondents, while ‘improved coordination of policy efforts across MS in (central/regional level) in order to better integrate environmental policies in sectoral policies’, was placed in the top two validity levels by 85% of the respondents. A similar indication was given by 77.5% of the respondents about ‘burden sharing at EU level to increase the effectiveness of MS policy in meeting EU objectives’. Moreover, 40% of the respondents considered highly valid the following arguments: ‘Environmental problems are often trans-boundary across MS borders and require EU level responses’ and ‘environmental assets are public goods and require EU action to ensure adequate provision’. On the other hand,

⁶ Five respondents did not indicate the validity of all listed reasons.

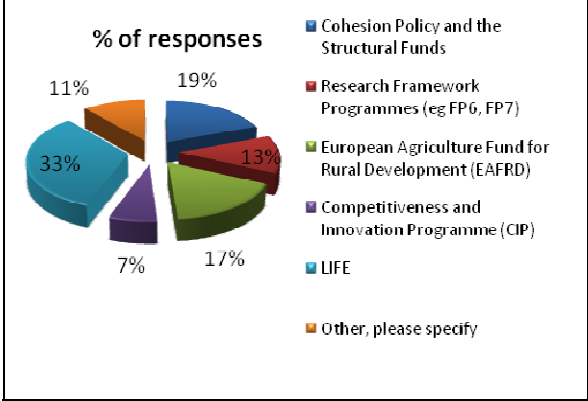
the argument that ‘Member States could seek to gain a competitive advantage from environmental policies in the absence of action at the EU level’ is not considered valid by 20% of the respondents.

Chart 9 - Application for EU funding to address local environmental problems



‘Have you applied for EU funding to address environmental problems within your region/municipality?’ (39 respondents, 39 responses)

Chart 10a - Sources of EU funding used to address local environmental problems

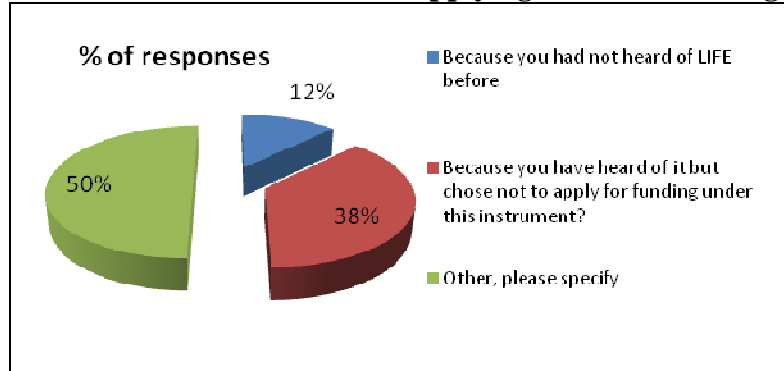


‘If so, please circle those EU funds you have applied to / are receiving funding from’ (37 respondents, 88 responses)

95% of the respondents have applied for EU funding to address environmental problems within their region/municipality (Chart 9); 33% of them have applied to or are receiving funding from the LIFE instrument, 19% from the Cohesion Policy and the Structural Funds (the share of respondents using Cohesion Policy/Structural Funds adds up to 25% if those who selected ‘other’ but specified ‘ERDF Interreg’ are also counted), 17% from the EAFRD, 13% from research framework programmes and 7% from CIP (or 9% if ‘other’ specified as Intelligent Energy Europe is also counted) (Chart 10a). With one exception (Europeaid), ‘other’ relevant sources of funding mentioned by the respondents overlap with the ones listed in the questionnaire (Intelligent Energy Europe, which is part of CIP and ERDF/Interreg, which is part of Cohesion policy).

Only one respondent, representing 12% of those who did not apply for funding under the LIFE instrument, had not heard of LIFE before; this question received only eight replies, yet it should be seen as an indication that there is still scope for continued outreach and dissemination activities at the Programme level, within the future LIFE instrument. 38% of the respondents, although they knew about the LIFE programme, chose not to apply for funding under that instrument (Chart 10b). ‘Difficulties in the formation of an appropriate consortium’, ‘lack of sufficient human resources’ and ‘involvement in another project’ were the main ‘other’ reasons for not applying for LIFE funding, as specified by the respondents.

Chart 10b - Reasons for not applying for LIFE funding

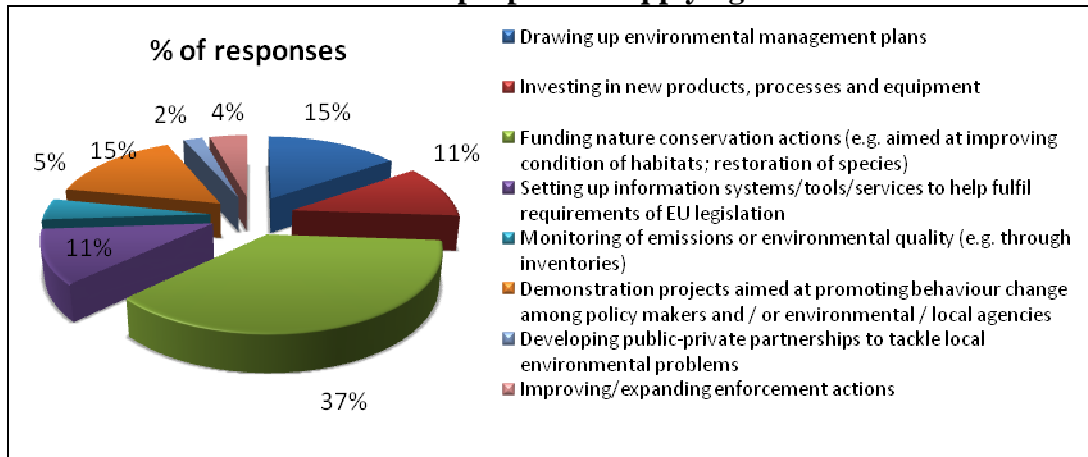


‘If you did not include LIFE in the list of funds you have applied to, was this...’ (8 respondents, 8 responses)

Only three of the respondents who applied for EU funds to address local environmental problems did not consider the LIFE instrument; all three of them stated that they knew about the LIFE programme, but chose not to apply for funding under that instrument because of the following reasons: a) ‘the administrative burden associated with applying to the LIFE Programme was too onerous’ (mentioned by two respondents); b) ‘the match-funding rate of LIFE was too high, hence the respondent was unable to raise the required match-funding’; c) ‘conditions attached to obtaining LIFE funding were too restrictive’; d) ‘information barriers i.e. not enough information provided on how to obtain the funding’; and e) ‘time taken to obtain the funds (from approval to disbursement of funds) was too long’.

According to the consultation (Chart 11), LRAs mainly apply for LIFE in order to secure funding for nature conservation actions (37% of responses). Other purposes served by applying for LIFE include: ‘drawing up of environmental management plans’ and ‘demonstration projects aimed at promoting behaviour change among policy-makers and / or environmental / local agencies’, each receiving 15% of responses; ‘investing in new products, processes and equipment’ and ‘setting up of information systems/tools/services to help fulfil EU legislation requirements’, each receiving 11% of responses.

Chart 11 - Main purpose for applying for LIFE

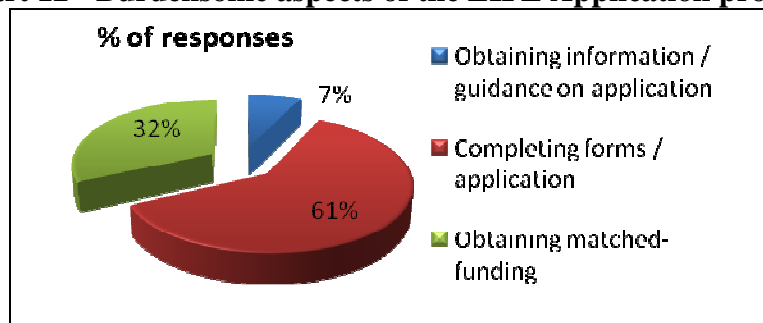


‘If you did include LIFE in Q10 (sources of funding to address local environmental problems), what was the main purpose of applying for LIFE?’ (29 respondents, 47 responses)

On the other hand, less than 5% of the respondents indicated as a motivation for applying for LIFE funding, one of the following: ‘monitoring of emissions or environmental quality’, ‘developing public-private partnerships to tackle local environmental problems’ and ‘improving/expanding enforcement actions’.

The strongest obstacles in the LIFE application process are the completion of forms/application and obtaining of match-funding, as indicated by 61% and 32% of respondents respectively (Chart 12). In the context of the financial crisis affecting several EU MS, the current trend with regard to the identified co-financing problems, is likely to become a major issue in the future, impacting a large number of LRAs.

Chart 12 - Burdensome aspects of the LIFE Application process



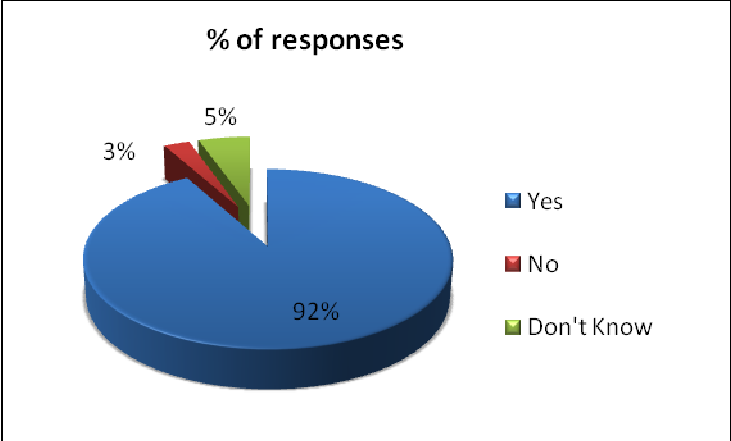
‘What aspect of the LIFE application process do you consider to have been the most burdensome?’ (28 respondents, 28 responses)

On the other hand, only 7% of the respondents consider ‘obtaining information/guidance on application’ as the most burdensome aspect of the LIFE application process.

The vast majority (92%) of the respondents would consider using LIFE in the future to address the main environmental issues in their municipality/region

(Chart 13). Only one respondent had a fully negative opinion in that respect (but did not explain why), while two other respondents were not certain about their actions; one of the latter two, justified his reply on the basis that LIFE is not considered appropriate to address the main environmental concerns in his local area.

Chart 13 - Use of LIFE to address the main local environmental issues



‘Would you consider, in the future, using LIFE to address the main environmental issues in your municipality/region?’ (37 respondents, responses 37)

1.2.4 The potential added value of ‘Integrated Projects’

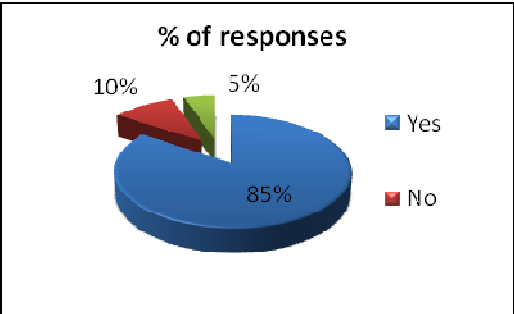
85% of the respondents like the idea of ‘integrated projects’ (IPs), contrary to only 10% who disagree with that concept; 5% of respondents did not express an opinion (Chart 14). Respondents have underlined the suitability of IPs when searching for local solutions to regional or national environmental problems. They also claim that IPs: are appropriate to enhance coordination in environmental issues especially when involving international cooperation; can help promote coordination between sectoral policies and between different territorial areas; and allow the optimisation of resources. On the other hand, respondents have commented that the necessary staff capacity to support integrated projects is missing at the local level, as well as that integration in projects can be both a desirable aspect and a burden (as sometimes it is important to have the option to address only environmental issues in a project). Moreover, those who are against IPs, argue that in practice, such projects are too complex and fail to achieve high quality standards.

About three quarters of the respondents consider IPs quite feasible, while 21% finds those projects very feasible; only 5% believe that such projects are not feasible (Chart 15). As one of the respondents commented, IPs offer the advantage of a comprehensive solution to the problem at regional level, but at the same time require quality coordination of activities and increased financing. In addition, respondents raised concerns over the increased coordination

requirements between the different agencies governing IPs, calling for consensus at a high governance level. The need to simplify financial reporting procedures was also mentioned, along with comments on the difficulties faced by public bodies lacking resources to co-finance IPs.

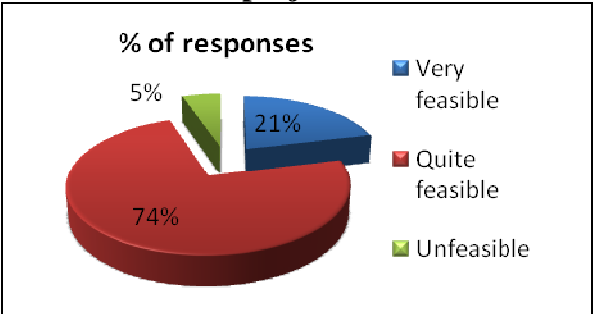
At the same time, respondents highlighted the potential of IPs to maximise synergies and value for money, as well as to create opportunities for the implementation of large-scale actions, bringing together both a large number of experts/technicians and adequate funds.

Chart 14 - 'Integrated projects'



'In principle, do you think the 'integrated projects' as described above are a good idea?' (39 respondents, 39 responses)

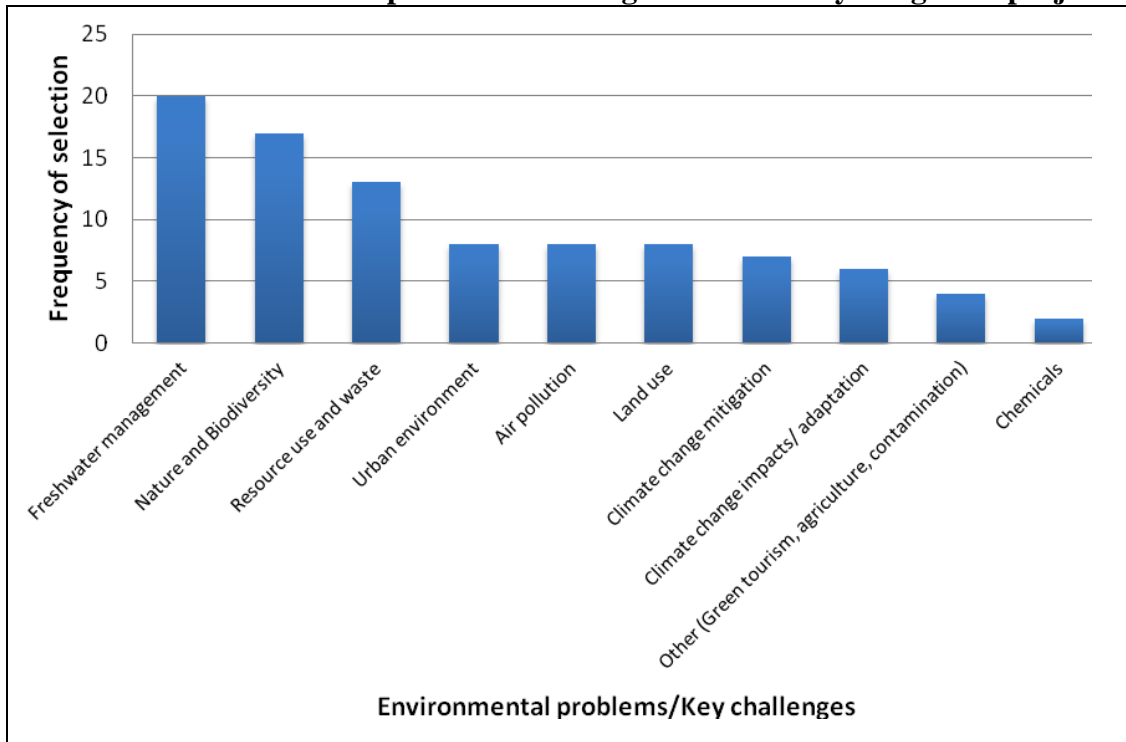
Chart 15 - Feasibility of integrated projects



'How feasible do you think this idea is?' (38 respondents, 38 responses)

Respondents suggested that 'integrated projects' could most realistically and effectively be used to address a wide variety of environmental problems/challenges met within their region/municipality, notably (Chart 16): 'freshwater management' (21.5% of responses); 'nature and biodiversity' (18% of responses); 'resource use and waste' (14% of responses); as well as 'urban environment', 'air pollution' and 'land use' (each counting for 9% of responses). In addition, a total of 14% of the related responses concerned climate change issues (either adaptation or mitigation).

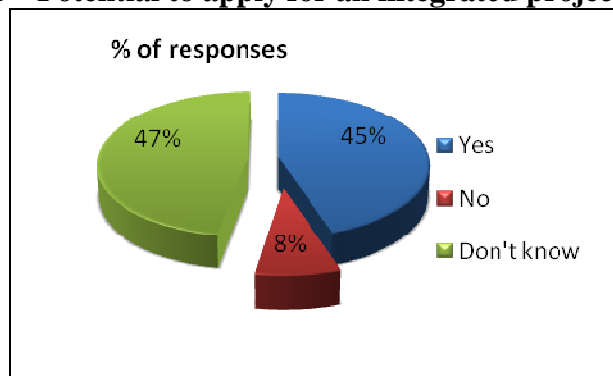
Chart 16 - Environmental problems/challenges addressed by integrated projects



‘Which environmental problems within your region/municipality identified in Q1 do you think ‘integrated projects’ could most realistically and effectively be used to address? State as many problems as you wish, explaining your answer if possible’ (36 respondents, 93 responses)

Moreover, about half of the respondents (47%) are not certain if their municipality/region would be interested in applying for an integrated project in the next programme period (Chart 17); as few respondents commented, such a decision remains subject to their capacity and availability of resources. 45% of the respondents anticipate such an action in the future, while only 8% is negative in that respect.

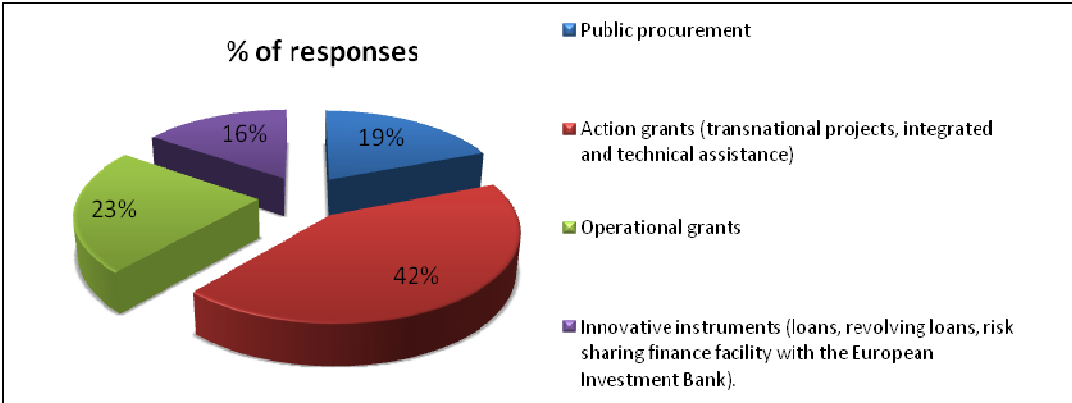
Chart 17 - Potential to apply for an integrated project in the future



‘Would you anticipate that your municipality/region would be interested in applying for an integrated project in the next programme period?’ (38 respondents, 38 responses)

According to the respondents, the most effective mechanisms to be used in the future LIFE instrument are considered to be ‘action grants (transnational projects, integrated and technical assistance)’, followed by ‘operational grants’, (42% and 23% of responses, respectively, Chart 18). The other two mechanisms listed in the questionnaire (‘public procurement’ and innovative instruments) received less than one fifth of responses (19% and 16% respectively).

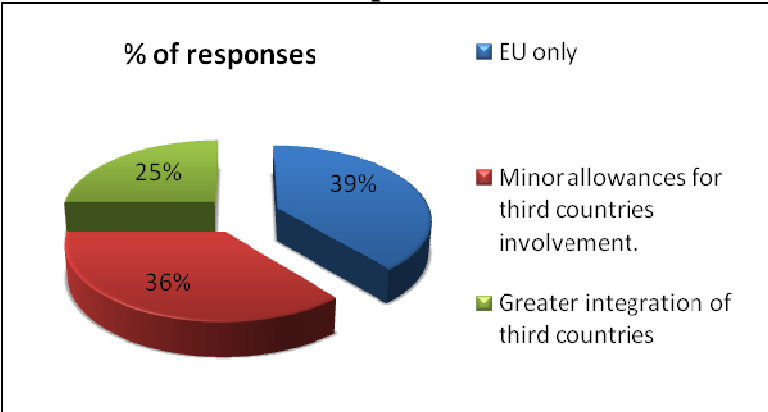
Chart 18 - Effective mechanisms for use in the future LIFE instrument



‘Based on your previous experience and according to your opinion, what is/are the most effective mechanism(s) to be used in the future instrument?’ (34 respondents, 52 responses)

39% of the respondents believe that the new LIFE instrument should address EU countries only, while 36% consider that it should ideally include ‘minor allowances for third countries involvement’ (Chart 19). One quarter of the respondents think positively about greater integration of third countries. The few arguments raised by the respondents regarding this matter suggest that involvement of countries outside the EU should be allowed if required by the project, or more specifically, whenever there is a clear contribution towards achieving specific EU policy objectives and/or promoting solutions to shared problems.

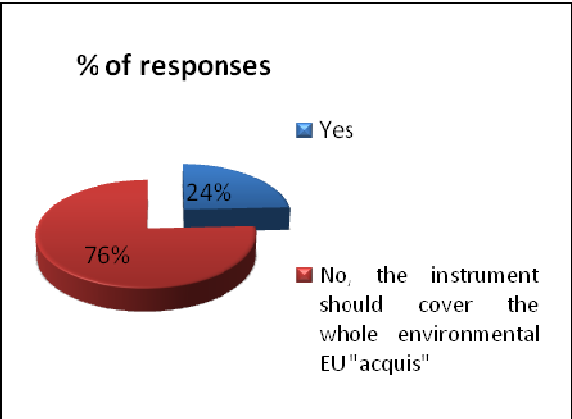
Chart 19 - Ideal territorial scope of the new LIFE instrument



‘According to your opinion, what should be the ideal territorial scope of the future instrument’ (36 respondents, 36 responses)

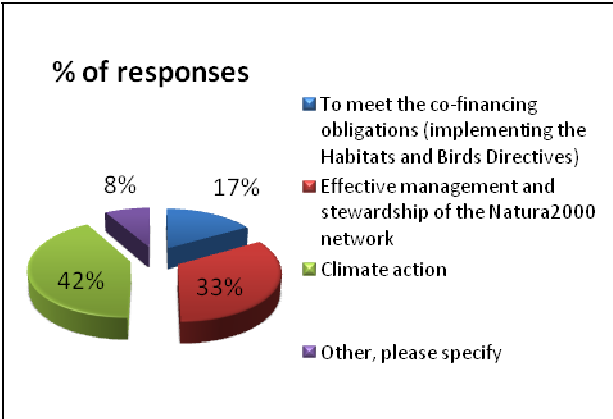
More than three quarters of the respondents (76%) do not agree with narrowing the focus of the future instrument to a specific area/objective (Chart 20). Those who are in favour of a more focused LIFE instrument, specify climate change (42% of responses), the management of the Natura 2000 Network (33% of responses) and the Habitats and Birds directives (17% of responses) as the most pertinent objectives/areas (Chart 21). Only one of the respondents specified an area/objective other than those listed in the questionnaire, stressing the need to focus on the protection of other areas important for biodiversity.

Chart 20 - Narrowing the focus of the future LIFE instrument



‘Do you agree with the idea of narrowing the focus of the future instrument to a specific area/objective’ (37 respondents, 37 responses)

Chart 21 - Areas/objectives of the more focused future LIFE instrument



‘If you answered ‘YES’ in the previous question (chart 19), please select the areas/objectives you consider most pertinent’ (10 respondents, 12 responses)

1.3 Conclusions and recommendations

The consultation has provided valuable indications about how LRAs perceive the LIFE instrument and their expectations from the EU as regards a future financing mechanism for the environment; however, the total number of respondents is limited and therefore the following conclusions are only preliminary.

⇒ In this context, *the results of the consultation could be complemented with a series of focused workshops targeting LIFE stakeholders and their networks at the regional and local levels, to be organised jointly by the CoR and the European Commission.* Specific areas of interest for these events may include: a) ways to overcome the main obstacles for LRAs in the LIFE application process, notably obtaining match-funding; b) identification of the most effective financing mechanisms for LRAs, notably innovative instruments such as financing involving risk-sharing; and c) Added value for LRAs of a separate financing instrument on the environment, specifically targeting nature and biodiversity or climate

change issues. Given that the LIFE+ 2011 call for proposals is currently open, adequate participation in the events is considered likely, although particular attention should be given to the moderation of the workshops, to make sure that the focus of discussions remains firmly on the future LIFE instrument, as opposed to the on-going programme and call.

The results of the consultation indicate that there is sufficient scope for (one or more) EU financial instruments for the environment, targeting several significant local and regional environmental problems/key challenges, ranging from nature and biodiversity issues to climate change, and from resource use and waste to freshwater management.

The LIFE instrument is broadly used by LRAs to address these issues, especially in terms of facilitating the implementation of EU policy/legislation in related fields. In this respect, respondents have underlined the significance of financial resources, as well as of dealing with conflicting priorities (such as keeping a balance between fostering economic development and protecting the environment), with regard to implementing and enforcing EU environmental policy/legislation.

The consultation has also emphasised the effectiveness of raising awareness amongst competent authorities on the specified environmental problems/solutions, and of promoting innovation in environmental management techniques, in terms of improving environmental policy and its implementation at the local/regional level. Moreover, respondents have confirmed the existence of weaknesses in the integration of environmental considerations into other policy areas, in the development and implementation of policy (leading to inadequate levels of environmental protection), as well as in the use of various EU funding instruments available to support environmental investment.

As the majority of respondents indicated, EU-level action on the environment is justified by several reasons, notably to correct ineffective transposition, implementation or enforcement of EU environmental policy by MS and to assist MS in that respect, as well as to enhance coordination of action across MS in central and regional levels, towards the integration of environmental provisions into sectoral policies.

⇒ ***The CoR should advocate EU action fostering closer collaboration between the central and the regional level and among LRAs within each MS, towards more efficient implementation of EU environmental policy.***

EU action in this respect could include, among other things:

- the establishment of a LIFE Networking Facility;

- policy facilities operating under the new LIFE instrument and addressing specific environmental challenges in broad EU regions (e.g. Mediterranean countries, Baltic countries, etc.);
- a separate budget line within the new LIFE instrument for the provision of support to small LRAs at policy level.

The EU is the main source of funding for actions addressing environmental problems within the local areas (regions/municipalities) of the respondents to the consultation. In this respect, LRAs primarily apply for funding to the LIFE instrument as well as to Structural funds/funds related to the Cohesion policy.

The consultation indicated that the involvement of LRAs in LIFE projects is mainly hampered by the intensive application requirements – notably as regards the completion of forms – and the difficulties in obtaining match-funding.

⇒ Given that, according to the respondents, the current mechanism for the provision of information and guidance on the LIFE application seems to work well with most of the stakeholders, ***the CoR should advocate the simplification, by the EU, of the LIFE application process***, in order to facilitate the involvement of smaller local authorities that often lack the capacity and resources to apply for LIFE funding.

⇒ Moreover, the identified obstacles to co-financing should be considered within the context of the ongoing financial crisis affecting several EU MS, and therefore ***the EU should take action to avoid augmentation of the problems in the future, and limit associated impacts on LRAs***. In this respect, ***the CoR should advocate further EU support to LRAs encountering difficulties in obtaining match-funding for environmental projects, including the option for a higher EU co-financing rate***.

Respondents like the idea of integrated projects and in broad terms consider them feasible. However, despite appreciating the benefits of IPs, notably the potential to maximise synergies and implement large-scale actions, several LRAs are not fully confident about applying for an integrated project. This should mainly be attributed to their concerns about the availability of resources and their capacity to address the increased needs for management and coordination.

Although the LIFE instrument is well appreciated by most LRAs, there still remain a limited number of sub-national level actors, e.g. small local authorities, who have not heard of LIFE before.

⇒ In this context, *the CoR should advocate careful planning of dissemination and outreach activities at the Programme level in the new instrument, so as to target all potential beneficiaries*, including small scale local authorities.

LRAs' interest in the future LIFE instrument is likely to remain high in terms of securing funding for: i) nature conservation actions, including environmental management plans; ii) demonstration projects promoting policy change; iii) investments in new (innovative) products and/or processes; and iv) development of tools that facilitate the implementation of EU policy. The consultation indicated that action grants are considered to be the most effective funding mechanisms for the future LIFE instrument. On the other hand, innovative instruments are not highly appreciated by a large number of respondents.

⇒ In this respect, *the CoR should support the use of action grants as the main financial mechanism to be used in the future LIFE instrument*.

⇒ In addition, within the context of the ongoing economic downturn, it is in the interests of LRAs to further explore the potential of using new, innovative financial tools to co-finance their environmental projects. *The CoR could provide assistance to LRAs in that respect, through:*

- *the organisation of a relevant workshop*, targeting LRAs with adequate capacity (including skilled and experienced human resources) to analyse good practices in the use of new financial tools;
- *the publication of a guide on the use of innovative financial instruments*, including selected good practices and clear methodological instructions.

The new LIFE instrument should ideally focus on EU countries and allow third countries' cooperation only if justified by the objectives of the action, e.g. promoting specific EU environmental policies or offering solutions to shared environmental problems. Moreover, narrowing down the focus of the future LIFE instrument to any specific area/objective is not likely to be supported by LRAs and relevant stakeholders; however, there seems to be adequate scope for a specific instrument focusing on nature and biodiversity.

⇒ Therefore *the CoR should advocate further assessment by the EU of the potential to develop a specific instrument for 'nature and biodiversity'*, running in parallel with the new LIFE instrument.

Annex I - List of respondents

No	Country	Authority
1	Austria	Association of Communities of Wachau valley (Arbeitskreis Wachau Regionalentwicklung)
2	Austria	City of Klagenfurt (Magistrat der Landeshauptstadt Klagenfurt am Wörthersee)
3	France	Inter-departmental Mediterranean Entity (EID Méditerranée)
4	Germany	City of Augsburg
5	Germany	Foundation for Nature and Environment in the district Mayen-Koblenz
6	Germany	Ministry for Environment, Forestry and Consumer Protection Rheinland-Pfalz
7	Germany	Ministry for Agriculture, Environment and Consumer Protection Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
8	Greece	The Benaki Phytopathological Institute (BPI)
9	Italy	Municipality of Albisola Superiore
10	Italy	Esfera S.r.l. (Abano Terme)
11	Italy	Genova Province
12	Italy	Municipality of Perugia
13	Italy	Municipality of Recanati
14	Italy	Regional Center For Agricultural Experimentation and Assistance (Ce.R.S.A.A.)
15	Italy	Turboden S.r.l. (Brescia)
16	Italy	Municipality of Valfabbrica
17	Italy	Veneto Region – Forests and Parks
18	Italy	Vercelli Province
19	Malta	Xaghra Local Council
20	Netherlands	Overijssel Province
21	Portugal	Iberian Centre for the study of birds (Ceai)
22	Portugal	Legislative Assembly of the Autonomous Region of Azores
23	Portugal	Portuguese Society for the study of birds (SPEA, Madeira)
24	Portugal	Tavira Municipality
25	Slovakia	Slovakia Ministry of Environment
26	Slovenia	Municipality of Gornja Radgona
27	Slovenia	Municipality of Kranj
28	Slovenia	Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation
29	Spain	Council of Andalucia – Ministry of Environment
30	Spain	Principality of Asturias
31	Spain	Benaguasil City Council
32	Spain	Biodiversity Foundation
33	Spain	ACCÍÓ – Competitiveness for Catalonia
34	Spain	Cocentaina City Council
35	Spain	Assembly of Extremadura
36	Spain	Institute of Ceramics Technology (Castellón city)
37	Spain	Los Monearos County
38	Spain	Navarra Government
39	Spain	Valencian Buidling Institute
40	Sweden	City of Gothenburg

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