ESMERALDA

Report on Management Plan and Self-Assessment

Deliverable D1.5

25 July 2016

Benjamin Burkhard & Anja Uhlenbrok

ESMERALDA

Enhancing ecosystem services mapping

for policy and decision making

Prepared under contract from the European Commission

Grant agreement No. 642007
EU Horizon 2020 Coordination and support action

Project acronym:	**ESMERALDA**
Project full title:	**Enhancing ecosystem services mapping for policy and decision making**
Start of the project:	February 2015
Duration:	42 months
Project coordinator:	Dr. Benjamin Burkhard, Christian Albrechts University Kiel
Project website	www.esmeralda-project.eu

Deliverable title:	Report on Management Plan and Self-Assessment
Deliverable n°:	D1.5
Nature of the deliverable:	Report
Dissemination level:	Confidential
WP responsible:	WP1
Lead beneficiary:	CAU

Citation:	Burkhard, B. & Uhlenbrok, A. (2016). *Report on Management Plan and Self-Assessment*. Deliverable 1.5 EU Horizon 2020 ESMERALDA Project, Grant agreement No. 642007.

Due date of deliverable:	Month 18
Actual submission date:	Month 18

Deliverable status:

Version	Status	Date	Author(s)
1.0	Draft	25 July 2016	Benjamin Burkhard & Anja Uhlenbrok CAU
	Draft	26 July 2016	Pavel Stoev, Marion Potschin, Fernando Santos, Joachim Maes
2.0	Final	27. July 2016	Benjamin Burkhard CAU

_____

Table of contents

Preface

ESMERALDA is a Supporting and Coordination Action aiming at helping EU member states to fulfil their obligations under the EU Biodiversity Strategy Target 2, Action 5. In order to fulfil these tasks, the project is organised in four key activity phases of which the first two "Networking and stakeholder involvement" as well as "Developing flexible tools for mapping and assessment" have successfully been started and carried out during the first 18 months of the project. This report gives a brief overview of the management and self-assessment of the project activities and the available resources. More detailed information about project outcomes can be found in the respective Work Package Deliverables.

Summary

An efficient and strong coordination of project activities as well as a coherent and transparent administrative and financial management are mandatory for the success of a project. Thereby it will be ensured that ESMERALDA reaches its overall goals in time and all project partners are appropriately involved. All project activities and the financial management were carried out according to the project's Description of Action (DoA) and did not show major derivations during the first 18 months of the project.

The main tasks of the project management and self-assessment (WP1) are to ensure that the work of all 25 consortium partners is carried out as planned and that the overall goals and objectives of the project are reached. The consortium management and self-assessment were carried out by the various consortium bodies, including the Management Support Team, Executive Board, Work Packages and their leaders, Project Panels, Science-Policy-Society-Advisory Board and General Assembly.

_____

1. Management structures

According to the project's DoA, the consortium established simple and straightforward management structures with clearly defined roles and responsibilities based on individual competencies for the respective role. The collaboration within the consortium can count on a high level of trust among partner organisations and project bodies. For the management of the different project components, Work Package Teams, the Project Executive Board and topic Panels were formed. The General Assembly and the International Advisory Board oversee project management-relevant activities and the general performance of the project, including the appropriate completion or termination of the project.

1.1. Creation of project governance

The project organisation has been established in accordance with the project's Description of Action (DoA) and consists of the Project Coordinator and the Management Support Team, the Executive Board, the Work Packages, Panels, the General Assembly and the Scientific Advisory Board. All project-relevant actions are overseen by the Project Officer from the European Commission (see Figure 1).

Figure 1:   ESMERALDA Project Governance structure (from DoA, P. 38).
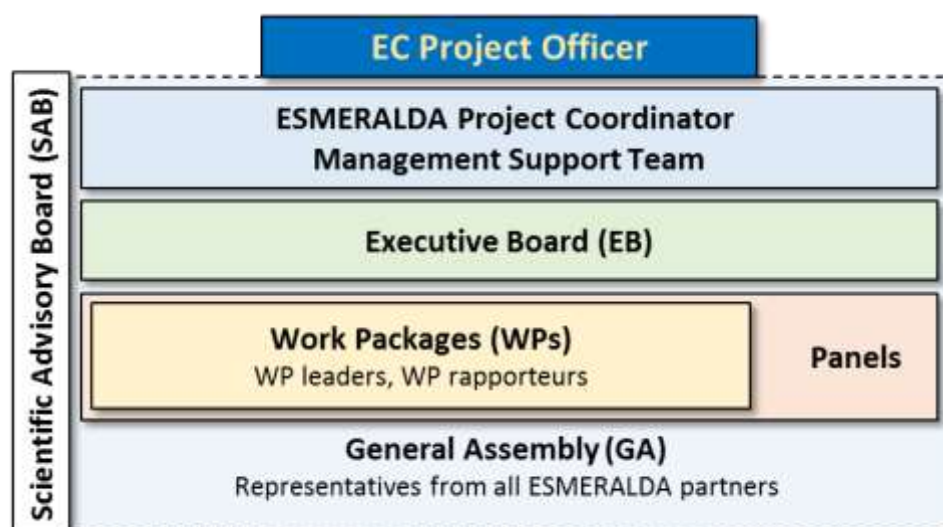
1.1.1.   Project Coordinator and the Management Support Team

The **Project Management Office (PMO)** supports the coordination tasks of the project. Together with the Executive Board, it constitutes the management, assisted by the Science-Policy-Society Advisory Board (SPSAB). The PMO has been established at partner Kiel University (CAU) and includes the scientific coordinator Benjamin Burkhard and the part-time administrative-financial project manager Anja Uhlenbrok. The PMO started its work on February 1st 2015 and has been permanently approachable for all aspects of the day-to-day project management. The PMO is lead by a researcher with experience in project management, ecosystem service (ES) mapping and assessment and their implementation. It ensures that the work of the 25 consortium partners in the six work packages is carried out as planned and that the overall goals and objectives of the project are reached. The PMO

_____

also carries out daily coordination's administrative, legal and financial duties with the European Commission, the Project Officer and with all project partners. The scientific Coordinator also has support in form of two deputies, i.e. Joachim Maes (JRC) and Marion Potschin (UNOTT).

1.1.2. Executive Board

The Executive Board (EB) carries out the general steering of the project and takes decisions on direction and priorities of the project at the highest level. It was established in April 2015 and approved by telecommunication vote of the General Assembly. The EB has held 10 meetings until July 1st 2016. The EB consists of the six WP leaders and a leading scientist from JRC. The EB thus includes and unites the expertise of coordination and integration (WP1, lead participant CAU), of stakeholder network and implementation (WP2, lead participant SYKE), mapping methods (WP3, lead participant UAM), assessment methods (WP4, lead participant UNOTT), methods testing (WP5, lead participant UNITN), dissemination and knowledge exchange (WP6, lead participant Pensoft) and EU/MAES-relevant experience and contacts (lead participant JRC). The EB constantly checks the finalised deliverables and provides for their prompt submission (see 'project reporting strategy' below).

Four face-to-face EB meetings took place on the occasion of the ESMERALDA Kick-off meeting, the project workshops in Riga and Nottingham and the SPSAB and MAES meeting in Brussels. The other meetings were held via teleconferencing (Skype). The EB is chaired by the project Coordinator and reported to the General Assembly during the project Workshop in Nottingham in April 2016. In addition, minutes of the EB meetings are taken and communicated within the EB before they are published in the internal area of the project website.

1.1.3. Work Packages

The six ESMERALDA Work Packages (WPs) are operating as coordinating groups for the major scientific areas of the project. Each work package has a respective leader that reports regularly to the EB about WP-related activities and progress. The WP leaders can delegate tasks to task leaders but are supervising the achievement of project Deliverables and Milestones as well as the timely delivery of respective reports.

1.1.4. Project panels

Project panels will be established by the EB to deal with specific horizontal issues such as the four ESMERALDA strands (Policy, Research, Application, Networking), technical, technology or scientific panels, intellectual property panels or exploitation and dissemination panels. A first panel has been established by the ESMERALDA EB in October 2015 dealing with "ecosystem mapping". The topic is, compared to ecosystem services mapping, slightly underrepresented in ESMERALDA. Therefore, Markus Erhard (EEA) was contacted and agreed to lead the respective project panel.

1.1.5. General Assembly

The General Assembly with representation of all partners was established according to the Consortium Agreement as the overall decision-making body of the project. The General Assembly is free to act on its own initiative to formulate proposals and take decisions in accordance with the procedures set out in the Consortium Agreement. In addition, proposals made by the Executive Board shall also be considered and decided upon by the General Assembly. Decisions like changes to the consortium plan, entry of new parties or other modifications of the Grant Agreement and its Annexes are expressly reserved to the General Assembly. It is chaired by the project Coordinator and has been constituted at the Kick-off meeting in May 2015. The General Assembly has held two basic management votes up to now, both by telecommunication means: 1) the confirmation of the Executive Board and 2) the

_____

confirmation of the agreement to a European Commission-initiated amendment of the Grant Agreement.

In addition, the intended consortium enlargement in order to integrate further EU member states and some minor organisational issues were discussed and voted face-to-face during the General Assembly meeting at the ESMERALDA Workshop in Nottingham on 14 April 2016.

1.1.6.   Science-Policy-Society-Advisory Board

The Science-Policy-Society-Advisory Board (SPSAB) consists of individuals from either parties that are not directly involved in the project or other third parties having expertise in the fields of ESMERALDA. The SPSAB was established based on personal invitations by the project Coordinator in the summer of 2015 and met for the first time on 16.09.2015 in Brussels. The members of the SPSAB were selected according to their highly relevant competences related to science, policy and societal application of ecosystem services mapping and assessment approaches. All AB members as listed below were confirmed by the General Assembly during the Kick off Meeting in Kiel. Regular meetings are scheduled for 2015, 2016 and 2017. Minutes of the meetings are or will be published on the project website as Milestone 5 reports.

Table 1:   Members of the ESMERALDA Science-Policy-Society-Advisory Board.

Name	Affiliation	Country	Specific expertise
Leon Braat	Alterra	The Netherlands	MAES AB, MESEU
Neville Crossman	CSIRO Adelaide	Australia	Economic ES mapping
Markus Erhard	European Environmental Agency	Denmark/EU	MAES AB, ES mapping
Berta Martín-López	Lüneburg University	Germany	Social-ecological ES mapping
Anne Teller	DG Environment	EU	EU implementation

The SPSAB provided recommendations for the further development of ESMERALDA to the EB during the first meeting in September 2015 (see Milestone 5 report). These recommendations included aspects of outreach, methods, policy impact and case studies. They became part of the project strategy and were presented to the consortium during the General Assembly at the second project workshop in Nottingham in April 2016.

2. Communication

The Project Coordinator is responsible for the general communication flow between the Project Management Office, the Executive Board, all project partners, the Project Officer and the European Commission as well as relevant stakeholders. A web-based Internal Communication Platform (ICP) has been developed (Deliverable 1.2) for the exchange of information, datasets, results, coordination decisions, minutes of meetings, reports and other relevant information. E-mail, videoconferences and the internet are primary means of communication in the project, reducing travel costs and carbon emissions. A specific communication and dissemination strategy has been developed for ESMERALDA by WP6 (Deliverable 6.2).

_____

2.1. Project internal communication

To ensure smooth information flow between project partners, related projects, networks and relevant stakeholders an external and internal communication platform has been created on the project website (see also ICP chapter in the more detailed Deliverable 6.1 report). The members of the EB maintain permanent communication about the implementation of the project tasks. In addition, all information relevant for the financial and legal administration of the partners is forwarded constantly by the project management office.

2.2. Exchange with the EC Project Officer

The exchange with the Project Officer is very important for the successful implementation and improves the quality of the project. A good working relationship and information in advance allows less administrative burden for the Consortium and the Project Officer. Therefore, the PMO communicates pro-actively with the Project Officer about relevant aspects of the project, such as the current state of work or expected deviations from the consortium progress and composition. The exchange with the Project Officer included intensive communication during the consortium agreement development phase in autumn 2014 and a fist meeting in Brussels in February 2015, shortly after the project had started. The communication resulted in continuous updates about recent developments and changes in the project implementation and execution. The possibility and opportunities of a consortium enlargement as a strategic decision have been discussed with the Project Officer and approved. The process shall start after the review of the first project report (see also item '5. Amendments' below).

2.3. Exchange with other related projects and initiatives

ESMERALDA is embedded in a whole set of projects and initiatives dealing with Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services (MAES). The co-operation with relevant projects and initiatives takes place a) on a more individual base by consortium members that are involved in various projects and initiatives, and b) a more formal way by exchanging project results (e.g. ESMERALDA MS31 about interoperability of results, i.e. BISE and OPPLA), participation and invitations to relevant events and further common initiatives. The EU-funded projects OpenNESS, Operas, MESEU and TRAIN were identified as being specifically relevant for ESMERALDA's first phase and close co-operation and exchanges are established in order to create synergies.

On EU level, several ESMERALDA consortium partners (e.g. JRC, CAU, UAM, UPOZ, SYKE, MTA OK, UNEP WCMC, SEPA) are active members of the EU MAES Working Group and join their twice-per-year-meetings in Brussels. ESMERALDA also actively links up with the EU outermost regions and the overseas territories. Contacts with the BEST (voluntary scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of European overseas) initiative of the EC have been established and a dedicated additional project Workshop dealing with these regions is planned to take place in spring 2017 on the Azores. Based on this, a MAES-Azores pilot and comparable studies in other outermost regions could be initiated with the help of ESMERALDA.

_____

3. Project Reporting Strategy

A project reporting strategy has been developed in ESMERALDA for an efficient and smooth delivery of all Deliverable and Milestone reports. It explicitly describes the delivery chain from report production, report review to final upload to the European Commission's project management system (SyGMa).

The strategy contains the following 10 steps of a successful report production:

1. Task leader/Deliverable/Milestone lead author in charge for the Deliverable/Milestone prepares the report in time (see DoA when reports are due), involving project partners that are relevant/competent for the respective Task.

2. Leader of the Work Package in which the Deliverable/Milestone is located (see DoA) supervises the timely report writing.

3. In case the report is delayed, the Coordinator shall be informed and a new delivery timeline/date has to be given.

4. Work Package leader sends the report draft in good time (latest 14 days before the report is due according to the DoA) to the whole EB for review.

5. All EB members have the chance to review and comment on the report. Competent consortium partners (from outside the EB) shall also be involved in the review process, invited by the WP leader based on recommendations from report author(s) and/or the EB.

6. At least 2-3 EB members should volunteer or be appointed (based on their competence) to review the report and circulate the document (based on a review schedule, indicating dates and persons) and send it back to the WP leader, who forwards it to the Deliverable/Milestone lead author.

7. The Deliverable/Milestone lead author works in the comments and sends a final version to all EB members.

8. All EB members have the chance to check the report again and give further advice and/or recommend the coordinator approval/non approval of the report.

9. The coordinator finally approves the report and uploads it to the SyGMa (Figure 2).

10. The reports are made available via the project's ICP, the coordinator updates all consortium members on a regular base about available reports.

_____

Figure 2:   The European Commission's online system for Grant Management SyGMa; ESMERALDA's Deliverable upload interface for continuous reporting.

4. Consortium Agreement

The relationships between the 25 consortium partners and their obligations and rights with respect to each other and the project are regulated by the Consortium Agreement. The Consortium Agreement is based on the DESCA model agreement and has been concluded in January 2015. It has been signed by all consortium partners at the beginning of the project.

5. Amendments

The European Commission initiated first Grant Agreement amendments. The General Assembly was asked to vote by email and approved the amendments. During the General Assembly in Nottingham in April 2016, the following mandate was given to the Coordinator in order to facilitate future cases: "The General Assembly of ESMERALDA grants power of attorney to the Coordinator CAU to sign EC-induced amendments of the Grant Agreement. The Coordinator shall inform the partners about the amendment without delay".

The PMO is currently preparing amendments of the project's Grant Agreement. The official amendment processes have however not yet started. The General Assembly authorised the Coordinator to prepare the project enlargement to include further EU member states and to apply for the respective amendment towards the European Commission. The ESMERALDA project wants to integrate additional partners from member states and associated countries that are not yet official partner of the consortium. ESMERALDA wants to provide support to as many European states as

_____

possible and also to cover the maximum possible share of European ecosystems and their services. For this reason, the Coordinator and the PMO contacted organisations from Ireland, Norway, Israel, Luxemburg, Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Estonia, Lithuania, Greece and Cyprus (see also Milestone 13 report). Negotiations about possible co-operations are currently being held. It is likely that 5-8 new partners will decide to eventually join the consortium. In addition, the legal succession of ESMERALDA partner CVGZ caused the need for a minor amendment. Furthermore, PI Benjamin Burkhard will change to Leibniz University Hannover (LUH) in autumn 2016, which shall become then the coordinating organisation.

6. Financial Management

According to the Grant Agreement, the pre-financing has been distributed without delay to 23 of the 25 consortium partners. ETH Zürich (Switzerland) does not receive funding by the European Commission and funding to the JRC is not transferred via the coordinating organisation. The pre-financing was distributed according to the individual proportional share of the respective partners, as there have not been any deviating agreements.

The PMO has been acting as the direct intermediary between the partners and the European Commission. The partners have been informed about financial issues where appropriate and necessary. This especially covers the introduction of the general financial rules and the relevant project documents during the Kick-off Meeting, introduction of financial issues-related institutions like National Contact Points (NCPs), distribution of relevant information like letters of the European Commission, modifications of the Annotated Grant Agreement (AGA), information about the process and the form of the financial report and individual supervision of partners in day-to-day business where requested. Individual supervision mostly included information about eligibility criteria.

In general, the budget was spent according to the budget plan in the GA. In consultation with partner BEF, CAU covered travel costs for several stakeholders joining the 1st Project Workshop (Stakeholder Workshop) in Riga and will claim them in the first financial report.

With regards to the forthcoming amendments, there will be a need of budget redistribution. As the amendment processes have not started yet, these redistributions are not yet in force. The consortium intends to shift budget from the CAU budget to new consortium partners (see 5.) in order to enable them to cover travel costs to project Workshops from the project budget.

No financial report could be submitted until the creation of this Deliverable report because the electronic submission system will not be accessible for ESMERALDA partners before August 1st. The PMO informed the partners about the current financial rules and the procedure of reporting. The first financial report will be created right after the submission of this Deliverable 1.5 report and will give an overview of the expenditures incurred.

7. Conclusions and self-assessment

ESMERALDA has been implemented successfully and has performed excellently during the first 18 months of the project's lifetime. No critical risks in general project management, objectives' achievements or financial management were identified (see Table 2).

Table 2:   Critical risks for ESMERALDA implementation and first self-assessment (see project DoA Table 3.4e, p. 91).

Initial description of risk (from DoA)	Self-assessment after first 18 months of project duration
Loss of critical competencies or of key people in the project	Although there were some changes in staff (due to personnel leaving or maternity leaves at several partner organisations), key competencies could be replaced by recruiting new staff members or internally. (nomination of Deputies for respective positions). Especially the large size of the consortium helps to seek alternative internal partner.
Withdrawal of project partners	No partners withdrew until now. On the contrary, several new partners are planned to be integrated in ESMERALDA.
Loss of internal communication and awareness	All partners participated regularly in project meetings and workshops. The EB meets regularly and a Communication and Dissemination strategy has been developed (Deliverable 6.2).
Non-performance of partners	All partners have been very committed to the project.
Delays in critical components of the work	Almost all Milestones and Deliverables were achieved in time, guaranteeing a smooth implementation of the ESMERALDA objectives. The project reporting strategy (see 3.) facilitates an efficient production, review and submission of reports. In case serious delays happen, respective management structures are in place to avoid this risk.
Low interaction with stakeholders and other related projects	ESMERALDA's interaction with stakeholders in EU member states and other related projects has been exemplary. The project has achieved a good standing in the member states, the EU MAES working group and in the scientific community.
Change in general direction of the coordination activities	No major activity changes have been necessary until now. A new component will be the detailed consideration of the EU outermost regions and overseas territories, which may develop to be more comprehensive than initially foreseen.
Economic difficulties, natural disasters	Not applicable until now.

A more detailed self-assessment based on a survey among the consortium members, the Science-Policy-Society Advisory Board advices and the 1st periodic report review comments of the European Commission will be derived in the following phase of the project.