

**Results of the Evaluation Questionnaire for the
Second ALTER-Net Summer School
Trends in Biodiversity:
European Ecosystems and Policy
1 – 13 September 2007**

The aim of this questionnaire was to get feedback from the participants of the summer school on the overall structure, the lectures and their topics, as well as the organization, in order to improve these at the next summer school. The questionnaires were already in the folders which the participants received when checking in at the summer school and they were asked to return them on the last day after the wrap up in the plenary. Of the 32 participants 31 (97%) handed them back or sent them afterwards. Not all the questions had been answered every time so that the sum sometimes does not add up to 31. The “translation” of 1 to 5 in the text is: excellent – good – satisfactory – fair – poor. The quotes given in blue of the voiced opinions are not representative of the mean but give the whole breadth of views and as such overemphasizes the margins.

Expectations

The expectations ranged from no expectations at all to concrete expectations to learn more in special fields like biodiversity itself and socio-economics. Networking was another issue mentioned a couple of times. In spite of the fact that many had no expectations at all those were met or even exceeded by the summer school (19.5) while (10.5) found their expectations well met and (1) satisfactory.

Background material on the website <http://www.pik-potsdam.de/alter-net/>

The rating of the website this year was less good than in the past: (13) gave it an excellent, (9) good, (5) satisfactory and (3) a fair. A general difficulty was to find it on the PIK-website where the “Infodesk” and “Education” links are not self-explanatory. This is a general difficulty but unfortunately cannot be changed by the summer school secretariat (Sabine: I am trying to move “Education” as a main issue on the homepage). Additional difficulties were the password-restricted site which apparently some (many?) did not go to as many suggested to create a page with all the literature recommended which exists there. One wanted more background information on the summer school itself. The recommendation of a clearer structure of the website itself has been taken and it was tried to do this already.

The rating of the background material was mostly excellent (6) to good (18) with (4) satisfactory and (1) only fair. But on the other hand only 21 participants actually read anything from this suggested material while 9 participants admitted having not had the time to do so mostly due to field work they had to finish before the summer school. As many did only read the abstracts of the talks or the CV of the speakers this means even less “real” readers of the texts. Some were apparently intimidated by the great number of recommendations and wished for much less while some would welcome a rating like “very important” or “less important”. Some took the journal itself as a rating help and stated that they read the articles published in “Science” or “Nature”.

The provision of background material on the CD for the working groups was considered by (6) as very well, (15) considered it as good while (7) rated it as satisfactory and (3) as fair. One of the reasons for this rating might have been that some did not have a personal laptop so for them it was rather difficult to work with the CDs provided. These might have been the same participants who would have preferred printed material. But some explicitly would not consent to this view. Almost all participants are happy with receiving the pdf copies of the presentations (29) while (2) found this satisfactory so not that important. One of the explanations given was the better concentration on the talks and not worrying to take notes from everything. The preparation of reports by the participants were found very well and useful by (16) and well by (7) although (4) found it only satisfactory and (3) just fair. They argued that nobody would read those reports as everybody would have his own notes anyhow. And of course it is understandable that one would have to have a look at those reports first before giving an opinion in this respect. But most would prefer to get the working group reports on the final CD (27) and (3) while only (1) rated this as satisfactory.

Structure and organisation of the summer school

The structure of the working day was considered by 13 participants as excellent, by 14 as good and by 4 as satisfactory which is much better than last year. Some complained though that the speakers overran their allocated time which shortened either the time dedicated for the working groups or for the free time. One suggestion was to have the last day without any talk and thus exclusively reserved for the working groups.

The general quality of the lectures was rated by 13 as excellent and by 17 as good. It was stated that generally the lectures were excellent with some exceptions and some even considered them the best they had ever seen. One participant even congratulated the conveners for having them chosen apparently in a careful manner.

The opportunity for discussing the lectures was considered mostly as excellent (23) while 6 considered this as good and 2 as satisfactory. Here the same complaint was given as last year i.e. that the presentations should be stopped at one hour (or 40 minutes for aperitif talks) in order to leave sufficient time for long discussions after every talk. The fact that most speakers stayed for some additional time after their talks at Peyresq was enabling a lot of informal discussions at lunch or coffee breaks which was considered a main advantage. Subsequently there was a complaint that some speakers left too early.

The group work of developing an assessment was rated by 9 as excellent, 14 as good, 5 as satisfactory and 1 as fair. Apparently many had made the experience that the beginning of the group work was very time consuming having a lot of discussions and difficulties in the group dynamics between the participants themselves. But most confirmed that this changed gradually with time and at the end most were content with what they achieved. The time constraint was mentioned of course and a better cooperation with the synthesis group would have been welcomed by some as it would have saved time. Surprisingly to last year the own group's work was rated less favourable than the more general question: 6 considered this as excellent, 15 as good, 8 as satisfactory and 1 as fair. Here the same observations were made, i.e. that the start was difficult but then it got going. One participant called it "teething problems". "What did you learn from your case study?" resulted of course in many answers. Like how to do an assessment (2) or much about scenarios (6) or downscaling (2) were mentioned explicitly. Many participants (5) openly stated that they learned to work in a team, even became more patient and learned how to discuss and to reach consensus. What is more it was recognized laudatory that the case studies have been given like a European project, which made it more like the real world.

The contribution of the tutors was usually rated quite well, with excellent (12), good (16) and only 2 satisfactory. Most of the participants found them very helpful. Some would have preferred especially in the beginning more explanations in order to save time but others stated that they received the information needed.

In respect to the question if they would have preferred more presentations or more breakout time the majority (16) voted for no changes while 8 would have preferred more breakout activities which is opposite to last year's vote where the majority opted for changes. Many regarded the present set-up as a perfect balance which would have worked even better if the speakers would have stucked strictly to their time. One participant would have preferred more talks instead of the group work.

What worked best extended from the poster presentation (3), the walk (3), aperitif talks (5) of course the excursion (5) and to other free events like star gazing etc. One simply stated that it was a good balance and all worked well.

The opposite question, i.e. what worked most poorly showed a broad spectrum as well but 4 participant even mentioned the local dance group as superfluous and too long. The kick-off meeting for the working groups was referred to especially the selection of numbers of scenarios to work on. Furthermore difficulties with the synthesis group's work was noted which should better communicate their goals and issues to the other groups.

As could be expected the excursion was enjoyed by most (24) or found good (5) while only 1 rated it as satisfactory which is better compared to last year. Only 3 participants complained about the long driving time spent in the bus. As we had a small walk included this year this absence was not complained about as last year and only one participant wished an even longer walk. The talk given in full sunshine was

apparently hard to bear for one participant. In general the present schedule and themes of the excursion were found great and some asked to keep it for the future as it is.

The day off was enjoyed by a 100% and rated by all participants as excellent. The question whether the day off was needed was answered more variable as 28 needed it dearly, while 2 simply needed it while 1 found it not necessary. The timing was judged as perfect either for finishing some jobs or mostly for recovering and have a mental recreation. One found the day important to get to know better the other participants.

How well were the following topics covered by the summer school?

Apparently the participants rated the different topics very much according to their own research interests. The “very poorly” rated of the covering of biodiversity in Europe was due to missing an overview of endangered mammals, fishes or insects and another complained that the emphasis was too much on plants. In general the coverage was judged to be very well or good with few poor and one very poor vote.

Do you think more / less emphasis should be put on the following topics at future summer schools:

Here the same preferences as in the questions above were noticeable and most participants would put the same emphasis on the topics except for “Critical ecosystem properties to sustain ecosystem services” and “Indicators of ecosystem services” for which the desire for more emphasis was voiced.

Excursion

The participants mostly agreed that the excursion provided excellent (12) or good (10) examples for the lectures while 7 voted it as satisfactory and 1 as fair. The main reason was apparently the lectures themselves had much broader themes than the excursion could show locally but still it was considered as a good introduction into real problems in this region. It was welcomed to have the opportunity to get first-hand information and to talk to involved persons. The analogue question in respect to the working groups was even confirmed with a broader consent: 17 said it was excellent, 9 good and 4 satisfactory. One participant mentioned that the excursion was a crash-course on the Southern Alps, their ecosystems, agriculture and demographics and another stated that it was very useful for the agricultural group. In general it gave a good impression of the region which could be assigned to the Var catchment as well but one participant had the opposite opinion in this respect. Many of the students did not miss anything (6) but others would have enjoyed meeting more local stakeholders or getting more information on local biodiversity (3). More walking was mentioned this year only once as we had already a long walk on the agenda which was missing last year. The wish for a change was denied explicitly by 5 students while 2 considered the excursion as perfect. One participant would prefer to meet more social scientists and another considered the presentation on the flooding of the village too repetitive. One suggested that it would be a good idea to establish a special working group on the Verdon catchment itself. And of course the long bus drive was another problem referred to but stating at the same time that it was worthwhile in the end because of the scientific value of the excursion.

Organisation

Apparently the majority was quite content with the organisation as many did not fill in anything in this paragraph. Some were more communicative and explicitly stated that nothing (10) should be changed and some considered it to have been wonderful (2) or even brilliant (3). As earlier put on record already here the overrunning of time of many speakers was again mentioned or even the wish of less presentations which both would save time for the working groups. I am afraid the wish for including sport or game activities cannot be fulfilled by the organizers as this is more considered as a private activity. Interestingly the bad internet connection was not mentioned as a drawback so people had accepted it and one participant even requested not to change this. And the overflowing number of plastic cups are already again on the to-do-list of the organizers.

The question of better effectiveness was answered by 3 participants with “nothing”. Some suggestions were to include more global issues and global speakers or having a broader mix of background of the

speakers. The overrunning of time of several speakers was mentioned again as a matter for improvement. The nicest recommendation was to lengthen the summer school.

The information on the summer school was more often than before from former participants but the knowledge provided by the ALTER-Net partners had improved as well. Colleagues and supervisors were equally distributors of the notice. The flyers and posters sent by the summer school secretariat were apparently posted as well.

Career development: How relevant do you think the course was in relation to possible careers in:

The participants considered the summer school most relevant to a potential career in inter-disciplinary research (27) followed by science communication in respect to biodiversity (24) with the third place occupied by consultancy work (23). One stated that the two weeks were of high relevance not only for the career which was backed by the statement that the course was excellent for my personal development.

Do you think the course will help your future career development? Yes / No

Almost a hundred percent (30) answered in the affirmative while one did not yet know. Some (4) especially mentioned that working in a team would help them in the future because there they “exercised skills that are overshadowed in most PhD projects but those skills are essential for a (scientific) career”. Some will concentrate more on environmental policy in the future and one participant even got new ideas where to go for a postdoc.

Any additional comments?

Surprisingly 15 participants gave some comments. Most expressed their thanks that they were able to attend the summer school, that they learned a lot and that they started new professional relationships and even friendships between each other. But some made more precise comments and voiced some wishes. One participant expressed the wish to have a presentation by some non-scientist like a politician or a journalist. Furthermore a presentation by an anthropologist or philosopher would be appreciated who could analyze the concept of nature and biodiversity from another point of view. The wishes to reduce the plastic waste at the aperitif talk or picnics are well taken (Sabine: but we tried already and it seems there is no other way to manage this). Then one wished to learn better modelling but there are other summer schools (even by ALTER-Net) which are designated to further this. And there were some wishes for the future as well: to stay in contact, to establish an alumni website (Sabine: is in preparation) or even organize alumni meetings.

Evaluation

Please answer the following questions by circling the numbers given for each of them. We also appreciate any additional comments you make, either directly in relation to each question or on the back of the last page.

Excellent/Easy/Yes - Poor/Difficult/No

Expectations

Did the summer school meet your expectations? 1 2 3 4 5
19 1 10 1

What did you expect from the summer school: **The summer school actually exceeded my expectations; honestly did not know what to expect; networking; learn more about biodiversity and socio-economics; exchange ideas; show my own research; to discuss my research in a broader context; multidisciplinary approach; expected to learn more about communicating to policy-makers;**

Background material on the website <http://www.pik-potsdam.de/alter-net/>

How would you rate the ALTER-Net summer school website? 1 2 3 4 5
13 9 5 3

What could be improved at the ALTER-Net summer school website? **More background information on the summer school; background literature clearer structure; better selection of literature; zip folder of all the literature; change structure and font; difficult to find from PIK website; difficulties with the password; maybe more links in a menu and less in the text itself; too many clicks to find the articles;**

How would you rate the background material on the website? 1 2 3 4 5
6 18 4 1

What other background material would have helped? **Less material; more insights in biodiversity in general;**
 Explanation or additional comments: **More ranking would have helped; my university does not have so many rights so I could not get everything;**

Did you read anything from the background material of the internal website in advance? yes / no
21 / 9

Which material? **Science and Nature papers; last year report; abstracts;**

Explanation or additional comments: **I did not find it; time too limited; field work; the amount was overwhelming;**

Was the provision of background material on CD-ROM for the working groups adequate? 1 2 3 4 5
6 15 7 3

Would you have preferred a different type of distribution? **No: 3; GIS data were a bit unorganized;**

Explanation or additional comments: **main papers should be there in hard copies as well; more maps; difficult for people without a laptop; laptops were widely available in the working groups so do not waste paper by printing everything; too much information should be more precise data of the area; telling participants in advance that GIS files will be available; multidisciplinary approach; expected to learn more about communicating to policy-makers;**

Are you satisfied with receiving pdf copies of the presentations and additional background information after the summer course? 1 2 3 4 5
29 2

Explanation or additional comments: **We could listen to the talks without worrying about notes; I am looking forward to receive them;**

Do you find it useful that participants were asked to prepare a report of each lecture and the discussions? 1 2 3 4 5
16 7 4 3

Explanation or additional comments: **I have to see them; was really useful; absolutely, was the first time I saw this procedure and I liked it; not really as everybody makes his own notes; nobody will read them because we get the pdf files of the presentations; maybe provide written instructions; it is a good idea in respect to the discussions**

Would you like to see the final report, including each group's sectoral assessment and the synthesis to be distributed on the final CD-ROM?

1	2	3	4	5
27	3	1		

Structure and organisation of the summer school

How do you rate the structure of the working days?

1	2	3	4	5
13	14	4		

Explanation or additional comments: **Perfect, we were tired but not exhausted; structure very good on the timetable but speakers overran frequently meaning less time for working groups and less free time; I missed the free hour between 18:30 and 19:30 some days; second week too much focus on working groups; last day not talks so more time for the working groups; good balance between talks and working groups;**

How do you rate the general quality of the lectures?

1	2	3	4	5
13	17			

Explanation or additional comments: **Generally excellent with few exceptions (6); first week much better than second; a broad variety of topics but they seemed to have been carefully selected and fitted very well together; sometimes difficult to accept three different topics in one day; some of them were really the best I have ever seen – thank you;**

How do you rate the opportunity for discussing the lectures?

1	2	3	4	5
23	6	2		

Explanation or additional comments: **Generally very good but because some lecturers went much too long the discussion was too short; some of the speakers were leaving very early after their talk but I had very interesting discussions with the ones who stayed longer; the fact of “living together” made it optimal; very good compared to usually;**

How do you rate the group work of developing a sectoral assessment (or a synthesis of all sectors)?

1	2	3	4	5
9	14	5	1	

Explanation or additional comments: **A brilliant exercise; it took some time to take off but then it got going; synthesis group work estranged us from our own working group; the synthesis group should be more communicative with the other groups; better feedback from the synthesis group would save time for the other groups; hard as in real world projects; time too short; learning by doing is fine but we had to do all 4 scenarios; time was too short to come to a good quantitative analysis;**

How do you rate your own group's work?

1	2	3	4	5
6	15	8	1	

Explanation or additional comments: **First it was difficult than it was fine (“teething problems”); best working group I have been in my student experience; too much work; not sufficient time; too much work; English native speakers dominated;**

What did you learn from your case study? **How to do an assessment; much about scenarios (6); downscaling (2); stakeholder integration; that you can produce something without data; preparing a report; good idea to give the case study a European project setting; a different way of looking at biodiversity namely from the**

perspective of human well-being; be more patient; experience in group work (5); project management – how to reach consensus;

How do you rate the contribution of your tutor? 1 2 3 4 5
12 16 2

Explanation or additional comments: **Always helpful; we did not demand much contribution; some more explanations of the methods would have been useful at times; very useful in the synthesis group;**

Would you have preferred more presentations or more breakout activity time? **No: 16 Yes: 8**
Maybe a free day in the first week; perfect balance; keep to schedule! To have the planned free time would have been nice; more presentations and less group work;

What activities/presentations worked best in the summer school? **Poster presentation (3); walk (3); aperitif talks (5); excursion (5); star gazing; bat walk; hiking; free day; most worked really well; Scottish dancing; good balance;**

What activities/presentations worked most poorly: **Local dance (4); local dance was too long with the deadline for the working groups; working groups; kick-off meeting of the working groups especially the selection of number of scenarios; more time needed to prepare questions to the shepherd; sometimes we did not understand the work of the synthesis group; maybe poster presentation better inside (easier to hear);**

Did you enjoy the excursion on Thursday 6 September? 1 2 3 4 5
24 5 1

Explanation or additional comments: **Provided a fascinating insight in landscape changes in Europe; it was great that we met local people; keep that it does give such a great local understanding (2); would have preferred a clear link to the case study but it was really nice; would prefer more walking; too long travel in the bus (3); too tired; listening to the talk in full sunshine not acceptable;**

Did you enjoy the day-off on Monday 10 September? 1 2 3 4 5
31

Was the day-off needed to obtain, for example, some rest? 1 2 3 4 5
28 2 1

Explanation or additional comments: **Perfect moment; fine for finishing jobs; advise future participants to rest; for mental recreation needed; for personal exchange between participants needed; maybe have an additional morning off;**

How well were the following topics covered by the Summer School?

	Very well - Very poorly				
	1	2	3	4	5
Biodiversity in Europe - state of the art_____	10	8	7	4	1
Monitoring and assessment_____	6,5	10,5	11	3	
Modelling and scale issues_____	20	7	3	1	
Critical ecosystem properties to sustain ecosystem services_____	3	13	10	3	
Socio-economic aspects of ecosystem services_____	11	13	5	1	
Indicators of ecosystem services_____	3	12,5	9,5	5	
Linking biodiversity research with policy and the public_____	17	11	2	1	

Do you think more / less emphasis should be put on the following topics at future summer schools:

More emphasis - same - less emphasis

	1	2	3
Biodiversity in Europe - state of the art_____	12	17	
Monitoring and assessment_____	10	17	2
Modelling and scale issues_____	4	21	4
Critical ecosystem properties to sustain ecosystem services_____	19	11	
Socio-economic aspects of ecosystem services_____	7	20	2
Indicators of ecosystem services_____	15,5	11,5	3
Linking biodiversity research with policy and the public_____	10	17	2

Excellent/Easy/Yes - Poor/Difficult/No

Excursion

Did the excursion provide good examples for the lectures? 1 2 3 4 5
12 10 7 1

Explanation or additional comments: **Not directly relevant for the lectures but more useful for the working groups (3); very good local guides; yes, especially the opportunity to talk to locally involved persons; it was good to see the man-made nature with its specific biodiversity problem: increasing forests resulting in less biodiversity; lectures were much broader;**

Did the excursion provide useful insights for the working groups and your sectoral assessment? 1 2 3 4 5
17 9 4

Explanation or additional comments: **It was a crash-course on the Southern Alps, their ecosystems, agriculture and demographics; very useful for the agricultural group; useful to hear from real stakeholders; we needed this excursion to realise where was the study area and the main problems; very good but it was not the same catchment, thus not all aspects were usable;**

What did you miss? **Nothing (6); more different stakeholders; more on biodiversity (2); more on local flora-fauna; more walking; more discussions; more information on the dry Alpine ecosystems and their functioning (key species, facts and figures); more social scientists;**

What would you like to have changed? **Nothing (5); it was perfect (2); too many curves in the morning; less driving; perhaps some written material e.g. leaflets on the Verdon catchment; a working group on the Verdon catchment; presentation of the flooded village had too many repetitions; less pressure for the synthesis group;**

Organisation

What suggestions do you have for the organizers for how they could be more effective? **Nothing (10); sufficient effective; brilliant (3); wonderful (2); maybe less presentations; maybe restrict the presentations to 45 min + 15 min discussion which would give more time for the working groups; clearer dataset and definition of the case studies; some more structure for proceedings in the group work; try to incorporate some sport activities or games; pay more attention to sustainability of the drinks (plastic, aluminium); please install no better internet connection!**

What other ideas do you have for how the summer school could have been more effective? **Nothing (3); more mixing of speakers from policy, communication, social and natural scientists and more “global science”; provide a “press release” as outcome; after the poster session the posters could be posted in the “Bar” resulting in more discussions; make the summer school longer; moderators should be more consistent in**

respect to the allocated time to speakers and discussions; disconnect working groups and synthesis groups; maybe smaller working groups;

How and when did you learn about the summer school? Any suggestion how to improve the advertisement? **From previous participants (6); ALTER-Net partner institute (6); colleagues (4); my supervisor (4); mailing list; IAI; ALTER-Net website; PIK website;**

Send flyers to former participants to hand out; use mailing lists; send flyers to universities and labs who work in these fields; distribute flyers at conferences like GFÖ or BES;

Career development: How relevant do you think the course was in relation to possible careers in:

	High relevance - Low relevance		
Inter-disciplinary research	27	1	2
Biodiversity / ecosystem management	14	6	9
Biodiversity / science communications	24	3	2
Biodiversity policy	21	2	5
Biodiversity NGOs	12	3	13
Local or regional government	15	3	10
Consultancy work (e.g. impact assessments)	23	2	3
Other (please specify): Biodiversity modelling; high relevance not only for career; excellent for my personal development;			

Do you think the course will help your future career development? Yes / No

Please explain your answer: **Yes: 30 I do not yet know: 1**

Poster feedback helped; talking to speakers; has definitely improved my abilities to discuss my science; we gained more diverse knowledge than any book can provide; I learned in 2 weeks as much as I would have learned in half a year by reading myself; I look at my own work from different perspectives and very critical and that was very enriching; it has helped me in putting my research work into wider context (2); the assessment of ecosystem vulnerabilities using scenarios has not been used in Latin America at local or regional scale and it will be very useful to apply this in my future research programme; it helped directly with my present project/PhD (3);

Accommodation

	Excellent/Easy/Yes - Poor/Difficult/No				
	1	2	3	4	5
How would you rate the accommodation of Peyresq?	24	5	2		

Explanation or additional comments: **Beautiful and away from distraction; wonderful but I would prefer to have a more realistic idea of what we were going to find before arriving there; too many people sharing a bathroom; my room was a dark place not too appropriate for work; nice view, great place but no privacy; better internet connection would be handy, however;**

	1	2	3	4	5
How would you rate the cuisine at Peyresq?	31				

Explanation: **Better than a 3 star restaurant; I am especially grateful for the efforts made to provide really good vegetarian food! Can I give it a zero? It was more than perfect; too good; I will miss the food and wine; I have gained a least 2 kilo but I am happy about this; a bit less fat would be fine;**

