



Final Report Peer-review: Governance and collaboration for river restoration and blue-green infrastructure.

**Peer Review hosted by
Ajuntament de Quart de Poblet & Fundació Limne**

Date: 21-22 June 2022

Venue:
QUART JOVE

**Carrer de la Torreta, 1.
46930, Quart de Poblet (SPAIN).**

1. Brief presentation and motivation to host a peer review¹

The hosts - Quart de Poblet Council's & Limne Foundation

During a conversation with the Interreg Europe PLP team after the e-Workshop on 'Living Rivers' (June 2021) Limne expressed an interest for a Peer Review or a Matchmaking on river restoration. Quart de Poblet Council's formally applied to the Interreg Europe Peer to peer call in November 2021 taking into account its role and the necessity on the regional and local level to support Turia's river restoration and its role as a keystone of the blue-green infrastructure.

Since the last consolidated text of the Hydrological Plans (linked to the Law of Waters) municipalities have new competences in urban rivers and their riverbeds, although authorization from the River Basin Agency is mandatory. In this regard, the General Structural Plan (urban planning) provisionally approved by Quart de Poblet Town Council and as a review of its urban planning in 2002, Quart de Poblet has integrated the blue-green infrastructure defined in its planning cartography.

Within the framework of the UN strategy and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals SDG, the Local Urban Agenda 2030 places the management of green infrastructure in urban and peri-urban areas, highlighting SDG 6 (Clean water and basic sanitation), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 13 (Climate action) and 15 (life of terrestrial ecosystems).

LIMNE is a non-profit foundation created in 2007 by scientists with extensive training and experience in freshwater ecosystems and their management in both rivers and Mediterranean wetlands. LIMNE specializes in biodiversity research and the mitigation of anthropogenic impacts on aquatic environments through practical river restoration and nature-based solutions, including the participation of society and public-private partnerships.

LIMNE's four main lines of action are: i) restoration of rivers and wetlands through land stewardship, ii) community science, iii) environmental volunteering and iv) environmental education.

¹ Both this section 1 on motivation and section 2 on challenges are further developed in the peer-review base-document "**Public-social-private river governance and green infrastructure in Quart de Poblet, Comunitat Valenciana, Spain**" available at <https://www.limne.org/2022/06/19/peer-review-governanca-i-collaboracio-per-a-la-restauracio-fluvial/>

2. Policy challenges encountered

Policy addressed – current situation and challenges

Concerned about the disconnection of the Túria riverbed from the towns it runs through and returning it to its natural course, both hosts have collaborated in various projects since 2012, which include a river restoration project and the management of an Environmental Interpretation Centre.

LIMNE and Quart de Poblet City Council applied to collaborate in a Peer Review of the Interreg Europe programme, with the aim of **improving the public-social-private governance** of the district river ecosystems, working on the **restoration of the urban riverside**, in compliance with article 28.4 of Law 10/2001 dated on July 5 of the National Hydrological Plan, and promoting an active participation process in line with Directive 2000/60/EC.

These collaborations between the public, social and private sectors must result in improvements in the Valencian Community Green Infrastructure in general and, in particular, in the connectivity between the Túria Natural Park and the El Poio ravine, and the Albufera Natural Park in Valencia.

Expected impact from the programme

In this sense, and within the framework of the LIMNE - City Council collaboration, a proposal was submitted to seek assistance in the conservation and rehabilitation of riparian ecosystems in the urban stretch of the Túria River affected by periodic flooding. Through the application of **Solutions based on Nature** (e.g. control and management of Invasive Alien Species, restoration of riverbanks, stabilization of margins, bioengineering, removal of infrastructure, etc.) it is intended to **favour the resilience** of these ecosystems **against episodes of flooding and climate change**.

Long-term management, restoration and conservation of sensitive ecosystems such as rivers and wetlands involve a **wide range of actors**, including public administrations, private parties, as well as local NGOs and environmental groups. For this reason, adequate policies, regulations and governance structures are required for the correct management and conservation of the elements which comprise the blue-green infrastructure.

Given the seriousness of the social and environmental problems which society is facing, all parties involved (companies and other organizations in the productive sector, citizens, non-profits) are urged to create alliances so that, alongside public powers, they can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets to restore biological diversity and enhance the public benefits it provides.

In Spain, the concept of collaborations, alliances or "partnerships" between the public sector and civil society is of a diffuse nature. The concept of public-private collaboration has a very broad meaning

which arose from company collaboration in the construction of public infrastructures. However, the dynamism of society and public administrations has gone beyond the ambit of infrastructures to embrace collaboration in other areas (educational, environmental, cultural, etc.) between the public sector and others, non-public who, therefore, are included in the broad category of "private".

Based on these thoughts, **two main questions were addressed** to the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform:

1. What mechanisms can be used to make the long-term collaboration between the town council, the Limne Foundation and other NGOs more effective in the question of river management and restoration? How do the regional and Basin administrations fit into this collaboration? What actions and needs can be identified in the collaboration between LIMNE / city council and what instruments can give them stability and transparency?
2. How can a Town Council become involved in the broader policies of the district for the governance of green infrastructure, the 2030 agenda and in collaboration with other administrations with more specific competence in the matter? What means, obligations and actions are necessary for this?

Expected impact from the peer review

Quart de Poblet Town Council, in collaboration with the LIMNE Foundation, wishes to improve the governance structure of the river courses and their surroundings, as part of the town's Blue/Green Infrastructure. The application addresses biodiversity restoration and conservation of rivers, wetlands and their surrounding landscapes. The long-term management, restoration and conservation of these sensitive ecosystems involves a wide range of parties and involves exploring the governance of the river environment considering its technical, legal and public policy aspects.

The expected result of the exchange-Peer Review is to **share knowledge and experiences** in order to **modify and improve existing policies for the fluvial landscape and wetlands**, and in relation to the Green Infrastructure and Landscape Plan of the Valencian Community. All the aforementioned by understanding the Green Infrastructure as a result of a governance of public-private action in these places.

Therefore, both hosts believe that a peer review can be of significant value for the establishment of new policies regarding river restoration and improvement of the blue/green infrastructure.

3. Participants

After approval of the project call and drafting a background paper, Interreg Europe selected peers from Ireland, Italy, Spain, France and the United Kingdom with relevant knowledge in river restoration and/or with experience in tools for public-social-private partnerships or land stewardship contracts. The meeting also counted with the participation of two lecturers from Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, in the Netherlands, who reviewed the process to be adapted and applied to practical lecturing trials of the peer-review methodology.

List of participants:



Name	Organization	Role
Bartolomé Nofuentes	Municipal Councilor of European Cooperation, Quart de Poblet	Host
Juan Medina	Municipal Councilor of Planning and Environment, Quart de Poblet	Host
Sales Tomàs	Limne Foundation, Quart de Poblet	Host

John Jones	Norfolk County Council, United Kingdom	Peer (Invited but unable to attend)
Constanze O'Toole	The Rivers Trust, Ireland	Peer (online)
Jose Ramon Díez López	University of the Basque Country, Spain	Peer
Alexandra Maccario	Ville de Cagnes-sur-Mer, France	Peer
Francesco Scorza	University of Basilicata, Italy	Peer
Marc García	Júcar Hydrographic Confederation's water commissioner, Spain	External Stakeholder
Eva Beltrán	Head of the department of Environmental Quality, Júcar Hydrographic Confederation, Spain	External Stakeholder
Vicente Domenech	Deputy Director-General of Regional Planning, Department of Taxation, Valencia Regional Government, Spain	External Stakeholder
Mauro Montesinos	Spanish Electricity Network (REE)	External Stakeholder
Pepe Sierra	Coordinator for the 2030 Agenda, Global Omnium, Spain	External Stakeholder
Jordi Pietx	International relations, Limne	Advisor
Antonio Ruiz	Forum of Stewardship Networks and Entities (FRECT), Spain	Advisor
Thorsten Kohlisch	Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform	Project Manager

Astrid Severin	Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform	Thematic Expert
Magda Michalikova	Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform	Thematic Expert
Katrin Buttgen	Lecturer (Observer)	Zuyd University of Applied Sciences (NL)
Sofija Grbic	Lecturer (Observer)	Zuyd University of Applied Sciences (NL)



After the first conversations with the peers, it became clear very fast that setting public-social-private partnerships for ecological restoration is a key topic with a lot of potential for discussion. This helped during the peer review since there was a wide understanding for the issues we tried to tackle.

Three main pillars of dissertation and debate were settled:

- Governance framework
- Tools for public-social-private partnerships
- Funding scheme.

The peers themselves could also gain some interesting insights in the way of the hosts' approach to set alliances to reinforce river restoration.

Due to the involvement of different experts from all over Europe, both hosts tried to get some key insights in the challenges of policy making on river restorations and blue/green infrastructure implementation. All inputs had an important contribution to our draft of future projects and programs. At the same time, Quart de Poblet Council's & LIMNE were pleased to receive the following policy recommendations from the team of thematic experts and our European group of peers:

4. Policy Recommendations



Due to their diverse while common expertise in similar issues to the faced governance challenges in the peer review, the peers managed to quickly gain insights on three main focuses:

1. Governance framework.
2. Tools for public-social-private partnerships.
3. Funding scheme.

Key insights / Recommendations

To put it in a nutshell the following are the most important insights and recommendations both hosts received. The recommendations are supported by a detailed presentation with highlights on suggestions by all participating peers.

Topic	Key insights / Recommendations
<i>Governance framework</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Efficient collaboration on river management and restoration leads to i) increased public awareness of issues and remedial actions; ii) Better outcomes and management decisions, as more perspectives are addressed; iii) Encouragement of positive action by citizens; iv) Increased public support for (and engagement in) outcomes/decisions taken; v) Creating a culture of cooperation, embedding longer-enduring outcomes, and delivering sustainable change.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ As part of the efficient collaboration above, find first all actors who could have interest to the project
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Social learning involves the integration of the different “frames” of stakeholders. Frames influence how people see reality.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Stakeholders in river-basin management have different geographical and issue-related areas of interest and they operate at different spatial scales. The relevant competencies are usually spread over different authorities. Implementing a multistakeholder process involves the creation of at least one new boundary, the boundary around the process.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ “Commoning” success factor for structuring collaboration → the individual has tangible – both real and perceived – control over the act of shaping their own living conditions.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Need to advance in the revision of protocols for participation in ecological restoration at different scales and levels of governance.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Propose legal, administrative, financial and governance measures to integrate participatory processes at different scales and in different phases of restoration. ✓ Promote systems for evaluating the efficiency of participation.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have restoration demonstration projects that consider exemplarity criteria, (ii) existing exemplar cases, (iii) needed exemplar cases, (iv) explanatory documentation and (v) means to facilitate transfer and access to information.
<i>Tools for public-social-private partnerships</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Multi-thematic, integrated approach: environment, floods, activities, land...
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Build a collaborative project: multi-stakeholder consultation: exchanging data, sharing diagnostics, orientations and scenario → technical meeting in cycle from the smallest to the widest.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Citizen participation: communication and active local animation: mobilization, listening, sensibilization on the issues, sharing knowledge, experiences, social expectations, and organize the restitution.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Successful public-social-private partnerships can enable catchment groups to carry out water quality and habitat protection and enhancement works by providing long-term core funding to cover staff costs and essential organization requirements.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Catchment organizations that are properly resourced can be active participants in achieving the objectives of the Water Framework Directive.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Success factors (knowledge, participation) are linked to specific tools to reinforce partnerships, such as ecosystem services metrics or geodesign.
<i>Funding scheme</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) → a promising concept to place value on nature and to reduce the

	overexploitation.
	✓ Sponsorship schemes: different types of funding options, carbon sequestration
	✓ Volunteering – involvement of companies, part of their CSR activities

5. Calendar of implementation

- Next Steps for the governance and collaboration strategy for river restoration and blue/green infrastructure in Quart de Poblet:
 - Quart de Poblet Council’s Department of Sustainable Urban Development is currently carrying out a participatory process with workshops and sectoral meetings as well as with citizens to address the challenges of the SDGs. The objective is to create a mission statement and a plan of action to execute the 2030 Agenda, prioritizing a proposal for the future, through which a desirable scenario is to be established after the implementation of the Urban Agenda, addressing full inclusion in the town design.
 - Limne has announced a 3-years project called Fluviatilis and focused on developing citizen participation in river conservation through land stewardship, nature-based solutions and bioeconomy/green employment programs. The project has the support of the Biodiversity Foundation of the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (MITECO) within the framework of the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan (PRTR), financed with NextGenerationEU funds.
 - Cooperation opportunities from Peers & PLP are ongoing to establish new territorial partnerships (future projects) or participate on site visits/workshops (f.i. workshop in Cagnes-sur-Mer on 27 October 2022 on the topic of "Natural and cultural heritage in coastal regions").
- Inform peers and Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform about lessons learned from implementation of program.
- An interview with the Policy Learning Platform (in 12 months) → as an opportunity to discuss the state of play, the implementation process, the way recommendations have (or not) been taken on board.

New activities based on the recommendations	Lead (AjQuart / LIMNE)	3Q - 2022	4Q - 2022	1Q - 2023	2Q- 2023
Public-social-private partnership: Hosts will sign a binding collaboration agreement	Limne				
Tools for public-social-private partnerships: measurement of ecosystem services metrics & public perception	Limnes				
Nature-based Solutions (NbS)	Limne				
Citizen participation: design of NbS routes.	Limne				
Social learning: training courses, finding different actors, focus educational workshops.	Limne				
Commonig & geodesign: The establishment of a 'citizen participation' forum on rivers	Quart de poblet				
Commonig & Geodesign: Technical seminar on the Turia river governance framework. Open to practitioners, non-governmental organizations, scholars & citizens.	Quart de poblet				
Citizen participation: environmental volunteering & educational/training courses	Limne				
Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES)	Limne				

Sponsorship schemes: carbon sequestration	Limne				
Involvement of companies, part of their CSR activities	Limne				

6. Conclusions

The Peer Review on the topic of “Governance and collaboration for river restoration and blue-green infrastructure” was a highly valuable opportunity to gain insights from EU experts. For both host the peer review was a very good basis to build on the next initiatives for ensuring successful implementation of new governance policies.

The peer review agenda elaborated by the Interreg Europe PLP and coordinated with the hosts lead to a very constructive structure so that the topics were considered from different perspectives. Interreg Europe PLP representatives, peers and stakeholders highly contributed for gaining comprehensive understanding of the goals of the hosts and rapidly faced policy challenges and addressed new ones, such as funding schemes.

Notwithstanding the above, further efforts are required to manage and evaluate legal and institutional mechanisms and policies², as well as factors affecting risk on public-social-private partnerships.

Valuable feedback and insights were received so Quart de Poblet City Council’s & LIMNE will be happy to continue the dialogue with the peers to foster new ideas and alliances. Both hosts are open to share with the Interreg Europe community their know-how concerning the development and implementation of their governance and collaboration strategy.

Quart de Poblet City Council’s & LIMNE highly recommend the Peer Review in the development process of similar projects to fellow public entities and non-profits. We, the hosts, thank all experts for sharing their expertise and ideas. Special thanks also to the Interreg Europe PLP and their great team for the wonderful guidance and expertise.

² Conventions, contracts, bidding processes and other pacts or agreements.