



TRANSNATURE

Methodology Guidelines

TRANSNATURE (Biodiversa+)



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1 Foundations of TRANSNATURE

1.1 Qualitative Empirical Legal Research

TRANSNATURE adheres to the approach of socio-legal studies. According to Cane and Kritzer (2012, p. 1) socio-legal studies—or law and society—is an “interdisciplinary movement with strong roots in sociology but including scholars from a wide range of traditional disciplines including law”. The socio-legal studies approach sets the scene to study law and its institutions within the social, historical, and cultural contexts. Due to the importance given to social, historical, and cultural contexts within this project, there is a need to include the study of the “law in action” along with the “law on the books”. To do so, TRANSNATURE requires the use of research methods from other social sciences such as sociology or anthropology. Thus, framed within socio-legal studies, the methodological approach that enables TRANSNATURE to employ methods of other social sciences disciplines is empirical legal research. Empirical legal research (ELR) is the label employed to refer to the empirical research of law (Cane and Kritzer 2012). Empirical research in law involves the study through direct, rather than secondary sources, (e.g., institutions, rules or procedures)¹. Empirical research may use qualitative methods, quantitative methods, or a combination of both, known as mixed-methods approach. On the basis of the aims and objectives of TRANSNATURE, we will employ a qualitative approach to ELR.²

Qualitative research lacks a widely accepted definition. Kirk and Miller (1986, p. 9) suggest that qualitative research “fundamentally depends on watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language, on their own terms. As identified with sociology, cultural anthropology, and political science, among other disciplines, qualitative research has been seen to be “naturalistic,” “ethnographic,” and “participatory.” By naturalistic we mean that it is conducted in its natural context (the field), by ethnographic we mean holistic in an anthropological sense—thus, including a wide range of participants pertaining to different groups of interest who have a key role in our research topic (e.g. we do not aim to integrate only the views of governmental or institutional actors), and by participatory that the research subject plays an active part in the process (Webley, 2012), this participatory aspect will be further developed below.

Other researchers argue that qualitative research differs from its quantitative counterpart based on its ontological and epistemological stances (see Barbour, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Flick, 2009). These stances are explained below.

1.2 Ontology

Ontology can be understood as one’s understanding of the nature of being or reality—one might question whether there is one reality or several, or whether each person constructs their own reality. TRANSNATURE aligns with idealism. As Ormston et al. (2014) describe, idealism asserts that reality is mind-dependent: it is only knowable through the human mind and through socially constructed meanings which represent multiple realities that are context-specific. In other words, the social world is made up of representations constructed and shared by people in particular contexts. TRANSNATURE is sensitive to these multiple realities and perspectives which might be context-dependent. For this reason, it employs

¹ Primary data is data directly collected by the researcher, while secondary data comprises information gathered by someone else in the past. Examples of primary data collection methods include surveys, observations, experiments, questionnaires, and personal interviews. On the other hand, secondary data sources encompass government publications, websites, books, journal articles, and internal records.

² As discussed during a partner meeting, depending on how we present the data of the mapping, we will change it to mixed methods to allow the inclusion of descriptive statistics.

different case studies in different settings and aims to gather as many perspectives as possible through the inclusion of a variety of groups of participants (see Ormston et al., 2014).

1.3 Epistemology

Epistemology can be understood as one's understanding of the nature of knowledge (Fuyane, 2021; Webley 2012). TRANSNATURE aligns with the inductive logic. In other words, we will build knowledge bottom-up through observations of the world, which in turn provide the basis for developing theories or laws³.

TRANSNATURE furthermore aligns with the school of thought of interpretivism (and its related movement constructivism). While "Positivism considers people as the products of their environment and the researcher attempts to be an objective observer", interpretivism considers people not only as the product of their environment but also "as those who construct the environment through their understandings of it." (Webley, 2012, p. 930). In accordance with this, in the project:

- Knowledge of the world is based on the 'understandings' our participants have of their social world.
- Researchers construct meanings and interpretations based on those of participants.
- The research process is considered largely inductive in the sense that interpretation is grounded in the data, though it is also recognised that observations are theory-laden because they are mediated by ideas and assumptions.
- Reality is affected by the research process. Some researchers may aim to be transparent about their assumptions and attempt to adopt a neutral position; others embrace subjectivity and become more personally engaged.
- Knowledge is actively constructed by human beings, both participants and researchers, rather than being passively received by them.

Based on the importance that the participants have on qualitative research, calls have been made to achieve greater equality between the researcher and the research participants. It led to the development of participatory action research (PAR), described below.

1.4 Methodological Approach: Participatory (Action) Research

PAR aims to break down the barriers between the researcher and the 'researched', and to enact positive change for those involved in the research process (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Chevalier & Buckles, 2019; Ormston et al., 2014). It is based on a **collaborative approach** with key research participants. PAR should occur right from the start of the research project, however, this can be difficult when it comes to funded research because its objectives and design are often set to some degree beforehand. To counter this problem, during the elaboration of the project, we contacted some stakeholders.

TRANSNATURE has already defined its objectives, questions and to some extent, the methods, but will include its stakeholders in the design of the methods that are going to be used and the form they will take (in-person, online). They will be involved in the research process in the following activities: (1) in

³ Laws intended not as legal prescriptions, but as norms or rules that help to explain a certain phenomenon.

stakeholder engagement meetings in October 2023 to discuss the scope of the research and the methods used (co-creation of methodology) (see Annex III); (2) in interviews and focus groups (data collection—see Annexes I and II); (3) in assessing the effectiveness of their case studies' governance in enhancing biodiversity protection (data processing);⁴ and (4) in evaluating the proposed policy recommendations (effect on policy). In line with what has been discussed in the kick-off meeting, they should feel to be effectively involved in the project by taking into consideration their opinions and inputs.

2 Research Design

2.1 Research Objectives and Questions

2.1.1 TRANSNATURE Research Objectives

- O1) identify successful examples of transboundary biodiversity conservation,
- O2) propose ways to address common challenges and effectively protect biodiversity, and
- O3) elaborate policy recommendations to improve the effectiveness of transboundary biodiversity conservation governance.

2.1.2 TRANSNATURE Research Questions

RQ1) To what extent and how do transboundary conservation areas involve different types of managing authorities and stakeholders in effective governance mechanisms to enhance conservation?

RQ2) To what extent and how does the stratification of different governance mechanisms in the same natural areas, such as World Heritage sites, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), national management authorities, subnational authorities and indigenous and community conserved areas (ICCAs), trigger processes that strengthen biodiversity conservation? Are there cooperation mechanisms or mechanisms of conflict resolution in place among the different actors involved?

RQ3) To what extent can transboundary conservation areas contribute to decrease ecological degradation by improving the prevention and enforcement of both cross-border pollution and transnational wildlife crime in the EU?

2.2 Definition “Transboundary Biodiversity Protection”

Transboundary Biodiversity Protection (TBP) entails the presence of cross-border cooperation (1) explicitly aimed at ensuring the conservation of shared ecosystems or natural resources and can be pursued together with other objectives. This express reference to conservation is one of the three

⁴ The effectiveness of biodiversity conservation governance will not be evaluated in terms of an increase in biodiversity or population numbers, reduction of pollution, or other variables more pertinent to environmental or natural sciences. Based on the aims and scope of TRANSNATURE, and on what we discussed at a partner's meeting (22/06/2023), effectiveness is to be evaluated in institutional terms, by assessing the responsiveness of the case studies' governance schemes to international principles, as well as their coherence with Kunming-Montreal targets and EU Biodiversity Strategy. Effectiveness will also be evaluated in terms of the personal perceptions of participants/stakeholders. To this end, criteria on how to evaluate effectiveness were discussed at the stakeholder engagement meetings in Autumn 2023 (see Annex III) and during interviews and focus groups in WP2. These activities will be harmonized among the partners to secure the coherent evaluation of the outcomes.

elements relevant in all the cases selected in this project together with (2) the transboundary dimension of the governance arrangements considered (more than one country involved), and (3) the presence of a plurality of authorities operating at different governance levels and cooperating in the case study area.

2.3 Cross-Case Analysis

TRANSNATURE is a comparative study that analyses the same issue in different contexts or case studies. This is known as “cross-case analysis”. In other words, TRANSNATURE will generate knowledge by comparing and contrasting individual case studies. The selected cases are ideal for such a comparison because they share a number of fundamental features. They are all European cases with transboundary dimensions in which national protection measures are accompanied by different forms of governance: international protection mechanisms, intergovernmental arrangements between subnational entities, or more informal arrangements that foresee either management by indigenous peoples and local communities or cooperation on specific protection issues. At the same time, they ensure enough variation in terms of different European regions covered, different ecosystems (terrestrial, mountainous and river-based), and combinations of governance models (World Heritage sites, Man and Biosphere (MAB) reserves, Natura 2000 sites, EGTCs, ad-hoc cooperation agreements, ICCAs etc.), different authorities (international, national and subnational), and actors involved (indigenous peoples, local communities, and citizens). There is also a level of variation in economic and or human activities that are carried out in the selected cases, as well as the socio-economic context.

Building comparison helps us to study transboundary protection of biodiversity in different settings to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of differing forms of transboundary conservation areas. Thus, it will help us to identify the absence or presence of particular features that might prove useful (e.g., involvement of local communities), to explore the effectiveness of different governance mechanisms; or to examine differences among different transboundary conservation areas that can prove useful or ineffective in preventing and enforcing wildlife crime and cross border pollution.

One approach to comparison, that in turn, aids to gain in-depth exploration and insight into the researched phenomenon is the case study design.

To have enough consistency between cases to allow comparison, all the case studies selected are in Europe but involve different models of governance. The case studies are:

CS1) EGTC ZASNET and the Transboundary Biosphere Reserve ‘Meseta Iberica’ (Spain-Portugal): ZASNET was established in 2010 at the North-Eastern border of Portugal and Spain between municipalities and subnational governments of these two countries to cooperate inter alia in the environmental sector. Its most successful result is the recognition of the ‘Meseta Ibérica’ as the first Transboundary Biosphere Reserve (TBR) in the framework of the MAB Programme. The TBR embraces natural parks and Natura 2000 sites, and ZASNET is its managing authority. Among the TBR organs, there is a participatory body to ensure the involvement of civil society/local communities in the governance of this transboundary natural space. Universitat Rovira i Virgili is in charge of conducting the fieldwork for this case study.

CS2) Julian Alps: Prealpi Giulie Park and Triglavski Narodni Park (Italy/Slovenia): these natural parks, located in the Eastern region of the Alps, have developed a long-standing cooperation to jointly protect and manage their natural resources, and they represent a fascinating example of transboundary governance of biodiversity conservation in the making. Recognized as a transboundary protected area (Transboundary Ecoregion Julian Alps) by the Europarc Federation in 2009, in 2014 the Alpine Convention certified them as a pilot transfrontier region for ecological connectivity. The parks are currently applying, together with the competent national authorities, to become a UNESCO MAB Transboundary Biosphere Reserve, as it happened for ZASNET. The territories of the parks include Sites of Community Importance

(SIC), as well as Natura 2000 habitats. Eurac Research is in charge of conducting the fieldwork for this case study.

CS3) Scheldt Estuary (Netherlands-Belgium): the Scheldt Estuary is situated between the southwest of the Netherlands and the northwest of Flanders, Belgium. The total basin area is widely recognized as important for water birds, migrating fish species, porpoises, and diverse rare habitats. Large parts of this estuary are designated as Ramsar sites and Special Protection Areas or Special Areas of Conservation under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives. Many bilateral treaties have been concluded between the two concerned states, including Scheldt Estuary Development Scheme (2010), which aims to balance the safety and accessibility of the river, also in terms of commercial interests, with the objective to achieve the natural recovery of the concerned habitats. Since then, however, expansion plans for the port of Antwerp and increasing pollution are threatening this fragile equilibrium. The University of Ghent is in charge of conducting the fieldwork for this case study.

CS4) Baltic to Barents (Sweden-Norway-Finland): Lapland (Finnish: Lappi) is the Northernmost region of Finland in the West of the country and is an area inhabited by Sámi people (part of the region Sápmi). It includes marine protected areas, mountainous habitats, and inland waters. In these borderlands, rivers that from the outside might appear to be natural boundaries, provide connections for people and wildlife. These connections have allowed for the establishment of very different forms of cross-border cooperation for the protection of the natural environment which is crucial for the local communities. The University of Lapland is in charge of conducting the fieldwork for this case study.

2.4 Methods

Each case study included in TRANSNATURE will gather data through the combination of qualitative methods. Having a uniform set of methods will give homogeneity among cases and the development of guidelines for each method will help us to build the comparison at the tasks T2.5, T4.1 and T4.4 (see Annex IV). The methods used to gather data include both, desktop research (document analysis and mapping) and fieldwork (interviews and focus groups), described in detail in the next sections.

2.4.1 Desk research

2.4.1.1 Qualitative Document Analysis

The information available on documents will give form to WP1. As explained in the project description, for developing T1.1 and preparing for fieldwork, each partner will conduct desk research to collect data about transboundary biodiversity governance, cross-border pollution, and transnational wildlife crime, focusing on its case study. This data will or may come from legal documents (international/bilateral treaties, EU legislation, national and subnational legislation and executive decrees), policy documents (strategies including at regional and national levels, action plans...), previous projects relevant to transboundary biodiversity governance (e.g., SWiPE or PIROSLIFE), and academic literature in the fields of (transboundary) biodiversity governance, as well as cross-border pollution and transnational wildlife crime. The legal/policy qualitative document analysis should include all layers that are relevant to the case studies.

2.4.1.2 Mapping

The purpose is to provide an overview (mapping) of transboundary biodiversity protection systems, both in and outside the EU, including the name of the area (or management scheme); countries involved; if applicable, date management area (or scheme) established; type of instrument (ex, bilateral agreement or other); if applicable, classification as internationally/EU agreed areas (e.g. IUCN classifications, Ramsar,

habitat Directive)The research scope for the mapping includes examples of transboundary biodiversity governance in and outside Europe but it is not systematic. Before finishing the project, we will ask again to all the partner institutions to add other projects. This way we will ensure that the information we present at the end of the project is up-to-date and relevant. Even though, it is important to bear in mind that the aim of the mapping is not to be exhaustive but rather representative of a variety of existing models and projects that are of interest to TRANSNATURE. The information obtained will be useful to inform the final evaluation (WP4) and to identify useful case studies to take into consideration for further research on the topic.

2.4.2 Fieldwork

2.4.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

First, each partner will carry out in-depth semi structured interviews in their case study⁵. The aim for the interviews should be to gather information not only related to the WP2 but also through specific questions relevant for WP3. Questions related to WP2 will be developed by each project partner and adapted to the specificities of each case study. However, to ensure consistency in the approaches and comparability of gathered data, questions will be shared in advance to check if they cover the same aspects and are fit to respond to the project's research questions 1-3.

Accordingly, before the interviews start, a *set* of questions will be drafted; these will give the skeleton of the *semi-structured* interviews. This semi-structured approach (1) will ensure that key questions have been approached, which will be the base to build the comparison among case-studies; 2) will allow other topics to emerge, being context sensitive. Allowing the emergence of other aspects will help us to identify practices, aspects, actors, etc. present in a certain case study, yet missing in others. One additional purpose of the interviews is furthermore to aim to develop criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of transboundary governance schemes for biodiversity protection.

If our participant gives us their consent, we will audio-record the interviews. Then, these will be transcribed, anonymized, and stored in a secure place (e.g., One Drive). The interviews will be coded either manually or using NVivo 12 or other similar software. As accorded during the kick-off meeting, we will develop at this point a common coding system based on the data that will emerge in the interviews—in this vein, it will be defined more clearly at a later stage of the research.

After an analysis of the interviews, a second interview round might be useful if gaps have been found or follow-up questions have been identified. Nevertheless, decisions will be made in observance of the results of the first set of interviews.

2.4.2.2 Focus Groups

As a tool for qualitative research, a focus group does not aim to measure views but to understand them. The aim is to gather and discuss different opinions or expectations of participants. In focus groups, opinions, attitudes, motives, etc. are not ascertained through individual conversations with group members, but in the group. The focus group corresponds to an everyday conversation situation, which makes it easier for participants to share their opinions and views. Due to the group dynamic, topics and ideas can be taken up and further refined by the participants. As a result, more topics are addressed and the collection of opinions, ideas and views is more diverse than from individual interviews (please, see Annex II for a detailed description of how to conduct a focus group—bear in mind that the practical aspects of the focus groups (number of participants, duration...) will be context sensitive. In other words, they may differ from one case study to the next or from one focus group to the next).

⁵ See Annex I for a guide on how to conduct a semi-structured interview.

Each partner will carry out a focus group in each case study area⁶. Focus groups tend to agglutinate six to eight participants, thus, depending on the number of groups of interest (governments, local communities, indigenous peoples, youth, law enforcement...) it might suffice to set up one focus group for each case study. Whether to have one focus group or multiple, to include all groups of interest in one focus group or divide them, to carry the focus group online⁷ (synchronous or asynchronous) or in-person, should be decided to take into consideration our stakeholders' opinion. For example, if there is a hunting association maybe it is not a good idea to put it in a focus group with an environmental NGO, since we want a healthy discussion and avoid causing discomfort or tension among our participants. In turn, the composition of focus groups will be discussed in observance of our Ethics Plan, to ensure the wellbeing of research participants. In other words, we will decide the composition of the focus groups based on the characteristics of each case study and the results emerging from interviews and we will need to adapt to the participants' availability.

Similar to what has been discussed about the interviews above, we will ask for our participants' consent to record the focus groups. Then, these will be transcribed, anonymized, and stored in a secure place. Due to the difficulties in bringing the group back together again for doing a "follow-up" focus group, if we identify the need to ask further questions or to raise a topic that came out in other case studies but not ours, we could gather the data doing an asynchronous focus group—it would take the form of a discussion forum where we could ask what we need and let the participants discuss through the chat as/when.

2.5 Designing and Selecting Samples

2.5.1 Purposive Sampling

Initial sampling has been already made with the selection of the case studies and the compilation of a preliminary list of stakeholders in the submitted project description. To select the participants TRANSNATURE will follow a purposive sample, as to say that participants are chosen with a purpose. They will be chosen based on their *roles* in accordance with the aims of the study. Thus, participants will be selected because they are members of one of our groups of interest: governments at different levels; managing authorities; NGOs; Indigenous peoples; local communities, young adults (it would be beneficial to avoid involving minors in our research unless it is completely necessary), etc. Following the PAR approach, the meeting with the stakeholders can suggest including additional groups of interest (ex. young adults or law enforcement) that they might consider relevant.

Sample size: relatively small, around 20 interviews per case study plus at least one focus group with 6-8 participants (representing each group of interest) would mean that the project would be composed of 80 interviews and 4 focus groups plus the qualitative document analysis. In this way, the project will have a high level of complexity and depth. Moreover, each partner can decide whether to do follow-up interviews or more than one focus group.

2.5.2 Sampling in EGTC ZASNET Meseta Ibérica

The EGTC ZASNET is the stakeholder and gatekeeper for this case study. In their action plan, they already include local communities, as well as associations/groups of interest. So, we plan to select our initial sampling through our main stakeholders (the members of ZASNET. This means that in turn, ZASNET is also the gatekeeper to get access to most of our research participants, which refers to the entity that controls

⁶ See Annex II for a guide on how to conduct a Focus Group.

⁷ Focus groups developed online will ensure the participation of those who have travel constrains (time, geography etc.), hence we would also avoid the risk of people not showing up and the exclusion of people and loss of information.

research access. Therefore, having a good relationship and achieving a certain degree of cooperation will be a strength in terms of access.

Besides that, if we identify another group of interest after our stakeholder meetings (for example firefighters, law enforcement agents, major NGOs— like WWF; SEO BirdLife, etc.) we can approach them through their organisation and from there start snowballing. In other words, once we finish one interview, we will ask our participant to direct us to someone else we can talk to, like a friend or a colleague who can be of interest and, in turn, can be interested in participating.

2.5.3 Sampling in Julian Alps: Prealpi Giulie Park and Triglavski Narodni Park

The two parks that are the object of our analysis are also the main stakeholders for the case study. They will help us identify other important stakeholders in the study area and therefore act also as gatekeepers. From an initial mapping, however, we have already identified important stakeholders who will help us understand the complex governance of this study area. These are the national ministries of the environment in Italy and Slovenia, regional authorities of Friuli Venezia-Giulia (Italy), municipal authorities in both countries, local civil society organizations, as well as regional organizations such as EUROPARC Federation, CIPRA, and Alparc. For some of these actors, we will on the one hand, identify relevant contacts on official websites, and, on the other hand, ask for feedback from our main stakeholders - the parks - to confirm these contacts or pass on to us the relevant ones, since these actors are also the main stakeholders for the parks included in the study. Other participants will be also found through the contacts established in the stakeholder engagement meeting to be held in presence in October 2023 at the premises of one of the parks or anyway close to their territories. Snowballing will be also used, especially to identify additional representatives of relevant civil society organizations.

2.5.4 Sampling in Scheldt Estuary

The Scheldt Estuary is a direct route to the sea with high shipping importance, as well as an important bird reserve, wetland, as well as area relevant to prevention of flooding. This means that the area has many stakeholders with different interests. The 2005 Scheldt treaties between Belgium and the Netherlands establishes the framework for the management of the Western Scheldt. The Flemish- Dutch Scheldt Commission, consisting of Flemish and Dutch governments, is responsible for the coordination. Stakeholders that are applying these agreements include the Ministries (environment, waterways, economy), authorities and agencies responsible for nature conservation. Other interested stakeholders include local and regional actors, such as nature or farmers organisations. The research team will also consider NGOs or trade unions that have an interest, such as the harbour trade union or landscape NGOs.

2.5.5 Sampling in Baltic to Barents

In our case study, we identified several gatekeepers among some of the stakeholders, along with local members of the Sámi and the Finnish communities. For this purpose, we initially start with Sámi institutions, such as the Sámi Parliament or with the local authorities in charge of maintaining and protecting biodiversity, such as the Finnish Forest and Park Services authority (Metsähallitus), and the nature livelihood's practitioners, like the Reindeer Herding Cooperatives Association (Paliskuntainyhdistys). After starting with these institutions, we will shift focus to different members of local communities, like herders and fishermen, as well as other natural livelihoods practitioners following existing networks from previous fieldwork in the same areas. The snowball technique will be applied and, additionally, persons suggested by the interviewees themselves will be interviewed accordingly. Furthermore, NGOs which have operated in the areas of our case studies will be contacted, such as Greenpeace, WWF, Finnish Association for Nature Conservation (FANC) (Suomen luonnonsuojeluliitto),

or even more local ones as ProSiika Ry (Pro-Whitefish Ry) who seeks the protection of singular fish species of the Torne River.

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Annex I

Stages of the Interview



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4 Stages of the Interview

Box 1: Stages of the Interview

Stage 1 : arrival and introductions

- Establish an initial rapport.
- “Host” the interaction by taking responsibility for making it friendly and positive.

Stage 2 : introducing the research

- Seeking informed consent: aims, objectives, voluntary, confidential.
- Scope of the interview: be aware that the participant is in control of what they disclose.
- No right or wrong answers, hearing their perspective in their own words.

Stage 3 : beginning the interview

- Contextual background information: for reference in interview and to set the tone.

Stage 4 : during the interview

- Breadth and depth of coverage

Stage 5 : ending the interview

- Give some advance notice. Once the end of the interview is approaching (you are about to ask the last question) let your participant know. Example: “Thank you so much for the explanation. *One last question*: how do you experience.....”
- End on a positive note: suggestions and recommendations.

Stage 6 : after the interview

- Thank for participation: express the value of their contribution.
- Explain how the information will be treated and used.
- Be prepared to stay to help the change of mode back to the everyday. Keep in mind that the participant might feel that he/she/they said something that he/she/they shouldn't, or that might be exhausted after the interview. Most participants feel that they are being tested, or that there are good and bad answers (even if we say that this is not the case). After the pressure they feel during the interview, before leaving we need to make sure to return to a normal way of communicating.
- Listen up for ‘doorstep data’. Doorstep data refers to this information that the participant gives when the interview is over. Because the participant thinks about something that wants to share, want to clarify a point that has been raised because is feeling insecure/worried

about the response, or simply because wants to continue talking. All this information is data. Listen to it and either ask if you can turn on the recorder again or pay attention and take notes as soon as you leave.

5 Stages described

5.1 Arrival and Introductions

The interview process begins the moment the researcher meets the participant. The first few minutes can be crucial for establishing a good rapport between the researcher and the participant. It is like meeting someone for the first time, it is typical to go through social greetings and small talk.

It is better if you come across as confident, friendly and relaxed, remember that you are the one who has to move the conversation into the research so you can effectively start the interview. One way to do so is by asking your participants where they would prefer to do the interview and how much time they have (maybe they have to go pick up kids from school or do grocery shopping).

5.2 Introducing the Research

This is the stage at which the interview begins with the researcher introducing the research topic. It is **crucial** that informed consent is not taken as given at this point and the researcher explains the aims and objectives of the research, its purpose and what the interviewer would like to cover (this will be the blocks in which the predefined questions, the skeleton of the interview, are organized). This way we can alert our participants about the topics we aim to cover and if sensitive topics will arise.

At this stage we need to say again that taking part is voluntary, that if there are aspects they do not want to talk about, they do not have to. Finally, point out that the interview is not a survey with a series of questions or short answers, that the aim of the interview is to hear their views and experiences in their own words.

5.3 Beginning the Interview

The opening questions are helpful to gain contextual information (ask about their employment, relation to the context in which the research is taking place, etc.) it will provide important information that will help us during the interview and will help our participant to use their own words and to get into the interview mood at ease. Example: “just to start, can you tell me a bit about yourself?” this will lead to asking for how long they lived in the area, what they do day to day, give details about their job.

5.4 During the Interview

At this stage the researcher guides the participant through the key themes. Here the interviewee will do most of the talking, we need to encourage them to talk, to be open, and to share as much as they want. Still, we need to keep track of not missing the point of the conversation, and we need to keep bringing

the conversation back to the topics we want to discuss (the ones that are set on our initial set of questions).

5.5 Ending the Interview

About 5-10 minutes before the end of the interview, you can let them know that you are close to completion. For example, saying “the final topic I want to talk about is...”. After that, one way of finishing the interview is to ask your participant for any final thought or comment. It will give them the opportunity to comment on something that you haven’t raised or to ask about something that was not clear at the beginning.

5.6 After the Interview

At this stage we thank our participant. It is important to explain to them what will happen with the information they gave us and how we will be reporting it. Here might emerge some ‘doorstep data’, which are final reflections, comments or even information that the interviewee shares right at the end when the researcher is leaving. Here you might ask to either turn on the recorder again, to take notes, or to retain as much information as possible and write it down as soon as you leave (unless your participant tells you that it is out of record). Once you leave, you have to be sure that you are leaving your participant “feeling well” about their participation on your research project.

Annex II

Stages of the Focus Group



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6 Stages of the Focus Group

Box 1: Stages of the Focus Group

Stage 1 : scene-setting and ground rules

- The introductory stage of a focus group should be used to inform the participants about what will be expected of them and set up the way in which the focus group will be conducted.

Stage 2 : individual introductions

- This helps the researchers to identify each participant but also ensures each has an opportunity to speak and identify with each other.

Stage 3 : the opening topic

- A general, neutral opener that relates to the research topic can help build up the group's discussion dynamic.

Stage 4 : discussion

- This is the main body of the focus group, with the key issues discussed and explored by the group and space given for them to move the discussion into new areas or formulate their views.

Stage 5 : ending the discussion

- This is helpful to signal in advance that the discussion is coming to an end and gradually relax the focus with some general final points and questions before the researcher clearly ends the group, letting participants know what will happen next and thanking them for their contribution.

7 Stages described

7.1 Scene-setting and ground rules

As participants arrive (or join the meeting room in case it is online) the researcher thanks them for joining and welcomes them and puts them at ease using a friendly conversation. If the meeting is in-person, it is interesting to offer them a refreshment at this point. When all the participants are present the researcher makes a more formal start of the session, with a personal introduction, offering an outline of the research topic.

The researcher might also include an indication of expected roles, explaining that the session will be in the form of a discussion, that there are no right or wrong answers, that everyone's views are of interest, that the idea is to hear as many different thoughts as possible. That said, you should remind them that they must be respectful with each other's opinions. We need to tell them that the session will be recorded (audio recorded better than video recorded in terms of image rights), and for this reason participants are kindly asked not to talk over each other.

Depending on what we ask it might also be helpful to ask the group to treat what other people say as confidential and not to repeat it outside the session. This will be particularly important if people know each other and are part of a wider network. This initial stage is important, and each partner will need the to take some time and planning how it will take place and how they will approach it.

7.2 Individual introductions

Switch on the recording device or start the recording if online (unless you don't have the previous consent of the participants, usually there is an option at the informed consent that they have to sign beforehand). Once the recording starts, the researcher asks the members of the focus group to introduce themselves by saying their names (or organization in case they are representing the views of an entity and not a personal stance). This point is intended to help the participants to build up a degree of familiarity, and the researcher to identify the participants on the recording, which is very useful in the transcription process. The researcher should also take note of the names and description to refer to them during the discussion. If online, they can put their name or the organization name on screen, if in-person can be used name-cards or badges.

When the introductions are complete, the researcher may choose to reflect on the composition of the group. It might be helpful to highlight the differences and the benefits of contrasting views. This can reinforce the feeling of now being a 'group' and one in which all members are included, whatever their situation or perspective.

7.3 The opening topic

After the introductions, the researcher starts a general discussion. This may be something neutral, general or conceptual or definitional about the issue that we are going to discuss. The aim at this stage is to promote discussion and to use this opening topic to engage as many of the participants as possible. If all the participants talk at this stage, it is more likely that they will continue participating. If they don't, it is more likely that they will feel more and more excluded (or shy) as the discussion evolves. Likely, at this point the responses will be flat, awkward silences will be generated, and probably only one or two participants will speak up directing their comments to the researcher. Here the researcher will have a more active role to spur the conversation, foster the discussion among the participants and encourage to speak the ones that are more reluctant to do so.

7.4 Discussion

A researcher new to group discussion will feel that things are going out of control at this point, especially if the initial discussion has been energetic. Now what? The role is one of juggling: balancing the need to

promote group interaction against the need for individual detail and the value of free-flowing debate against the need for coverage of specific topics.

Through active listening and observation, the researcher formulates further questions or comments. They may direct the flow over other relevant topic areas. During this stage, it is important to attempt to include everyone and balance the contributions of individual members.

7.5 Ending the discussion

The final topic will have been decided in advance (the same for all case studies could be interesting, for example asking suggestions about what might be done to improve the situation). To signal the end of the discussion, the researcher might ask their participants if they have anything else to say before finishing. Then the researcher thanks the group, stressing how helpful the discussion has been. Switch off the recorder at this point and be prepared to stay for a while before participants leave (either online or in-person).

Annex III

Stages of the Stakeholder Engagement Meeting



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8 Stages of the Meeting

Box 1: Stages of the Meeting

Stage 1 : greetings

- Disclaimer on confidentiality.
- Voluntary participation.

Stage 2 : introducing the aim of the meeting

- Engage on key topics.
- Stakeholders' opinion is valuable.

Stage 3 : introducing the project

- Aims of the project.
- Research questions.
- Main stages (including current stage of the project).
- Roles in the project.

Stage 4 : listing key topics

- Relevance for case study.
- Input on methods.
- Area to be studied.
- Effectiveness.
- Contacts.

Stage 5 : asking feedback on key topics

Stage 6 : wrap-up and closure of the meeting

Stage 7 : video-shooting

Note that the length of each stakeholder engagement meeting depends on the number of participants, but at least a two-and-a-half-hour duration is recommended to leave enough time for discussion. Stakeholder engagement meetings need to be organized in October 2023.

9 Stages described

9.1 Greetings

Researchers open on a friendly note by briefly presenting themselves. After that, participants need to be informed that, due to the nature of the encounter, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. That is why, before the meeting starts, participants will be asked to sign an informed consent containing a disclaimer on confidentiality, which will read as follows: “Your identity will be known to other focus group participants and the researchers cannot guarantee that others in the group will respect the confidentiality of the group. As researchers, we ask that you keep all comments made during the focus group confidential and not discuss what happened during the focus group outside the meeting.” Please plan a sufficient timeslot for letting participants sign the consent forms. It should be also reminded to the participants that their participation is completely voluntary and that they may withdraw at any time.

9.2 Introducing the aim of the meeting

Researchers inform the participants about the aim of the meeting, which is to present the project’s main goals, research aims, and methodology to the main stakeholders in each case study in order to receive their feedback on the relevance of our research for the main actors concerned. Participants may raise topics that they would like to be reflected in the research design and contribute to the methodology. It is important to remind them that there are no right or wrong answers and everyone’s views are of interest.

9.3 Introducing the project

This is the stage where the project is presented in a language that is understandable by all participants. If language issues arise, each partner might consider whether to hire an interpreter (for instance in the case at the border between Italy and Slovenia an interpreter from language to the other might be required unless parties agree to interact in English). Recording of the meeting is started. Authorization for audio or video recording will be asked in the consent form to be signed before the meeting starts and mentioned above.

9.4 Listing key topics

Issues to be discussed are listed: relevance of the project for the case study; inputs on methods; geographical delimitation of the area; evaluation of effectiveness; further contacts.

9.5 Asking feedback on key topics

Each issue raised in Stage 4 is explained separately and in more detail in a way to promote engagement.

- Relevance of the project's objectives for the case studies (each partner needs to elaborate on that separately, adapting content to the specific case study): participants are asked their opinion on that; they are also asked to raise specific new elements of interest for the case study;
- Inputs on methods: methods described in some detail; participants are asked about the suitability of interviews and focus groups, the suitability of the schedule foreseen in the project for the interviews (PM 11-20: from Jan 2024 to Oct 2024), and specific needs;
- Geographical delimitation of the area to be studied: researchers explain how they intend the area to be studied, what in their view is included and what is not. They then ask participants to share their views on what it is important to include in the study of the area object of the case study: how to delimit it geographically, what to include in a geographical map, which ecosystems, habitats and species are included, and if this delimitation is likely to create problems of fragmentation (to leave out some important spaces, species, habitats, etc.);
- Start discussion on how to evaluate effectiveness of governance: researchers will explain that we will evaluate effectiveness against the benchmark of existing legal principles, international and EU targets on biodiversity protection, including the capacity of these transboundary arrangements to address issues concerning wildlife crime and cross-border pollution. Participants will be asked: How would they evaluate effectiveness? Do they have parameters against which they measure the success of their collaboration for the protection of biodiversity? These are questions that will be asked also during the interviews and focus groups, but each stakeholder engagement meeting may constitute the first event where these issues are mentioned, for stakeholders to start reflecting and preparing on them.
- Other stakeholders to reach out to: researchers will ask participants for other potentially interested contacts to be reached out during the fieldwork.

After the explanation of each point, the floor is opened to participants. Researchers act as moderators, take note of the points raised, and keep the discussion alive by asking follow-up questions and keeping the focus.

At the end of Stage 5, researchers will ask participants if there is anything that has not been covered during the meeting that they think it is important for the project. This way we can make sure to cover blind spots.

9.6 Wrap-up and closure of the meeting

The main points raised in the discussion are summarized. Participants are thanked. It is important to repeat that their points will be taken into account to guide the fieldwork and to inform them on ways to receive feedback on how their input is integrated in the research design.

9.7 Video-shooting

2-3 short videos with voluntary participants need to be shot either after the meeting or to be arranged for another suitable moment (also online), but preferably after the meeting has taken place so that participants have a clearer idea of what the project is about and what their contribution in the project is likely to be. Instructions on how to shoot these videos will be prepared by Petra Malferteiner (Eurac Research) and shared in due time. Before shooting the videos, participants should sign specific consent forms.

Annex IV

Work Packages



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10 Work Packages

10.1 Setting the scene for transboundary biodiversity protection

Objective: Using state-of-the-art knowledge to develop a sound methodology to guide the research and establishing an initial engagement with stakeholders.

T1.1 – Conducting desk research on legal and policy documents at different levels on transboundary biodiversity governance, cross-border pollution, and transnational wildlife crime (~~PM 1-3~~) (all; leadership: University of Ghent). **Overview of legal and policy documents: deadline for completing the table is set for the end of August 2023.**

T1.2 – Fostering stakeholder engagement at the beginning of the project by organizing: (a) 4 parallel in-presence meetings to present the project to local stakeholders (from case studies or more regional organizations) and collect their inputs on project design and methodology (PM 7) and (b) a joint online partner workshop to bring together inputs from local stakeholders (PM 8) (all). **Meetings should take place around October-November 2023?**

T1.3 – Mapping the most relevant existing examples of transboundary biodiversity protection and the specific features of their governance (even outside Europe to have a term of reference) (including the project's study areas and related actors) (~~PM 1-9~~) (all; leadership: University of Ghent). **The deadline for completing the Table is set for the end of August 2023. Overview of relevant projects deadline mid of July 2023.**

T1.4 – Developing a common methodology to conduct research in the study areas (~~PM 5-10~~) (all; leadership: Universitat Rovira i Virgili - URV). **Deadline for giving feedback, first week of July 2023.**

D1.1 – Reports on main inputs from stakeholder meetings (PM 8)

D1.2 – Map of most significant cases with description of different government levels and types of actors involved (PM 9)

D1.3 – Methodological guidelines for field work (with inputs from meetings T1.2) (PM 10)

M1.1 – Partner meeting to ensure the appraisal of the common methodology by the Consortium (PM 10).

10.2 Unearthing the practices of transboundary biodiversity protection

Objective: Uncovering transboundary biodiversity governance in the four case studies to learn about specific cooperative mechanisms, key actors, participatory processes, and conflict-resolution mechanisms.

T2.1 – Identifying additional stakeholders in the study areas (PM 11-26) (all – each in its own study area)

T2.2 – Conducting field visits and interviews in the four study areas (PM 11-20) (all – each in its own study area)

T2.3 – Conducting focus groups in the four study areas (PM 11-20) (all – each in its own study area; leadership: URV)

T2.4 – Conducting interviews with other relevant supranational/national/transnational stakeholders to collect comparative input on similar cases (PM 11-20) (all)

T2.5 – Comparing first-hand data coming from the field and exchanging knowledge on main actors, cooperation, conflict-resolution and participatory mechanisms (PM 22-26) (all)

D2.1 – Final list of stakeholders per study area (PM 26)

D2.2 – Interviews’ transcripts (PM 21)

D2.3 – Focus groups’ report(s) (PM 22)

D2.4 – 1 working paper on cooperation and participatory mechanisms that compares experiences both in the study areas and in similar cases (PM 26)

M2.1 – Meeting to facilitate partner exchange on lessons learnt from the field (PM 26).

10.3 Focusing on cross-border pollution and transnational wildlife crime

Objective: Understanding whether transboundary biodiversity conservation in the case studies allows for specific mechanisms to both prevent and enforce cross-border pollution and transnational wildlife crime legislation (including administrative law, civil law, and criminal law).

T3.1 – Identifying specific governance features for the prevention and enforcement of cross-border pollution in the four study areas, based on the results of field activities (PM 24-30) (University of Ghent)

T3.2 – Identifying specific governance features for the prevention and enforcement of transnational wildlife crime in the four study areas, based on the results of field activities (PM 24-30) (URV)

T3.3 – Conducting specific follow-up interviews with stakeholders and enforcement agencies, if needed (PM 28-30) (URV and University of Ghent)

T3.4 – Developing criteria to both identify and evaluate best practices in the field of cross-border pollution and transnational wildlife crime (PM 30-32) (URV and University of Ghent)

D3.1 – Additional interviews’ transcripts (if any) (PM 31)

D3.2 – Compilation of best practices on cross-border pollution and wildlife crime (PM 32)

D3.3 – Working paper(s) on the prevention and enforcement of cross-border pollution (at least 1, comparative for all study areas) (PM 32)

D3.4 – Working paper(s) on the prevention and enforcement of wildlife crime (at least 1, comparative for all study areas) (PM 32)

M3.1 – Meeting to facilitate partner exchange on aspects related to cross-border pollution and wildlife crime (PM 31).

10.4 Evaluating the effectiveness of transboundary governance and streamlining research results into policy

Objective: Evaluating the effectiveness of transboundary biodiversity governance with reference to coordination, participation, conflict-resolution mechanisms, and the existence of mechanisms to prevent and enforce transboundary pollution and wildlife crime; producing policy recommendations to inform the policy-making process.

T4.1 – Developing draft policy recommendations on how to improve the effectiveness of transboundary biodiversity governance (PM 27-29) (all)

T4.2 – Collecting inputs on the draft policy recommendations from concerned stakeholders and policymakers (online meeting(s)) (PM 30) (Eurac)

T4.3 – Fine-tuning the policy recommendations based on stakeholders' inputs with specific reference to elements such as coordination, the inclusion of local perspectives and participation (both in each study area and in a transboundary context), conflict resolution mechanisms, the prevention and enforcement of transboundary pollution and wildlife crime (PM 31-36) (all)

T4.4 – Publishing on the effectiveness of transboundary biodiversity governance (PM 30-36) (all)

D4.1 – 6 peer-reviewed publications in international journals (PM 36)

D4.2 – Specific policy recommendations for each study area (PM 36)

D4.3 – Policy recommendations for international, European, transnational organizations (PM 36)

M4.1 – Draft policy recommendations presented to stakeholders and policymakers (PM 30).

10.5 Ensuring the dissemination and communication of project outputs and results

Objective: Engaging with stakeholders and policy-makers in a stable way, communicating the advancements of the project to a wider public, disseminating research results, ensuring that research results are available and understandable for end-users, as described in the Dissemination and Communication Plan.

T5.1 – Developing a detailed Dissemination and Communication Plan (PM 1-5) (all)

T5.2 – Developing a project visual identity/logo(s) (PM 1-7) (Eurac)

T5.3 – Creating a dedicated website and a Zenodo community for the sharing of open access files (PM 1-7) (Eurac)

T5.4 – Disseminating the results within academia through publications and participation in conferences (PM 18-36) (all)

T5.5 – Disseminating the results among stakeholders and study areas (PM 12-36) (all)

T5.6 – Disseminating the results to end-users (PM 30-36) (all)

T5.7 – Communicating the results to the general public (PM 8-36) (all)

T5.8 – Organizing the final conference (PM 34-36) (all; leadership: University of Ghent)

D5.1 – Dissemination and Communication Plan, including social media strategy (PM 5)

D5.2 – Project logo(s) (PM 7)

D5.3 – Project website and Zenodo community (PM 7)

D5.4 – Videos with short inputs by key-stakeholders, resulting from WP1 stakeholder meetings (to be published on the project's website) (PM 8 and to be updated throughout the project)

D5.5 – Infographics on the project website to illustrate the most important results and press releases if relevant (PM 36)

D5.6 – Blog posts on results of WPs 2, 3 and 4 (PM 36)

D5.7 – Yearly newsletter (PM 12, 20 and 30)

D5.8 – Additional short videos on the project results to be published on the project website (PM 36)

D5.9 – Live-streaming of the final conference (PM 36).

10.6 Management and coordination

Objective: Coordinating and supervising both the scientific and administrative project activities among the partners within the WPs, monitoring quality and timing of results' delivery, and carrying out the overall administrative and financial management of the project.

T6.1 – Overall legal and contractual management (PM 1-36) (all)

T6.2 – Financial and administrative management, including establishing communication flow and decisionmaking strategies in the project consortium, coordinating activities with the Biodiversa+ Secretariat and national funding authorities, establishing methods for reporting, progress monitoring, and ensuring quality (PM 1-36) (all)

T6.3 – Organization of online kick-off and periodical partner meetings (Strategic and Technical Board, see section 7 below), except for 1 in-presence meeting in PM 26 (10 in total) (PM 1-36) (all)

T6.4 – Monitoring of project activities and work progress (PM 1-36) (all)

T6.5 – Managing financial, legal, administrative, and technical risks along the project implementation (PM 1-36) (all)

T6.6 – Managing data throughout the implementation of all relevant project activities (PM 1-36) (all)

T6.7 – Integrating and monitoring ethics aspects (PM 1-36) (all)

D6.1 – Six-monthly progress report (PM 6,12, 18, 24, 30)

D6.2 – Project’s Vademecum for partners (PM 4)

D6.3 – Project’s Risk Management Plan (PM 6)

D6.4 – Data Management Plan (PM 6)

D6.5 – Ethics Plan (PM 9).