

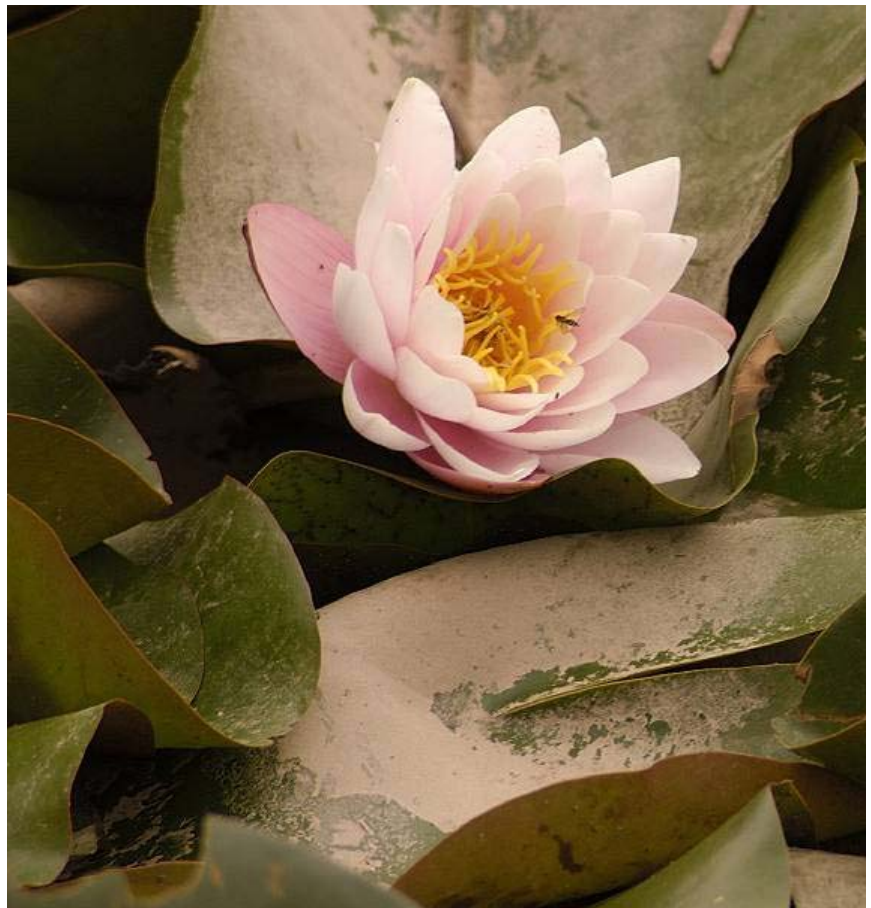


Identification and analysis of the main obstacles for applicants in EU-12 countries for submitting proposals for a LIFE+ funding

Final Report

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Johan Lammerant & Sofie Willems



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 1992, while many other EU funding programmes have environmental components the EU LIFE programme has been the only programme devoted entirely to supporting the development and implementation of environmental policy in the Member States of the European Union. For the period 2007-2013 the LIFE+ Regulation is in force, being the follow-up of the former LIFE III programme. It includes 3 components:

- Nature and Biodiversity (LIFE+ NAT)
- Environment Policy and Governance (LIFE+ ENV)
- Information and Communication (LIFE+ INF)

The LIFE+ funding instrument allocates an indicative yearly budget to the member states for the co-financing of projects. However, up till now, the EU12 countries have not been able to fully absorb these indicative national allocations. The LIFE+ unit has ordered this study to identify the main obstacles for applicants in EU12 countries for submitting proposals for LIFE+ funding. The objectives are to understand the reasons for the low success, to identify and analyse the main obstacles for applicants to submit proposals and to make concrete and realistic recommendations for the LIFE unit on how to better address these obstacles. Also recommendations for the Member States were prepared.

The study started with a selection of 6 representative EU12 countries, based on their individual performance (number of proposals submitted and success rate in 2007 and 2008). The selected countries were Romania, Cyprus, Poland, Latvia, Hungary and Czech Republic.

Based on a desk survey, other co-financing instruments and programmes which are available for the co-financing of the types of projects that can theoretically be financed by LIFE+ were identified, at a European, international, national and local level. Following this desk survey, 34 people of EC staff of different DGs were interviewed and 60 interviews were conducted in the selected countries based on questionnaires, to discuss synergies with other funding programmes and constraints perceived by the applicants to submit proposals. The local interviewees were asked to score the constraints in order of importance, and to suggest recommendations to address these constraints.

The main other funding programmes at EU level presenting synergies with LIFE+ are CIP Eco-innovation for LIFE+ ENV and the structural funds for LIFE+ NAT. Also at local level, some instruments exist that might fund potential LIFE+ projects. However, these similarities were not perceived as a large constraint. On the other hand, at EC level financial constraints such as the low co-financing rate and some financial requirements (low invoicing frequency in comparison to large project budgets, long period before payment of last instalment) of the LIFE+ programme were pointed out as the main problems. The long duration of the selection procedure was also identified as an important constraint. Some other constraints at EC level were low effectiveness of the LIFE+ information seminars, obligation to fulfill the 'complementarity requirement' of the LIFE+ Regulation, huge confusion and misperception regarding 'innovation' criterion and the perceived lack of support to National Focal Points. Some strong assets of the LIFE+

programme are the fact that it is a centralised funding scheme (decisions are taken in Brussels) and the high performance of the LIFE+ website.

At Member State level, main identified constraints differed from country to country but in general a lack of interest in LIFE+ by national authorities, as well as a lack of support from the NFPs and a lack of visibility of LIFE+ in the country, were mentioned as main problems. In some countries the unstable institutional framework, high bureaucracy and/or a lack of competences at local level were identified as important constraints.

Several ways of addressing the above mentioned obstacles were identified. After internal consultations the LIFE Unit decided to take a number of measures to address these constraints as far as possible. Some constraints can only be dealt with by means of revising the LIFE+ Regulation eg. the co-financing rate, but an important number of constraints can be addressed in short term. To reduce the burden of the long waiting time before the last instalment is paid the LIFE Unit decided to change the invoicing ratio from 40/30/30 to 40/40/20. Other short term measures at EC level are increasing efficiency of the LIFE+ seminars, delivering more support to the NFPs by means of an intensive train-the-trainer course and paying more attention to clarifying certain issues eg the complementarity requirement and the innovation criterion.

However, it is important to realise that also at Member State level (similar) actions can be taken to address the main obstacles, with perhaps an even larger impact. Member States could provide for extra co-financing, make more promotion for LIFE+, organise proposal writers' seminars, implement an informal pre-screening phase, offer more insight in differences with other funding schemes, etc. The impact can be very significant, as was shown by Poland, that increased its funding absorption from 2,5% to 78% in 2 years.

This example could inspire other Member States and should be therefore promoted. However, willingness of Member States to act in favour of LIFE+ will always be a national responsibility that can only be influenced by the EC in a minor degree. Therefore actions at EC level to address the current obstacles hence still remain necessary.