

Mobilizing values for wetland conservation in Europe: cases from France, Germany and Latvia

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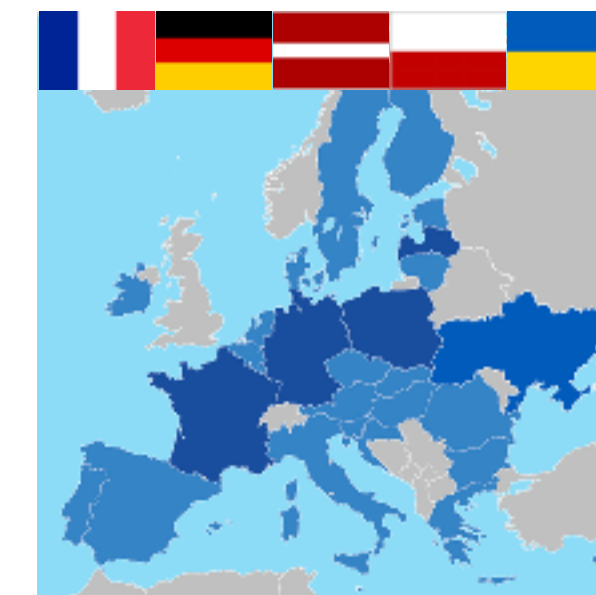
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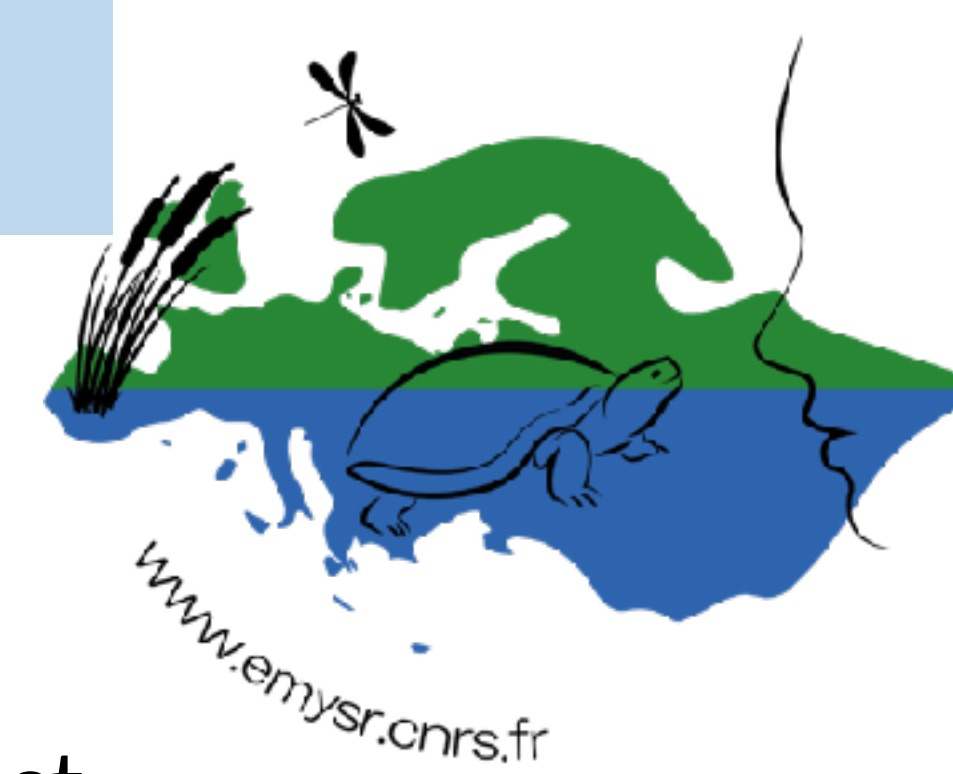
The Emys-R project



A 3-yr transdisciplinary action-oriented research project

- for defining the most efficient, socially-supported, ecological methods to restore wetlands in favour of *Emys* reintroduction and associated biodiversity in Europe;
- based on long term monitoring on 3 study sites in FR, DE and LV





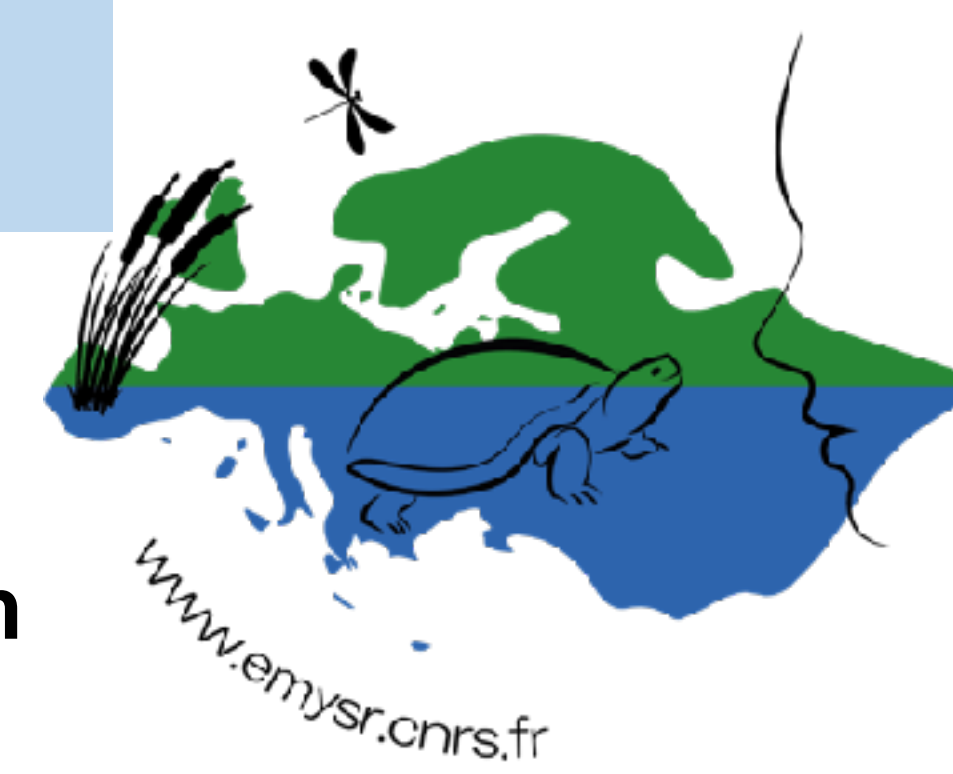
Wetlands - rapidly disappearing biodiversity-rich socio-ecosystems (IPBES, 2019)

Study sites - Natura 2000 EU legal conservation framework but all very different!

European pond turtle (*Emys orbicularis*) - rare, threatened, reintroduced, under strict protection.

Turtles hold significant cultural symbolism worldwide BUT! MAINLY SEA TURTLES representing „charismatic megafauna,” (Mazzoldi et al., 2019). **Very little research on how European pond turtle conservation and reintroduction are perceived socially**, esp. as an animal with such little charisma?... (Hoorn, 2016; Chiu, 2019; Kitolelei et al., 2022; Campbell, 2022).

POINT OF DEPARTURE - when environmental policy and management consider people’s relationships with nature, it benefits both society and nature (e.g. Berkes et al., 2003; Chapin et al., 2009; Lam et al., 2020; Ganzleben & Kazimierczak, 2020; Brondizio et al., 2021; Solomonian & Di Ruggiero, 2021; Jones et al., 2022; Souther et al., 2023). **Community-led conservation demonstrate benefits** (e.g. Brook et al., 2013; Young et al., 2021; Meyer & Börner, 2022).



How values held by local communities on an individual and collective level concerning wetlands in their neighborhoods constitute barriers or drivers for conservation community engagement?

What are institutional (non)engagement practices that does not stem from official policies (un-written rules)?

Can a new community engagement quality emerge when these two are „seated at the one table”?

Even better - can some draft procedural framework/guideline for local communities be worked out based on this „seating at one table”, on how to engage based on what values are held by local community? Ideally without heavy external funding and scientists?....



Photos: N. Busser & J. Meka



Objective 1: to identify and understand values and their role in behavior in favor of wetland governance, specifically restoration and Emys reintroduction in local communities.

=>

- 1) What are the values?
- 2) Which of them may be interpreted as potentially supporting conservation, and which of them as potentially hindering conservation?

→ semi-structured interviews

Objective 2: to identify systemic levers and barriers to transition in governance at each site.

- 1) what institutional and other factors constitute drivers or barriers for community engagement in wetland and Emys conservation?
- 2) What practices concerning conservation and community engagement exist but are not formal institutional rules?
- 3) What is the gap between people's perceptions and values and formal and non-formal conservation and community engagement practices?
- 4) How can values be mobilized for increased community engagement in conservation efforts?

→ semi-structured interviews, document analysis, participatory modelling workshops = *searching for Leverage points, esp. deep ones (Abson et al., 2017) and see how people can respond/act from their values*



Local inhabitant in Neuburg am Rhein (DE) being interviewed, sharing his very rich knowledge about local nature (fot. P. Romaniuk)

Objective 3: to build a framework for "value-based" participatory wetland conservation engagement based on the described theoretical approach and research findings.

=> How can pro-environmental values for local wetlands and socio-ecosystem sustainability be mobilized?

→ participatory modelling workshops



Initial stages of data analysis, so no definitive results yet, but some interesting threads are:

- A lot of TLK - „traditional and local knowledge” is not ‚used’ by decision-makers;
- health - biodiversity dilemma: mosquitoes (esp. in FR and DE)! People support spraying natural areas against mosquitoes, but this affects the trophic chain and contributes indirectly to biodiversity loss;
- patterns: in Latvia, majority of interviewees declare they are „scared of wetlands”, avoid them (why? Working hypothesis - due to folk tales still alive in Latvian culture, where wetlands are ‚evil’);
- more people than expected would like to be engaged, but that does not meet with the willingness to engage from some land managers (why? „This space is for nature, not for people” - passive attitude);
- pattern of people wanting to „do something good for nature together with others and then spend a good time e.g. having a picnic together” - community aspect - can it be realized?





Thank you!