

Entrepreneurial Interest in Lake Protection and Restoration: A Cross-Country Study

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Background & Context



Freshwater ecosystems, particularly lakes, face escalating environmental degradation.



The *ProCleanLakes* project addresses ecological restoration and sustainable development of lake systems.



Entrepreneurial initiatives can serve as key enablers of ecological innovation and socio-economic impact.



Limited academic research exists on entrepreneurship in lake restoration.



Research Aim & Questions

➤ Research Aim:

- To examine the motivations, challenges, and opportunities for entrepreneurs in the field of lake protection and restoration.

➤ Research Questions:

1. What motivates aspiring entrepreneurs to engage in lake restoration?
2. What resources and support structures are seen as essential for business development in this sector?
3. What are the key barriers faced?
4. How do innovative, sustainability-focused business models apply?



Methodology

Mixed-Methods Design:

- Quantitative Survey via Prolific (n = 150 participants)
 - Countries: Norway, Romania, Greece
 - Participants: Business & environmental studies students with entrepreneurial interest
- Qualitative Interviews
 - Conducted with local entrepreneurs in each country to complement quantitative data



Methodology

Mixed-Methods Design:

Survey Themes:

1. Entrepreneurial motivations
2. Perceived needs & available resources
3. Barriers to entry and operations
4. Interest in innovative business models
5. Financing strategies



Results

Motivations and Drivers:

- Strong cross-national interest in sustainability-driven entrepreneurship
 - Key Motivators:
 - **Ecological awareness:** sense of environmental responsibility
 - **Regulatory incentives:** support mechanisms encouraging sustainable business
 - **Market opportunities:** emerging green markets, especially around ecotourism and aquaculture
- => Positive perception of social impact and community value



Results

Barriers and Operational Challenges:

- **Financial Constraints:** Lack of startup funding and limited access to green financing
- **Regulatory Complexity:** Ambiguous or overly strict environmental and administrative policies
- **Market Limitations:** Niche markets, low consumer demand for sustainability-oriented products
- These align with barriers noted in environmental entrepreneurship literature (e.g., institutional voids, financing gaps).



Results

Promising Business Models

Participants showed strong interest in:

- **Sustainable aquaculture** (e.g., low-impact fish farming)
- **Algae-based circular economies** (biomass, biofuel, cosmetics)
- **Floating solar farms** (renewable energy integration)
- **Ecotourism** (lake-centric, culturally integrated experiences)

However, feasibility is influenced by:

- Local regulations
- Financial support infrastructure
- Workforce skills and availability



Results

Cross-Country Insights

- **Norway:**
 - Tech-forward, emphasis on individual responsibility; interest in VR & digital tools to raise awareness
- **Romania:**
 - Focus on socio-economic interdependence of lakes & communities; calls for improved public funding
- **Greece:**
 - Integration of cultural heritage with ecological restoration; advocacy for governance reforms & community engagement



Results

Demographic and Educational Insights

- Respondents had high educational backgrounds (mostly university level)
- Many reported prior exposure to environmental studies or management experience
- Education and experience significantly influenced their engagement level and interest in sustainable business



Policy and Practical Implications

- Importance of national context in designing support mechanisms
- Need for:
 - Country-specific entrepreneurship support strategies
 - Financial incentives (grants, seed funding)
 - Incubation hubs for sustainability-oriented startups
 - Training & mentorship programs



Policy and Practical Implications

Contribution to ProCleanLakes Goals

- Offers evidence-based insights to support the *ProCleanLakes* pilot actions
- Promotes stakeholder engagement and awareness-building
- Encourages integration of entrepreneurship into lake restoration strategies
- Supports the EU's agenda for green transition and circular economy models



Conclusion & Future Research

- This study is among the first to explore entrepreneurship in the context of lake restoration
- Highlights both strong potential and systemic barriers
- Sets the foundation for longitudinal and comparative studies
- Next steps:
 - Deeper case studies
 - Policy intervention testing
 - Cross-sector partnerships



Thank You!

Q&A

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Learn more: <https://procleanlakes.eu>



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