Recommendations of the Southern European Biodiversity Knowledge workshop concerning the Network of Knowledge

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BiodiversityKnowledge is a FP7 Coordination Action – "*Creating a Network of Knowledge (NoK) for biodiversity and ecosystem services*" (Grant No.265299).

The project aims at creating a Network of Knowledge (NoK) for biodiversity and ecosystem services in Europe including a broad range of scientific knowledge and expertise from different regional perspectives. Three regional workshops (in Central Europe, Northern Europe and Southern Europe) were therefore planned during October and November 2011 (Budapest, Copenhagen and Aix en Provence).

This document summarizes the main recommendations from the Southern European workshop (Aix-en-Provence, France, 28-29th of November, 2011

The participants of the workshop, and thus contributors to this paper, are listed in the annex.

The following areas and main points were considered important by the participants:

1) **Expert rewarding system/experts motivation/incentives**

- NoK should have a transparent, easy-accessible and pre-defined process of involvement of experts, the process should be scientifically-driven but open as well to non-academic experts;
- NoK should ensure commitments from institutions to mobilize national experts (top-down) and acknowledge their involvement (e.g. secondment);
- NoK should have concrete incentives (modulated according to engagement level)
  - o Facilitate interactions with policy-makers, particularly when formulating the request/question
  - o Reputation of the contributors:
    - Visible authorship
    - synthesis/assessment reports to be recognized as valid as high ranking scientific papers (will be the case once NoK has proved its credibility)
    - A strong interaction between the NoK process with IPBES might catalyse the engagement of European experts in the European NoKprocess;
  - o Valued in career process (EU frameworks): e.g. positions, grants, etc;
  - o Facilitation: money, assistants, technical support;
  - o Increased opportunities for scientific publications (through networks built up through NoK's work);
- Geographical scope / type and relevance of the request could act as an incentive for experts to be involved in the process;
- NoK should create, right at the beginning of the process, opportunities for experts to interact with policy makers and to participate in the setting up of the questions;
- NoK should contribute to the recognition of knowledge synthesis/assessment reports (the pinnacle would be if they are recognized as much as peer-review scientific papers)

2) **How to ensure the credibility and independency of the NoK?**

- NoK should create its own niche of existence, i.e. not replacing the work of consultants and avoid competition with any existing mechanisms;
- NoK should have a clear legal basis;
- NoK should have a clear mandate, and highlight what would be its role *vis-à-vis* other national, regional and international assessment mechanisms;
- NoK processes and procedures should be transparent ;
- NoK reports should be open access;
- NoK should set-up an independent review of the whole process in addition to the assessment review;
- NoK should ensure to limit any conflicts of interest from experts; ensuring a mix of experts would help towards this goal ;
- Nok should be able to highlight potential existing controversies in the field of biodiversity and ecosystem services;

- NoK should ensure/be able to testify the scientific (with fixed confidence and uncertainty levels) and technical quality (clear language/message so that the outputs are understandable by the client) of its work. The NoK outputs should be largely accessible and disseminated;
- NoK should ensure that the non-academic knowledge is also taken into account in the process and be acknowledged as such;
- NoK should develop a professional communication strategy directed to the general public;
- NoK should try to ensure a clear and long-term support from the European Commission to this regional process while IPBES is being created

3) Expert and peer-reviewers selection / criteria

- The expert group within the NoK process should;
    o Be independent from governments decisions;
    o Be set-up through a transparent process, notably for the nomination and selection of experts (e.g. some selection criteria could include scientific excellence (publications), participation to previous assessments, etc.);
    o Be composed of experts which are selected by governments/institutions (top-down), open calls (bottom-up) or a combination of both; regional relays could be used;
    o Be constituted by a panel of different stakeholders (scientists and other knowledge holders, policy makers, civil society);
    o Be multidisciplinary or the experts within the group should have multidisciplinary skills in relation to the biodiversity and ecosystem services research fields;
    o Define and implement specific means and tools to generate a constructive and fruitful dialogue between different knowledge holders (science/society interface);
    o Ensure an effective turnover of experts participating in the NoK process;
    o Encourage exchanges/interactions with external experts who don't belong to the biodiversity and ecosystem services "sphere";
    o Represent a good geographical balance.

4) Funding of the process

- The process of the NoK should be funded (logistic, staff and incentives for experts);
- The treatment of requests by the NoK should not be driven by funding (the whole process should be transparent and open access);
- NoK and IPBES should welcome funds from everyone (create a common pool of money), including private investments to "green" their image and to allow them to be more aware on what is going in the biodiversity field (it could be an incentive for them to be more pro-active with regards to biodiversity research);
- The funding of the NoK should be operated through a Trust funding mechanism in order to secure a complete independence of the whole process from funders.
- Funding sources can depend on the scope of the requests:

- o Running assessment (on a regular basis: subscription system or rely on institutions which provide man power);
  - o One shot specific system;
- Basic funding for running the secretariat could be provided by government contributions;
- NoK should look at existing funding models (public and private funds) which are in accordance with EU legislation;
- Requesters/clients should pay all or part of the expenses depending on their ability to pay (IPCC has some funds to cover this activity)
- NoK should give ideas of prices (budgets) and timeframes to deliver the expected products;
- NoK should rely on existing networks (LIFEWATCH, GEO BON…) to create synergies and further support the assessment process of IPBES;
- Research gaps should be highlighted by the NoK but not funded by NoK;
- NoK should clarify/distinguish the difference between funding "assessments" and funding research projects (which is not part of the NoK mandate)

5) **Priorization of requests**

- NoK should prioritize requests from IPBES and from national/EU political agendas;
- NoK coordination body should define pluriannual priorities, i.e. highlighting hot topics/ flagships initiatives over a certain period of time;
- NoK should avoid duplication of work with other networks (EC Joint Programming Initiatives, strategic research alliances…);
- NoK should also stress and convey European key priorities at the global level (IPBES)

6) **Scale of the requests**

- The requests to the NoK should mainly have a transnational approach, in accordance with biodiversity "ecoregions" classification (e.g. Alps), be of interest for Pan-European citizens and be in relation with the global level (IPBES);
- NoK could accept external requests from outside the European territory if it is directly relevant for Europe;
- NoK should facilitate the exchange of best practices: specific national/regional issues could mobilize the NoK to get support from other countries in order to understand some particular issues and to solve some common challenges, i.e. one national request could be of great interest for other European countries and regions;
- NoK should have contact points in each country

7) **Added-value of the NoK compared to the processes currently in place (with respect to the European, but also the national level)**

   NoK will be successful if it provides the following added values:

- Clearly define its functional niche in the existing landscape, in particular clearly define its role related to IPBES: would NoK be in charge of IPBES implementation at European level? Would it be an assessment mechanism with regard to biodiversity and ecosystem services in Europe? A mixed model between the two? Depending on the approach chosen, the prioritisation of tasks and activities could be different;
- Ensure credibility, independent expertise and independency from funders;
- Ensure a permanent collaboration platform for existing networks to join forces, to gather the knowledge and to avoid competition and duplication with existing initiatives;
- Bring more legitimacy to the cases and to the answers ;
- Identify needs, gaps and uncertainties in knowledge;
- Ensure open access to information;
- Production of synthesis in a standardized format ;
- Include experts from different countries to enlarge the perspective and broaden the vision
- Identify interesting questions which could have implications beyond national boundaries
- Consolidate a unique strategic position in European and international arenas (due to a more common regional approach)
- Increase accountability for biodiversity;

Further information on BiodiversityKnowledge, and especially
the Network of Knowledge prototype, can be found at
www.biodiversityknowledge.eu

Final Attendance list

KNEU Experts	Organisation
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Carlo **Heip**	Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research
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Daniela **Pauli**	Swiss Biodiversity Forum
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