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PROcoast

A PROactive approach for COmmunities to enAble Societal Transformation

D7.4 – CLUSTERING ACTIVITIES REPORT AND POLICY GUIDELINES IN COOPERATION WITH OTHER PROJECTS

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BACKGROUND: ABOUT PRO-COAST PROJECT

The PRO-COAST project was launched in November 2023 to address the issue of biodiversity loss in European coastal ecosystems. Around 40% of Europeans live within 100km of the coast, relying directly on ecosystem services that are threatened by both quantitative and qualitative losses. Groups already facing socioeconomic vulnerabilities are likely to be disproportionately affected. PRO-COAST aims to empower local communities to support the restoration and maintenance of biodiversity and ecosystem services across Europe, integrating local knowledge into practice and policymaking. The project is now underway, coordinating the efforts of 20 partners across 14 countries working on 10 unique case studies. These case studies cover multiple conservation approaches across nine very varied coastal ecosystems, testing different governance models and social incentives to engage local actors in adopting technologies and actions for biodiversity conservation.

An important element of PRO-COAST is its holistic, interdisciplinary approach, based on a conceptual framework that treats social-ecological systems as interconnected. By mapping relationships between ecosystem components and uncovering feedback dynamics, the project seeks to identify leverage points for transformative change. PRO-COAST promotes integrated bottom-up decision-making, recognizing that environmental issues cannot be separated from social, economic, and political factors. Through extensive citizen engagement guided by state-of-the-art conservation science, the project aims to build community capacity for biodiversity management, providing scalable solutions that balance conservation needs with local socioeconomic priorities. Now completing its second of three years, PRO-COAST is developing adaptive, participatory approaches to governance that avoid biodiversity losses and ensure sustainable, equitable access to coastal resources.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the progress and outcomes of PRO-COAST's clustering activities, which aim to strengthen collaboration and knowledge exchange between Horizon Europe projects, EU organisations, and stakeholder networks working on biodiversity, ecosystem services, and community engagement. Building on the initial clustering strategy, PRO-COAST identified 72 relevant Horizon projects through targeted searches, contacting 44 of them and establishing active collaboration with 12 that are now featured as official cluster partners on the project website. Clustering activities have fostered mutual visibility, participation in external events, and opportunities for joint initiatives such as webinars, storytelling campaigns, and methodological exchanges. These efforts have also helped identify synergies, particularly around community engagement, transformative change, and the use of decision-support tools for sustainability. To overcome limited engagement through email outreach, PRO-COAST is launching a webinar series in late 2025 focusing on its key tools: the DeepChange Framework, the Conservation and Human Use Index (CHUI), and the Community Sustainability Platform (CUSP). CUSP, a multilingual platform maintained by ESUG until 2033, will serve as a long-term hub for collaboration, hosting practical tools and resources from PRO-COAST and other initiatives. The report concludes with policy guidelines to enhance inter-project cooperation. ESUG was greatly assisted by Anatrack in the preparation of this report.

LINKS WITH OTHER PROJECT ACTIVITIES

This deliverable (D7.4) is closely connected to all other PRO-COAST work packages, acting as a bridge between the project's scientific, operational, and engagement components. Insights from WP3

(Biodiversity Management) and WP5 (Case Studies) have guided the identification of shared research interests with other Horizon Europe projects, particularly around coastal governance, ecosystem restoration, and community engagement. Moreover, WP6 (Stakeholder Engagement) has informed the participatory approach to clustering. It is also linked to key project tools and outputs: the Conservation and Human Use Index (CHUI) which provides a practical entry point for demonstrating and comparing ecosystem interactions; the Theory U framework which informs the project's approach to co-creation, reflection, and learning; and the Nienaber-Kotter model which underpins strategies for behavioural and organisational transformation. Together, these links ensure that clustering efforts reinforce PRO-COAST's interdisciplinary coherence and contribute to its long-term impact.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of the document

This document reports on PRO-COAST's clustering activities to date, building on the initial strategy defined in D7.5 at Month 6 of the project. It describes the project's efforts to identify, contact, and collaborate with other Horizon Europe and Horizon 2020 projects, as well as relevant EU organisations and stakeholder networks, to strengthen mutual learning and integration of policy and practice. The deliverable outlines how PRO-COAST contributes to the wider European research and policy landscape particularly on the themes of community engagement, and transformative change. In particular, the report provides an overview of the methodology applied to map and reach out to related initiatives, the relationships established with other projects and organisations, and the main collaboration activities carried out so far, including participation in events, and the preparation of webinars. It also highlights the role of the Community Sustainability Platform (CUSP) as a long-term mechanism for maintaining cooperation and facilitating knowledge exchange beyond the lifetime of PRO-COAST. Overall, this deliverable provides both a comprehensive account of the clustering achievements to date and directions for advancing future outreach, collaboration, and policy engagement with other European initiatives. The clustering process remains open and adaptive, with new projects and organisations added over time. Clustering creates opportunities to consult other projects, in which context there is excellent opportunity to gain information for the development of policy guidelines (see Next Steps). This document, therefore, notes policy-relevant issues throughout, where relevant, and considers them in more detail in Section 7.

1.2 Structure of the deliverable

The deliverable is structured into nine sections. Following a brief introduction, the next section provides an overview of clustering progress, outlining the outreach methodology, the responses received, and the lessons learned. Subsequent sections examine PRO-COAST's relationships with Horizon projects, EU organisations, and stakeholder organisations, highlighting areas of synergy and engagement achieved. Clustering and collaboration activities are then described in detail, with particular attention to website visibility, webinars, surveys, and policy exchange. The Community Sustainability Platform (CUSP) is presented as a key mechanism for future collaboration, both during the remaining time of the project and beyond (ESUG has responsibility to maintain the CUSP until 2033). The deliverable concludes with a summary of key achievements, challenges, and next steps.

2. CLUSTERING PROGRESS OVERVIEW

2.1 Outreach efforts and methodology (emails and project identification)

As part of its clustering strategy, PRO-COAST systematically identified and reached out to other EU-funded projects working in related fields. Several targeted searches were conducted on CORDIS, each centred on a specific thematic area, including transformative change, marine environments, community engagement, the implementation of Nature-based Solutions (NbS), biodiversity protection, and climate resilience. The inclusion of case studies similar to those in PRO-COAST was also an important selection criterion. Projects were first shortlisted based on the relevance of their title. Their end date was also taken into account, with those close to completion excluded, as they were unlikely to seek long-term collaboration. The list was then refined using project descriptions available on CORDIS and, when possible, through project websites. Suitable candidates for clustering were added to a shared spreadsheet containing project-specific details, including: the number of case studies, website link, end year, project description, and relevance to PRO-COAST. These summaries provided an initial overview of relevant projects and facilitated the preparation of tailored outreach emails to each project. In total, 72 projects were identified as potentially relevant partners for collaboration.

To guide the clustering efforts, a systematic assessment of potentially relevant initiatives was carried out. All projects previously identified were classified according to their relevance for collaboration. Each project was assessed against four criterion that align with the work of PRO-COAST: community engagement, social science integration, use of case studies, and focus on marine environments. For each criterion, projects were evaluated using a scoring system: 1 point if the criterion was fully met, 0.5 points if partially met, and 0 points if not met. The sum of these points produced an overall relevance score for each project (Annex 1). This analysis provided information on how closely each project aligned with PRO-COAST and the potential for future synergies. It also highlighted areas where collaboration could be pursued (e.g. efforts on community engagement). Results from this analysis (Table 1) revealed that around 93% of the projects scored either 1 or higher, suggesting that the majority of initiatives have at least a partial overlap with PRO-COAST. Additionally, 55% of the projects showed a good alignment with PRO-COAST in at least two contexts (score: ≥ 2). However, only 4 projects achieved the maximum score of 4, indicating that they fully met all four criteria.

Table 1: Distribution of the projects identified according to relevance score.

Relevance score	0	0.5	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4	Total
Number of projects	3 (4.2%)	2 (2.8%)	19 (26.4%)	8 (11.1%)	12 (16.7%)	7 (9.7%)	17 (23.6%)	0 (0%)	4 (5.6%)	72

From another perspective, among all 72 projects there were 59 (82%) projects which aligned with PRO-COAST to the extent that they had case studies. Of this 59, there were just 22 (31% of the 72) that also included (at least to some extent) both community engagement and social science, but only 4 (6% of the total) were coastal.

An example of the outreach email used to contact relevant projects was included in Deliverable D7.5. A revised version is provided in Annex 2. The outreach email presented potential areas for collaboration, such as mutual visibility on project websites and social media, as well as opportunities for joint activities.

It also invited the project members to contribute to the Special Issue guest-edited by two PRO-COAST members.

2.2 Overview of responses and readiness to engage

From the list of 72 projects identified, 44 projects were contacted by email, 1 was approached through an online event, and ongoing communication is being maintained with 2 through shared partners. The remaining projects were either no longer active (4 projects) or did not list a direct contact person. Of the 44 projects contacted, 14 responded, representing a response rate of 32%, and all responses were positive. The remaining 30 projects did not reply. The initial contact was generally followed by email exchanges, ranging from simple acknowledgments and expressions of interest to detailed suggestions for joint activities. The percentage of responses show that the outreach strategy generated limited engagement, suggesting that alternative strategies may be needed.

2.3 Lessons learned from outreach

Outreach activities presented several challenges. Firstly, identifying potential cluster projects on CORDIS was often time-consuming, as the platform did not always facilitate the search for relevant initiatives. Once potential projects were identified, further steps needed to be undertaken. These included reviewing their websites, assessing relevance, locating appropriate contact details, and preparing emails that were at least partially tailored to each project to highlight potential areas for collaboration. Despite these efforts, a significant proportion of projects did not respond. Project teams are likely to face heavy workloads and competing priorities, limiting the time they have available for external collaboration. Emails may also be overlooked due to the high volume of correspondence received. When project leaders responded, maintaining correspondence was at times challenging, as it was often unclear where meaningful synergies could be established. Despite several projects sharing common themes and interests to PRO-COAST, such as sustainable transitions or community engagement, it was not always easy to identify practical opportunities for working together which would be mutually beneficial. As a result, discussions occasionally remained at a general level without progressing towards specific joint activities.

One challenge for clustering may be linked to the structure of communication within EU projects. In many cases, communication is managed either by non-scientists, whose expertise lies in dissemination rather than identifying opportunities for concrete scientific collaboration, or by scientists directly involved in the research, who often have limited time to dedicate to external communication and networking. This division can make it difficult to establish effective contacts and explore potential synergies between projects.

In some cases, differences in project timelines or stages made it harder to align activities or identify common opportunities. This was particularly true for projects nearing completion, which had limited time remaining for collaboration or had already concluded most of their activities. For this reason, when searching on CORDIS, priority was given to projects whose end dates were closely aligned with, or extended beyond, that of PRO-COAST. In response to these challenges, PRO-COAST is now trying a new clustering approach by organising webinars. This approach aims to create a more direct and effective way to connect with multiple projects and explore common interests.

Based on the challenges encountered during outreach and clustering activities, the following policy guidelines aim to improve clustering and enhance collaboration between EU-funded projects. Despite the presence of filtering options, searches on the CORDIS platform were sometimes made difficult by the large

number of projects featured. Creating separate satellite platforms or dedicated sections for major thematic areas, such as sustainability or environmental science, could help streamline searches and make it easier to identify relevant partners. Projects should be encouraged to provide easily accessible contact information for both communication and scientific leads. Clear internal protocols should be established within projects to facilitate responses to external collaboration requests, ensuring that outreach emails are directed to appropriate team members. Establishing early coordination mechanisms and encouraging interactive formats such as webinars or joint workshops would also help to identify shared interests and potential synergies between projects from the outset.

2.4 Updated list of clustered projects and thematic overview of their focus areas

PRO-COAST currently features 12 projects which were sufficiently enthusiastic about clustering to wish to be included on the PRO-COAST website: B-Cubed, BioAgora, BioValue, BIOcean5D, CLEVER, EmpowerUs, MARCO-BOLO, MOSAIC, PLUS Change, PRO-CLIMATE, SELINA, and WaterLANDS. In Table 2, each project is presented with its thematic focus, principal overlap with PRO-COAST, and corresponding relevance score.

Table 2: Overview of the clustered projects and their relevance to PRO-COAST.

Project	Thematic Focus	Principal overlap with PRO-COAST	Relevance score	Website
B-Cubed	Integrating biodiversity data into models and indicators for policy	Case Studies, Policy, and Capacity Building.	1.5	https://b-cubed.eu/
BioAgora	Science-policy interface for conservation	Use of case studies.	1	https://bioagora.eu/
BioValue	Socio-economic valuation of biodiversity and ecosystem services	Includes social science on transformative change and the use of case studies.	2.5	https://biovalue-horizon.eu/
BIOcean5D	Ocean biodiversity monitoring across time and space	Focuses on marine environment and involves citizen science.	1	https://biocean5d.org/
CLEVER	Links trade and biodiversity to promote sustainable	Includes aspects of social science on governance mechanisms and the use of case studies	2	https://clever-project.eu/

	production and consumption			
EmpowerUs	Empowers coastal communities through socio-economic development and nature-based solutions	Socio-economic empowerment of coastal communities, integrating social sciences and case studies with a marine focus.	4	https://empowerus-project.eu/
MARCO-BOLO	Monitoring coastal and marine biodiversity change	Community engagement and focus on marine environments.	2	https://marcobolo-project.eu/
MOSAIC	Innovative approaches to sustainable land management	Use of case studies and social sciences to support sustainable change.	2	https://www.mosaic-europe.eu/
PLUS Change	Innovative approaches to sustainable land management	Strong stakeholder engagement, integrating social sciences and case studies.	2.5	https://pluschange.eu/
PRO-CLIMATE	Testing community solutions to strengthen climate resilience across Europe	Community engagement, integrating social sciences and the use of case studies.	3	https://pro-climate.eu/
SELINA	Integrates biodiversity and ecosystem services into European decision-making	Use of social sciences and case studies.	2	https://project-selina.eu/
WaterLANDS	Community-led wetland restoration supporting sustainability	Community engagement, integrating social sciences and the use of case studies.	3	https://waterlands.eu/

2.5 Identified areas of synergies from email exchanges

Email exchanges often helped identify the most important common interests for clustering. In that respect, information exchange was often the first step: many projects shared their website and additional details about their activities, which helped to better understand potential overlaps with PRO-COAST. For most projects, initial email exchanges opened the way to discussions on joint participation in future events, such as the IPBES plenary. In some cases, this led to direct invitations to in-person activities. For example, PRO-COAST was invited to attend events organized by LAND4CLIMATE. Another important aspect of clustering was to improve mutual visibility and outreach. Email exchanges were often an opportunity to support each other on social media. Whenever possible, PRO-COAST also subscribed to project newsletters to remain up to date with their activities. It was these exchanges that led PRO-COAST to add 12 projects to its website as cluster partners, where they are presented with their logos and an overview of their objectives (https://www.pro-coast.eu/en/bqxepxf_yrxcqwp_zrxcgqwp/clustering). An example of how these projects are presented on the PRO-COAST website is shown in Figure 1. The page features Horizon 2020 projects clustered with PRO-COAST, highlighting their objectives and links for additional information. It is available now in 4 languages.

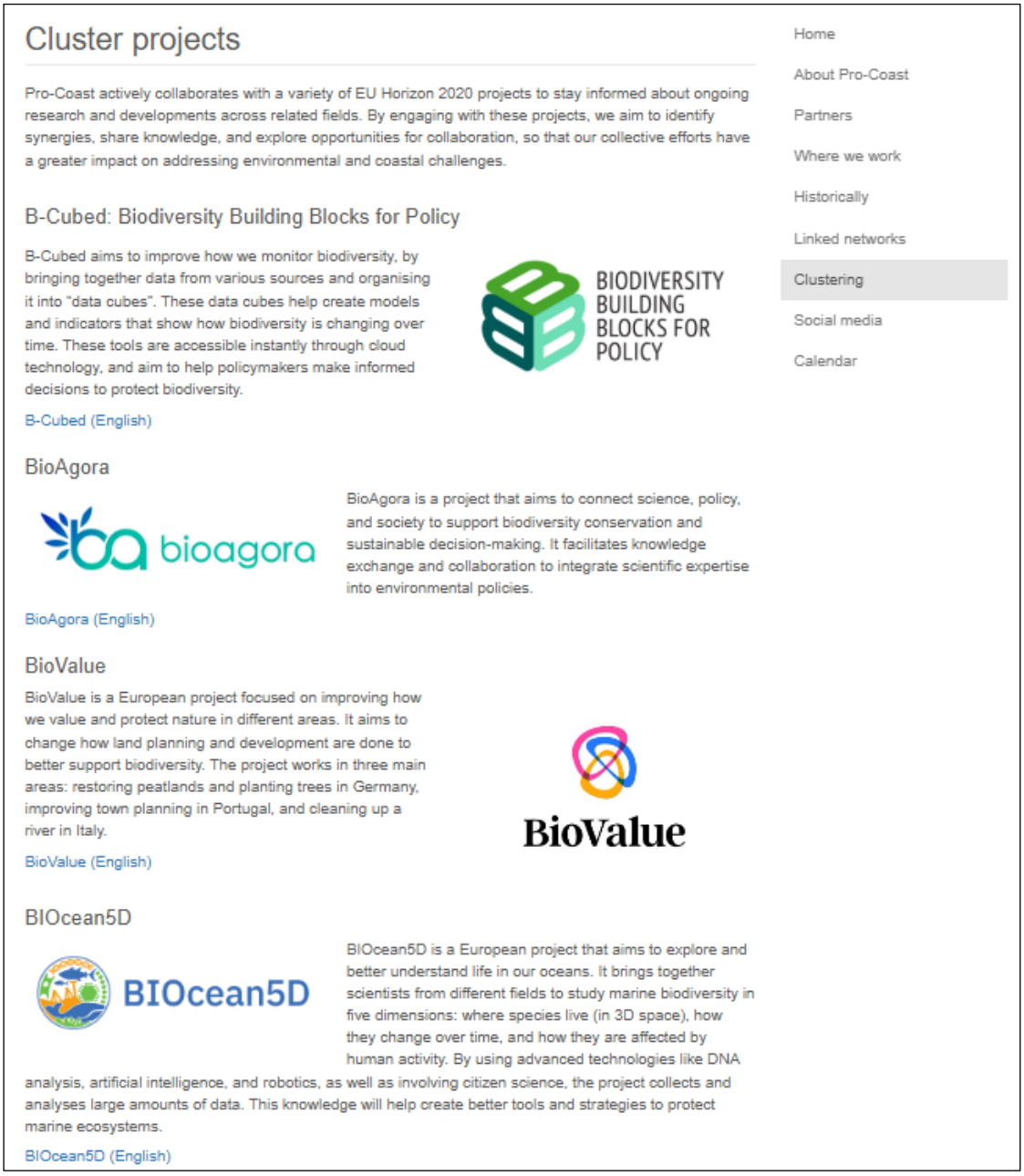


Figure 1: Example of how cluster projects are presented on the PRO-COAST website.

2.6 Cross-pollination activities

2.6.1 Collaboration and exchanges

Responsive email exchanges often led to concrete opportunities for collaboration, including joint meetings and the development of shared activities with other projects. For instance, communications with NBRACER resulted in an online meeting on 11 August 2025 between Julie Ewald (PRO-COAST) and NBRACER members. Discussions focused on community engagement and Nature-based Solutions, and both sides agreed to explore joint activities such as co-developing webinars, co-creating storytelling articles, and showcasing case studies. In particular, NBRACER invited PRO-COAST to participate to their storytelling initiative, Nature Narratives, which showcases pilot areas through simple narratives and photographs. They provided a template focused on highlighting the project's transitional change elements,

allowing PRO-COAST to illustrate its contributions. More broadly, NBRACER's approach to engaging with local communities appears highly relevant and could be effectively integrated into the webinars planned as part of PRO-COAST.

As part of the transformative change clustering activities, Robert Kenward and Julie Ewald had an online meeting with Eva Sievers (Leiden University) to contribute to her work on 'Reflexive Power Mapping'. This exercise aims to explore how projects engage with different dimensions and types of power in support of transformative change, for example through methods, governance, stakeholder engagement, or case studies. Following their initial exchange, Eva requested to connect with one of PRO-COAST's partners that managed a case study to capture on-the-ground perspectives. With PRO-COAST's facilitation, she was introduced to Friends of the Earth Malta, who agreed to participate in the discussion. This collaboration offers PRO-COAST the opportunity to learn from the process while also supporting current research on transformative change.

In addition to meetings between members, further opportunities for collaboration have emerged through the sharing of tools and methodologies with other Horizon projects. A clear example is the potential for tool sharing between BIOcean5D and PRO-COAST. Tools developed by BIOcean5D, such as the biodiversity value index and methodologies for understanding the economic and societal value of marine ecosystem functions, could also be applied within PRO-COAST. Conversely, PRO-COAST tools, including the DeepChange Framework and approaches for community engagement, may be of relevance to BIOcean5D. Collaboration is particularly appropriate as both projects focus on marine environments and place strong emphasis on involving local communities.

Cross-pollination that identifies tools useful at community level is of particular importance for PRO-COAST due to ESUG's continuing responsibility for the Community Sustainability Platform (CUSP) until 2033. WP2 of PRO-COAST, with help of ESUG, is collecting as many tools as possible, through literature review and practical experience in case studies, as well as through cross-pollination. The tools most suitable for use in communities will be signposted on the community websites in the languages for which they are built, while tools more suitable for community work by experts will be signposted on the English-language site.

Drawing from this experience, the following policy guidelines aim to enhance collaboration and exchanges between Horizon projects. Projects should be encouraged to engage in reciprocal exchanges of tools, frameworks, and methodologies. To support this, each project should clearly present on their website the tools used in their case studies, detailing their purpose, scope, and practical applications across different contexts, and provide contact information for partners interested in adopting or adapting these tools. Clustering should not be limited to Horizon projects or established organisations but also extend to individual experts such as PhD researchers and practitioners working on related topics, as their involvement can foster valuable knowledge exchange and contribute to building a broader community of practice. Finally, direct meetings between project leaders are more effective than email exchanges in generating concrete outcomes and should therefore be prioritised within clustering strategies. These exchanges have yielded valuable mutual learning, particularly on community engagement methodologies and integration of social-ecological tools.

2.6.2 Partner overlaps

Partner overlap between PRO-COAST and other Horizon projects creates opportunities for valuable cross-pollination of experiences and methods. In the case of PRO-CLIMATE, shared partners enable continuous exchanges on community engagement, social science approaches, and the analysis of case studies. Several social scientists involved in both projects (notably from Leipzig University) use their experience from one context to refine approaches in the other, providing insights into effective practices and potential

challenges. Similarly, PRO-COAST shares some members with the OTTERS project, which aligns with PRO-COAST in its emphasis on community engagement, social science approaches, and marine environments. Partner overlaps greatly facilitate cross-pollination, as insights and experiences are shared informally during project meetings.

2.6.3 Participation in events and networking

Through email exchanges, project members shared information on their webinars and invited us to participate or attend. Recently, a PRO-COAST member (Perline Bastid) attended the Naturescapes Collaboratory Meeting on 3rd September 2025, which focused on the use of a scorecard to assess the physical and social impacts of Nature-based Solutions (NBS). Following this meeting, the potential application of this approach within PRO-COAST was considered and will be discussed at our next partner meeting in Sligo, Ireland.

In some cases, despite limited response to emails, PRO-COAST established connections by attending project events. For instance, Julie Ewald and Robert Kenward attended an online event organized by PLANET4B on 4 October 2024, and another by SCORE on 11 March 2024, which allowed us to better understand their work. Email exchanges with SELINA opened the door to contributions to the Sustainability Issue. Discussions included proposals for reciprocal consortium presentations and initial steps to strengthen connections, among others, via social media.

A member of the PRO-COAST team, Julian Mühle, participated in the Marine Biodiversity Restore & Protect Marine Biodiversity and Reducing Bycatch meeting organised by Bio-Agora within the Knowledge Exchange Network for Marine Biodiversity in Brussels on 14–15 March. The meeting brought together EU-funded and national projects to discuss bycatch, which represents a significant threat to marine biodiversity. Key questions explored included identifying relevant stakeholders, examining barriers to implementation, and assessing how policymakers can best support reduction strategies. Participants examined the causes and impacts of bycatch, as well as potential mitigation measures. The dual role of bycatch reduction as both a conservation objective and a tool for ecosystem restoration was highlighted. PRO-COAST's presence at the event increased the project's visibility, facilitated networking with fellow projects, and provided opportunities to learn from ongoing initiatives. The event also introduced PRO-COAST to a range of relevant tools and organisations, including the Digital Twin of the Ocean (DTO) which aims to support sustainable ocean management. Future cluster activities aim to include collaborative sessions at the ESCAR Conference in 2026.

Julian Mühle also represented PRO-COAST at the Cluster event on "Transformative Change for Biodiversity", which brought together several Horizon projects on this theme. This event, organised by the European Research Executive Agency (REA) of the European Commission, took place in Brussels on 3rd June 2025.

Alex Yendell represented PRO-COAST as a panellist at the EmpowerUs final event, titled Empowering Coastal Voices: Co-creating the Future of Marine Policy. During a session titled Empower Policy: Why Social Science is Important for Marine Policy panel, Alex contributed perspectives on the role of social science in shaping marine governance, stakeholder engagement, and policy formulation. The event was held in Brussels (Belgium) on 10th of September 2025, bringing together researchers, policymakers, community actors and NGOs to explore how coastal and marine policy can better integrate local perspectives. This participation not only raised visibility for PRO-COAST but also strengthened connections between projects working at the intersection of marine policy and social science.

Recently, Perline Bastid represented PRO-COAST at the BioAgora Science-Policy Interface (SPI) Dialogue Workshop (October 1st–2nd, Ghent, Belgium). The workshop offered a valuable opportunity for

a PRO-COAST member to connect with coordinators and leading contributors of the BioAgora project as well as partners of WaterLANDS, with whom PRO-COAST clusters (Table 2). The workshop brought together EU and policymakers, scientists, and other stakeholders to discuss challenges and opportunities for implementing the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR). Through activities such as role plays, fishbowl discussions, and other interactive sessions, she contributed insights from her previous research on aquatic environments and from PRO-COAST's ongoing work on community-led ecosystem restoration. These exchanges helped raise awareness of PRO-COAST within the broader science-policy community and opened potential avenues for future collaboration.

Regarding clustering with long-term research and stakeholder organisations, Robert Kenward attended the 8th quadrennial World Conservation Congress of IUCN in Abu Dhabi during 9-15 October 2025. The theme of WCC8, Transformative Conservation, is especially relevant to PRO-COAST. Indeed, the EU representative welcomed European priorities and emphasised importance of Nature-based Solutions, of which IUCN sets the standards, as well as recognising the need to strengthen work in Europe towards transformative change. The work of ESUG, in 50 languages across three of IUCN's seven Commissions (also for CUSP of PRO-COAST), was recognised in Motion 94, on languages and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, with recommendation for further work with IPBES and UNESCO. The work of PRO-COAST was featured in posters at a meeting of the group on Sustainable Use and Management of Ecosystems that ESUG helped to found in 2014. This gave a chance to talk with 12 members of SUME about plans for engaging the CUSP with IUCN's Naturalliance network, and with representatives of stakeholder organisations whose IUCN-membership provides conservation research credentials, namely FACE, IAF and BirdLife as well as IUCN-CEM-SUME (see Table 4).

Based on this experience, the policy guidelines in D7.8 (and see Section 7) are proposed to encourage broader participation in inter-project events and networking opportunities. Attendance at events organised by other Horizon projects working on related themes is important, as it not only increases opportunities for direct interaction but also helps projects stay informed about others' activities and progress, which can in turn influence and inspire their own development. Projects should actively share information about relevant events, webinars, and participation opportunities through communication channels that extend beyond their immediate cluster. This may include strengthening the use and visibility of existing EU platforms and networks to share events and opportunities for collaboration among projects working on related themes.

3 RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER EU ORGANISATIONS

3.1 List of relevant EU organisations

A list of other EU science-based organisations and projects has also been compiled. Although these are not Horizon initiatives, they pursue complementary scientific programmes and networks that may be of relevance to PRO-COAST (Table 3). These organisations were not assessed using the relevance score, as they cover a wide range of case studies and projects making it difficult to classify them within the categories previously identified.

In generally, establishing meaningful collaboration with these organisations has proven challenging during the initial stages of the project. Nevertheless, we continue to follow their newsletters when available and make use of the resources they provide. For example, organisations offering tools on sustainability, such as Oppla (https://oppla.eu/knowledge/resources), are particularly valuable in the context of developing the CUSP. Oppla and ECSA currently represent the most promising entry points for collaboration, particularly regarding citizen science and tool sharing within the CUSP framework. It is expected that, as new tools are developed within PRO-COAST, opportunities for collaboration with larger EU organisations will expand. It was not feasible to establish a direct collaboration with Biodiversa+ as the network mainly includes partners from national ministries, research funders, and environmental agencies rather than Horizon projects. However, we keep up to date with their publications of deliverables, guides and handbooks. These publications are particularly relevant to PRO-COAST as they focus on Nature-based Solutions, transformative change, and socio-ecological systems. Currently, PRO-COAST is considering becoming a member of the Oppla community, as this might be beneficial for networking and increasing the project's visibility. Oppla also seems to be more open to collaboration with other Horizon projects.

Opportunities for collaboration with ECSA are likely to grow, particularly following the development of the Reciprocal Environmental Decision Support Tool (REDS), which will actively collect citizen science data on land uses in garden and associated biodiversity. In this context, joining one of the ECSA working groups, such as the Green spaces and citizen science group, which focuses on urban areas, could be especially relevant for PRO-COAST as the experience gained with REDS in engaging citizens to document land use and biodiversity in gardens could inform similar participatory approaches. For members of this working group, collaborating with PRO-COAST in relation with the REDS tool might be of interest, as it could provide an opportunity to extend citizen science approaches beyond public spaces.

Table 3: Overview of the EU organisations considered for clustering and their relevance to PRO-COAST

EU organisation	Thematic Focus	Relevance for PRO-COAST	Website
Alternet	Biodiversity research and science–policy interface	Expands PRO-COAST's reach into European science–policy dialogue	https://alterneteurope.eu/organisation/
Biodiversa+	Biodiversity research and science–policy interface	Expands PRO-COAST's reach into European science–policy dialogue	https://www.biodiversa.eu/

e-LTER	Ecosystem & socio-ecological research	Insights on participatory socio-ecological research	https://elter-ri.eu/
European Citizen Science Association (ECSA)	Citizen science & public participation in research	Broad European network of citizen science organisations and practitioners	https://www.ecsa.ngo/
Oppla	Ecosystem services, natural capital, and nature-based solutions	Practical examples and transferable methods for NbS and governance	https://oppla.eu/
OURCOAST	Coastal adaptation, planning and governance	Coastal management and climate adaptation case studies	https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/en/metadata/portals/ourcoast-the-european-portal-for-integrated-coastal-zone-management
PEER Pan-European Environmental Research network	Environmental research involving national institutes that were or remain state funded	Interdisciplinary methods, European research partnerships, and climate adaptation expertise	https://www.peer.eu/

4 RELATIONSHIP WITH STAKEHOLDER ORGANISATIONS

4.1 List of relevant stakeholder organisations

A list of stakeholder organisations was also compiled at the beginning of the project. Although these are not directly affiliated with the EU, all have a presence in multiple EU countries, and represent relevant stakeholders for the PRO-COAST project (Table 4). These organisations are diverse: some conduct scientific research, some are engaged in community-level transformative initiatives, and others focus primarily on influencing policy. Given this diversity, we have not yet attempted to use the relevance score to classify them, as it would be difficult to adapt a single coding system to such varied activities. However, by virtue of their work with case studies and through communities of interest (if not also local communities), their score for relevance to PRO-COAST would be high.

In Malta, PRO-COAST collaborates closely with Friends of the Earth (FoE) through its local case-study activities, positioning FoE as a key partner in implementing community-led environmental actions. As the designated leader for the Maltese case study, FoE Malta helps to coordinate on-the-ground actions such as including campaigns against the sale of pineapple cocktails served in hollowed fruit, which create unnecessary waste and harm the island's ecosystem. Together, PRO-COAST and FoE Malta promote environmental awareness among tourists, for example through guided nature walks and pre-ferry briefings aimed at encouraging responsible behaviour. In these ways, PRO-COAST and FoE Malta collaborate locally on raising environmental awareness and restoring biodiversity.

Four members of the ESUG team for PRO-COAST, including one science coordinator, are also active in the International Association for Falconry & Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF). This organisation, formed in 1968, was very active in the restoration of raptor populations following identification of organochlorines as causes of population declines, and more recently in the identification and actions against electrocution of large birds on growing clean-energy infrastructure. As a result of falconry's long history, together with its innovations for conservation, this partnership with wildlife was recognised by UNESCO in 2010 as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of humanity. With national member organisations in 90 countries, IAF is better networked than any other organisation concerned with sustainable use of biodiversity apart from IUCN. Through these links, PRO-COAST stays connected with developments within the IAF and takes part in some of its events.

Beyond the IAF, PRO-COAST maintains partnerships with other leading conservation bodies. The PRO-COAST project held its kick-off meeting in Brussels at the headquarters of FACE (Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the EU), whose CEO is on ESUG's board, and which runs a database with more than a thousand local conservation projects run by hunting organisations across Europe. Similarly, several PRO-COAST members are actively involved in the IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management's Specialist Group on Sustainable Use and Management of Ecosystems (CEM-SUME). Thanks to this involvement, PRO-COAST stays connected with the group's activities and takes part in relevant events and discussions, as well as securing linkage for PRO-COAST dissemination to the Naturalliance network and three others shown on the CUSP.

Table 4: Stakeholder organisations and their relevance to PRO-COAST

Stakeholder organisations	Thematic Focus	Relevance for PRO-COAST	Website
BirdLife International	Bird and biodiversity conservation	Global conservation expertise and coastal biodiversity protection	https://www.birdlife.org/
Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF)	Sustainable forest management and ownership	Sustainable use of natural resources	https://www.cepf-eu.org/
COPA-COGECA	Agriculture and farming	Sustainable use of natural resources	https://copa-cogeca.eu/
European Anglers Alliance	Recreational angling	Sustainable use of wildlife	https://www.eaa-europe.org/
Friends of the Earth	Environmental protection and sustainability	One PRO-COAST case study has members who are part of Friends of the Earth	https://friendsoftheearth.eu/
FACE Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the EU	Recreational hunting	Sustainable use of wildlife	https://www.face.eu/
IAF International Association for Falconry & Conservation of Birds of Prey	Falconry and restoration of raptor populations.	Sustainable use of wildlife	https://iaf.org/
IUCN-CEM-SUME Sustainable Use and Management of Ecosystems	Sustainable use of natural resources	Sustainable use of natural resources	https://iucn.org/our-union/commissions/group/iucn-cem-sustainable-use-and-management-ecosystems-thematic-group

We maintain regular contact with the last four organisations mentioned above. This helps PRO-COAST coordination team stay up to date with the priorities and challenges encountered by stakeholder organisations and ensures that our research activities and outputs are aligned with some of their needs. The development of the CHUI and REDS will provide an opportunity to share our approach more widely with these organisations and others and to expand our discussions with IUCN further. In this context, Robert Kenward attended the quadrennial (8th) World Conservation Congress of IUCN in Abu Dhabi to

provide information on PRO-COAST, including a last outing for our initial poster. Relationships with stakeholder organisations will also serve as valuable channels to advertise our upcoming webinar series and promote wider engagement with the project.

5 CLUSTERING AND COLLABORATION ACTIVITIES

5.1 Website visibility and mutual outreach

Email exchanges led PRO-COAST to add 12 projects to its website as cluster partners, where they are represented with their logos and an overview of their objectives (https://www.pro-coast.eu/en/bqxepxf_yrxcqwp_zrxcgqwp/clustering). PRO-COAST is also featured on Horizon project websites, including MARCO-BOLO, BioValue, and BioAgora. This promotes visibility and mutual outreach for our respective projects, particularly among audiences engaged with our shared themes and research focus. Additionally, PRO-COAST follows 21 other Horizon projects on social media and is followed by 19 projects in return (Table 5). This exchange helps us stay informed about their activities, including the events they organise or attend, as well as the progress of their case studies.

Table 5: Social media connections between PRO-COAST and other projects

	LinkedIn	Facebook	X	Instagram
Number of projects followed by PRO-COAST	4	6	10	4
Number of projects following PRO-COAST	2	1	9	8

5.2 Webinars and knowledge exchange activities

5.2.1. Purpose of webinars and part of our clustering strategy

To address the challenges faced when clustering with other projects via email, we have decided to organise webinars. These will serve as an opportunity to engage our current cluster partners and to re-establish contact with others, inviting them to attend and participate. These webinars will provide an opportunity for PRO-COAST to showcase its three main research developments: the DeepChange Framework (which integrates Kotter and Theory-U approaches), the Conservation and Human Use Index (CHUI), and the Community Sustainability Platform (CUSP), including the REDS system of knowledge exchange. A promotional leaflet has already been created to advertise the webinar series and will be used to support outreach efforts (Figure 2). Invitations will be directed to similar projects and researchers working with local communities in coastal ecosystems. The objective is to engage stakeholder organisations that may be interested in using the CUSP and applying the DeepChange Framework. The CHUI may also be useful for some stakeholders, though it may need to be adapted to their specific use cases. Organisations such as FACE, IAF, and IUCN-CEM-SUME are particularly likely to be interested in attending our webinar on CUSP, as the platform closely aligns with their work on sustainable use and ecosystem management. In addition, the webinars will foster mutual learning by creating space for dialogue and knowledge exchange.



Figure 2: Promotional leaflet for the PRO-COAST webinar series.

5.2.2. Planned webinar topics (Kotter Theory, Theory U, DeepChange Framework, CHUI, CUSP, etc.)

The webinars (beginning in late 2025, into early 2026) will focus on three key themes: the DeepChange Framework (combining Theory U and the Nienaber-Kotter model), the Conservation and Human Use Index (CHUI), and the Community Sustainability Platform (CUSP). These themes are presented below in further detail, together with an overview of their intended target audiences.

Kotter Theory, Theory U, DeepChange Framework:

Combining Theory U with the Reworked Kotter Model (Nienaber-Kotter Model): A Practical Hybrid for Change resulting in the DeepChange Framework.

Theory U provides a way to engage with the complexity, emotions, and depth of real people in real situations (Scharmer, 2009, 2018) while Kotter's model offers a structured approach to driving action, creating momentum, and maintaining team focus (Kotter, 1996). Combined, they balance inner transformation (shifts in mindsets and relationships) with outer transformation, that is, concrete steps and measurable results. This combination has value, particularly in the context of case studies. Theory U contributes depth, presence, and adaptive capacity needed for complex, human-centred transformation, focusing on co-creation and co-development of the work, while Nienaber's reworked Kotter model enhances participation and dynamism by incorporating learning loops and a non-linear structure. The updated model moves beyond a purely top-down approach, blending structured guidance with bottom-up engagement, thereby creating a more motivating and sustainable pathway for change agents and stakeholders. The DeepChange Framework is a valuable tool for practitioners seeking to implement change in complex social–ecological systems. The webinar on this topic would be of interest to project managers, local leaders, policymakers, and other Horizon project partners who are looking for participatory and adaptive approaches to change.

CHUI: Conservation and Human Use Index

The Conservation and Human Use Index (CHUI) was developed with attention to the interplay between biodiversity, governance, and social perceptions within the PRO-COAST Case Studies (CS). Using a four-dimensional framework (Natural and Ecosystem Service Values, Threats and Pressures, Governance, and Social Perceptions) the Index aims to enable each case study to capture not only the ecological condition, but also how governance systems operate and how stakeholders perceive and engage with conservation. Its structured scoring system (0–100 scale, colour-coded categories, and narrative interpretations) ensures that results are communicated transparently to stakeholders and decision-makers, thereby supporting both immediate management actions and long-term monitoring. The CHUI webinar is likely to be of interest to conservation managers, policymakers, NGOs, and Horizon project partners who need transparent, replicable methods to justify management choices, demonstrate impact, and integrate ecological evidence with governance and community perspectives in conservation planning. These audiences may therefore be especially interested in attending the webinar to explore how the Index can be applied in their own contexts.

CUSP: Community Sustainability Platform

Within PRO-COAST, ESUG has been developing the Community Sustainability Platform (CUSP) to ensure long-term impact beyond the lifetime of the project. This multilingual resource will bring together the tools and approaches identified as most useful across the PRO-COAST case studies. The CUSP network is being promoted by project participants and is already expanding geographically through the appointment of new ESUG Country Coordinators (CoCos) in countries not directly involved in PRO-COAST. Best practices will be shared as incentives for wider participation, while stronger commitment from international stakeholder associations will be supported through a community conference at the end of the project. Additional decision-support tools, developed by other projects, will also be signposted via the platform. As part of the project's outreach activities, other projects will be encouraged to use and promote the facilities offered by CUSP, with a dedicated webinar serving as one means of engagement.

The CUSP webinar will be particularly relevant for Horizon project partners, NGOs, community representatives, and international stakeholder networks who are interested in sharing and applying practical tools, exchanging best practices, and making use of a long-term platform for knowledge and resource sharing.

5.2.3. Organisation and partner involvement

The webinars will bring together three main categories of participants. First, representatives from EU Horizon projects, including the twelve cluster projects already featured on the PRO-COAST website, will be invited to exchange experiences and explore how the tools and approaches presented (i.e. DeepChange Framework, CHUI, and CUSP) can complement their own work. In addition, we hope to engage members of EU-level organisations such as Biodiversa+, e-LTER, and the European Citizen Science Association, to connect PRO-COAST with wider European research and policy dialogues and to reveal potential overlaps with other initiatives. Finally, members of some of the stakeholder organisations listed in Table 4 will be invited to contribute perspectives from practice. Their involvement will help to ensure that discussions on tool development remain grounded in real-world needs and practical considerations. Bringing together these different groups will create a diverse platform for dialogue, knowledge sharing, and potential collaboration.

To ensure accessibility, all webinars will be recorded and made available via the CUSP and on YouTube. This will enable partners, stakeholders, and other Horizon projects to revisit discussions and apply the concepts and tools in their own contexts. Sharing the webinars will improve outreach by making PRO-COAST's approaches more visible; viewers may be inspired to apply these methods in their own contexts and may contact us to collaborate further or learn more about what has been achieved. Other EU- or nationally funded projects may identify overlaps and propose joint workshops. Researchers might adapt the frameworks and tools for comparative studies or propose joint academic outputs. In this way, the project aims to promote a broader community of practice around coastal sustainability and further open opportunities for collaboration.

5.2.4. Expected outcomes for future collaboration

The webinars are designed not only to share knowledge but also to foster collaboration between PRO-COAST and Horizon projects, stakeholder organisations, and additional relevant participants. They will create opportunities for participants to share experiences, compare methods, and learn from one another's approaches. In the context of PRO-COAST, it will be valuable to gather external perspectives on the tools presented, as this may help to refine them. Most importantly, the webinars may also help identify collaborators interested in testing and applying the tools presented. Their use by other partners would provide a strong foundation for future collaboration and potentially create opportunities to further co-develop the tools and jointly generate new approaches. Additionally, by revealing overlaps between initiatives, the webinars could stimulate future joint activities between PRO-COAST and some of the participants, such as collaborative workshops. Discussions on shared topics of interest may also give rise to research collaborations between PRO-COAST members and participants, for example, in the joint development of new tools and frameworks. Such collaborations are likely to bring together expertise from environmental science and social science. Generally, the sessions will help to strengthen professional connections within the coastal sustainability community. Finally, by encouraging stakeholders to explore and apply tools such as the DeepChange Framework, CHUI, and CUSP in their own contexts, the webinars aim to help extend PRO-COAST's impact beyond the lifetime of the project.

5.3 Proposed survey of case studies from other projects

PRO-COAST is interested in understanding the factors that promote local community action for biodiversity conservation and environmental protection, not only by analysing the outcomes of its own case studies, but also by learning from other Horizon projects working on similar subjects. To this end, collaboration with other Horizon-funded initiatives is being considered through the development of a short survey aimed at case studies working on comparable environmental challenges and including community engagement. This survey would be disseminated to project coordinators, who would then invite their case study leaders to complete it. The aim would be to gather insights into the key challenges encountered in working with coastal communities and the strategies employed to address them. By synthesising the experiences across multiple projects, including PRO-COAST's own case studies, it would be possible to identify the critical factors that underpin successful community collaboration and effective case study outcomes. Larges samples would enable more robust analyses to test scientific hypotheses raised in PRO-COAST. The aggregated findings would then be shared with all participating projects, thereby fostering mutual learning and reinforcing synergies among Horizon initiatives. However, this activity remains under consideration due to time constraints within the project.

6 THE COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY PLATFORM (CUSP)

6.1 Overview of platform development

The Community Sustainability Platform (CUSP) is a key outcome of the PRO-COAST project, designed to be scaled out across Europe with the support of partners and Country Coordinators within ESUG. Already translated into 16 languages, the CUSP will act as a multilingual, multi-satellite platform, with each satellite tailored to a specific country or local community. Its primary aim is to disseminate scientific knowledge in an accessible way, making sustainability concepts and practices understandable and engaging for diverse audiences. An important feature of the CUSP will be the integration of a diverse range of decision-support tools, derived from tools which have proven effective in PRO-COAST case studies and complemented by a review of the existing literature on decision support tools for conservation. These tools will provide practical guidance for improving sustainability, with options adapted to different user groups, from policymakers and conservation professionals to local citizens.

The platform will feature two types of tools: simple, interactive ones for local communities and advanced, scenario-based ones for decision-makers and conservationists. Many of these tools will include mapping functions, focusing for instance on biodiversity, carbon storage, and related ecosystem services. For community users, the tools are intended to be both accessible and engaging for non-specialist audiences, encouraging engagement and sustainable behaviour. For professional users, the tools will provide more complex insights, such as predictions of sustainable outcomes under different management scenarios. To make the platform intuitive, users may be guided to the most relevant set of tools through sub-menus or a short questionnaire. A central highlight of the CUSP will be the REDS (Reciprocal Environmental Decision Support) application. Developed in the PRO-COAST Arne case study, REDS allows users to map their gardens according to land uses and record wildlife sightings. The application generates scores estimating the garden's carbon sequestration, together with suitability for sparrows, blackbirds, hedgehogs and (potentially) any other species of conservation interest. The REDS app exemplifies the type of tools that will be featured on the CUSP: science-based, designed for ease of use, and aimed at promoting sustainability. It is also expected to play an important role in enhancing engagement with the platform, though being both enjoyable and satisfying to use.

6.2 The CUSP preparation and translation

The precursor to the CUSP itself, which is a sophisticated network now under construction using the software of the System for Community Liaison, was the multilingual website built and translated in the early months of the project in the Multilingual Online Research Project Hosting webmaster software (MORPHmaster). After content had been agreed by partners, it was translated in this system into Dutch, English, Estonian, French, German, Greek, Italian, Maltese, Montenegrin, Norwegian, Romanian, Russian, Spanish and Ukrainian, which suited the system for operation in 25 cultures covered by the 14 languages the (Figure 3).

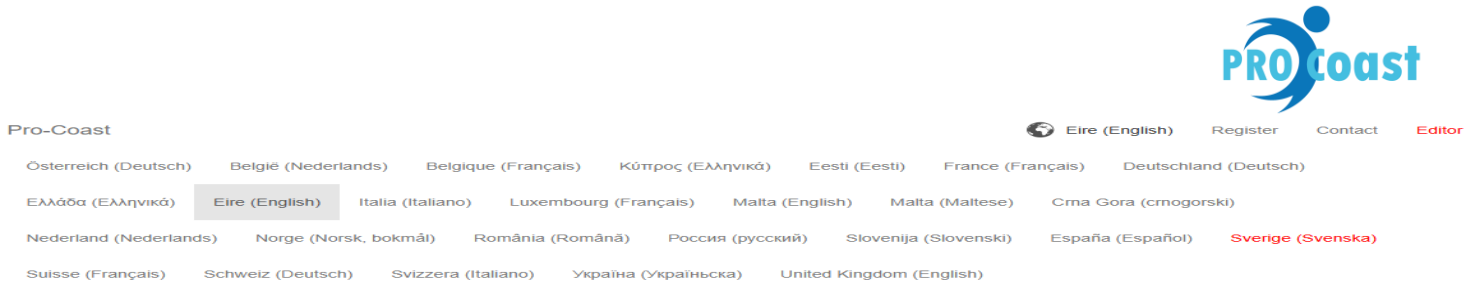


Figure 3: The language menu of the PRO-COAST website. Swedish (red) is not yet translated.

The translators were asked to complete a questionnaire prepared by Tetiana Gardashuk (who herself translates both Ukrainian and Russian) on ease of use of the system and quality of content (Figure 4).

Mini-Survey for Naturalliance -- Pro-Coast translation (please complete as soon as possible).

Your e-Mail Address	

The material you translated (please use an X where appropria	1:no	2	3	4	5:very
Did you find sentences too long?					
Did you find words or concepts hard to translate?					
ow relevant is the hub material for your part of the world?					
About how many hours did the hub translation take you?					
ne satellite Home Page suitable for your part of the world?					

Any further comments on the material?	

The software for doing the translation (please use an X as abo	1:no	2	3	4	5:very
Did you find the initial log-in easy?					
Were the instructions for using the system easy?					
Overall, was translation using the system easy?					

How did you translate:	Straight into the system		First into document		First in Excel
For single words or one-line material?					
For longer paragraphs of text?					

Any further comments on the software?	

Any other comments?

Figure 4: The questionnaire used to assess partner opinions when translating the website.

The system was found by most translators to be easy to use (Table 6). They took on average 6 hours to complete the translation. Most did not find content sentences too long or hard to translate, and they considered the content to be moderately to very suitable and relevant for their audiences (Figure 5).

Table 6: The opinions of partners on ease of use of the translation system.

	1=No	2	3	4	5=Yes
Did you find the initial log-in easy?			x	xxx	xxxxxxxxxx
Were the instructions for using the system easy?		x	x	xxx	xxxxxxxxx
Overall, was translation using the system easy?			x	xxx	xxxxxxx

The material translated (1-5 evaluation)

1. Did you find sentences too long?
2. Did you find words or concepts hard to translate?
3. How relevant is the hub material for your part of the world?
4. Is the satellite Home Page suitable for your part of the world?

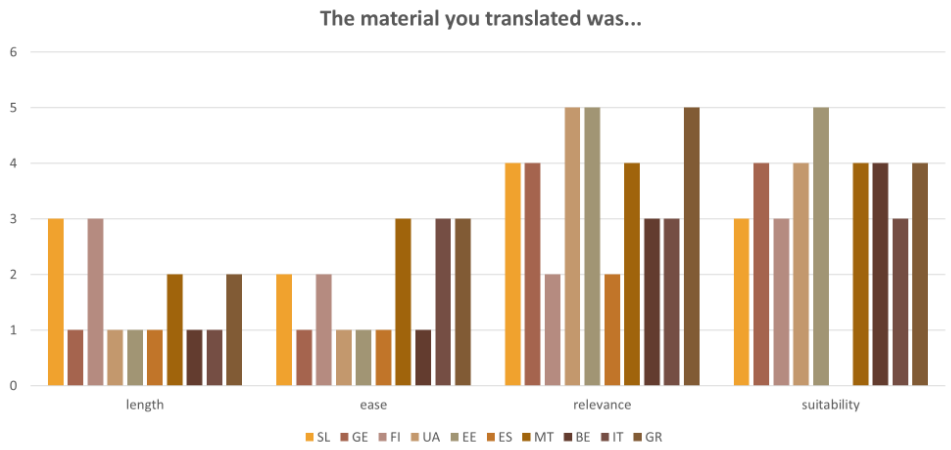


Figure 5: The opinions of partners on ease on difficulty of translation (left & left-centre, 1=easy) and on quality of content (right-centre & right, 5=high relevance).

6.3 Opportunities for clustering through CUSP

The CUSP, as a multilingual and multi-satellite platform, will also provide significant opportunities for clustering. It is expected to be of particular interest to Horizon projects focused on sustainability and community engagement, especially those developing tools. Frequently, tools generated within individual projects remain underutilised once the project concludes. By hosting them on the CUSP, these outputs would retain visibility beyond the project's lifespan, thereby enhancing their uptake by local communities, decision-makers, and other stakeholders. The platform will also enable the quantification of tool usage, for example by assessing which tools are most frequently accessed and by which stakeholder groups. This information would provide valuable insights for Horizon projects developing tools. Data collected on the CUSP could support collaboration with these projects to identify the types of tools that are most in demand and advise future tool development for sustainability. Furthermore, Horizon projects may themselves seek to employ some of the tools hosted on the CUSP within their own case studies. In return, they could provide feedback on tool performance and usability, which would help refine the platform's offerings and guide decisions on which tools are most relevant for different user groups. In addition, the platform has strong potential for collaboration with stakeholder organisations at local, regional, and international scales. These could include NGOs, conservation bodies, local authorities, and community groups, who can contribute tools while also using the accessible resources provided by the CUSP.

6.4 Links with webinar content

To ensure accessibility, all webinars will be recorded and made available via the CUSP and on YouTube. This will enable partners, stakeholders, and other horizon projects to revisit discussions and apply the concepts and tools in their own contexts. Sharing the webinars will improve outreach by making PRO-COAST's approaches more visible; viewers may be inspired to apply these methods in their own contexts and may contact us to collaborate further or learn more about what has been achieved. Other EU- or nationally funded projects may identify overlaps and propose joint workshops. Researchers might adapt the frameworks and tools for comparative studies or propose joint academic outputs. In this way, the project aims to promote a broader community of practice around coastal sustainability and further open opportunities for collaboration.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

7.1 Key achievements in clustering

PRO-COAST has consistently sought to engage with other Horizon-funded projects, EU organisations, and stakeholder networks, with the aim of establishing partnerships around biodiversity, ecosystem services, and community engagement. To date, PRO-COAST has successfully identified and established links with a wide range of relevant initiatives. Twelve Horizon projects have been formally included as cluster partners on the PRO-COAST website, ensuring mutual visibility and raising awareness of shared objectives. Outreach efforts have also led to participation in external events, invitations to contribute to collaborative activities such as storytelling initiatives, and opportunities for tool sharing. PRO-COAST representatives have taken part in key events and panel discussions, which has further strengthened ties with related projects and increased recognition of the project's expertise. These exchanges have enhanced the project's visibility within the Horizon community and positioned PRO-COAST as an active partner in wider discussions on transformative change and community-led sustainability.

7.2 Challenges encountered and lessons learned

Outreach activities for clustering presented several challenges. Response rates from contacted projects were often low, and even when contact was established, it was not always straightforward to identify concrete synergies, and discussions sometimes remained at a general level without progressing to joint activities. One reason for this might be the way communication responsibilities are structured within projects, which can make it harder to establish effective scientific collaboration. In addition, differences in project timelines sometimes hindered collaboration, particularly with projects nearing completion. A stronger level of coordination by the EU representative could facilitate clustering, particularly for projects that commenced at a later stage and therefore missed some of the initial development work of the clusters established earlier. Such coordination could help ensure that newer projects are more effectively integrated and able to contribute to, and benefit from, ongoing collaborative efforts. To address the barriers encountered with clustering, PRO-COAST is adopting a new approach through webinars, designed to provide a more direct and effective way of engaging with multiple projects and exploring shared interests.

7.3 Next phase and priorities (deepening collaborations, webinars, policy etc.)

In the coming phase, PRO-COAST's clustering efforts will focus on consolidating and increasing collaborations through a series of targeted webinars and the continued development of the Community Sustainability Platform (CUSP). The webinars, beginning in late 2025 and extending into early 2026, will provide a structured space for knowledge exchange with Horizon partners, EU organisations, and stakeholder networks. They will showcase PRO-COAST's key tools, including the DeepChange Framework, the CHUI, and the CUSP, while inviting discussion on their potential applications in other projects and contexts. These sessions are expected to foster dialogue, mutual learning, and practical opportunities for collaboration, while extending the project's visibility and impact across the Horizon community.

An increasing emphasis will be placed on gaining recommendations from other projects and organisations, including those confederating stakeholders as well as research organisations, on policy needs for the

transition of communities. This will be done partly by requiring questions to be answered by those downloading tools from the CUSP, as was implemented successfully when the TESS project initiated a similar multilingual website. The website concerned at https://www.naturalliance.eu is still attracting several hundred visits monthly and links with the IUCN/ESUG network at https://www.naturalliance.org, with which in turn there is already networking on the CUSP. A second approach for gathering policy recommendations will be the survey of projects and organisations with which PRO-COAST is already clustering. The results of all this consultation will be presented as Deliverable 7.8 in Month 34.

7.4 Policy guidelines

The principle of clustering with other projects is very important. Clustering needs to involve long-term projects and other research organisations. A great inefficiency of the current system of short projects is that results are overlooked by the science community when organisations lack the resources for publication of results after projects. Long-term projects and other organisations are likely to adopt the most important findings from Horizon projects that align with their interests, although that may mean that material most relevant for innovation continues to be overlooked.

Our planning for policy guidelines will include not only recommendations for improving clustering as it is currently conceived but also recommend additional changes for Science Framework projects as a whole. In terms of practical measures to strengthen collaboration and clustering among EU-funded projects, drawing on lessons learned from our outreach and networking activities, we already note the following:

1. While CORDIS searches can be challenging due to the large number of projects, creating dedicated sections or satellite platforms, organised by theme, would improve navigation and partner identification. Projects should provide clear contact details for communication and scientific leads and set internal protocols to handle collaboration requests efficiently.
2. The exchange of tools, frameworks, and methods should be strengthened. Projects should clearly present on their websites the tools used in their case studies, describing their purpose, scope, and practical applications. They should provide contact details to relevant partners so that those interested in adopting these tools can access information and support on how to do this.
3. Direct meetings between project leaders should be prioritised over email exchanges within clustering strategies, as they lead to more meaningful dialogue and concrete outcomes. To ensure that PRO-COAST remains aligned with current priorities and needs, we are maintaining regular contact with other Horizon projects, EU organisations, and stakeholder organisations to exchange and discuss policy recommendations based on their experiences.

In terms of recommendations to reduce loss of information from short-term projects by changing processes in future Science Frameworks, we consider it worth mentioning now a few that have already come to mind. One consideration would be a publication budget that is available after a project finishes, to support publication in quality peer-reviewed journals of analyses that had been pre-registered during the project, with payments managed by coordinating partners and payable only on eventual publication. Another would be the maintenance by DG R&I of a searchable database of abstracts to project results deemed suitable for publication but only present in deliverables, with a list of keywords concerning the results and links to the deliverables concerned. This could work also for material presented on project webpages. Two further ideas to increase uptake of work from projects would also be the maintenance of searchable databases by DG R&I, including one for abstracts of actual publications from projects. A second database would be for words used in one science discipline that have a substantially different meaning in another, such that

partners in multi-disciplinary projects could be advised or required to visit the different definitions in this glossary on starting a project. PRO-COAST is building a glossary of such words to inform ecologists and social scientists, and we note that, were such a glossary to become multilingual, it could assist AI-based translation for some of the most advanced concepts that need to move between languages and different scientific disciplines.

8 REFERENCES

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9 ANNEXES

Annex 1: Overview of PRO-COAST's communication, responses, and clustering activities with other Horizon projects.

Project name	Scoring	Date contacted	Inviation to special issue	Response	Clustering activities discussed or in place
A-AAGORA	4	Email, date unknown		No response	Was contacted at an unknown date.
AURORA	3	Email, date unknown		No response	Online form
B-Cubed	1.5	04/06/2025	Yes	Positive	Exploring potential synergies, with possible links at the IPBES plenary. Project website shared on PRO-COAST site.
BAMBOO	0	Project ended			
BCOMING	1	Not contacted			
BEPREP	1	Not contacted			
BESIDE	0.5	Email, date unknown		No response	Online form
BGE	1.5	Not contacted			
BioAgora	1	08/06/2024	Yes	Positive	Engaging through existing transformative change and marine project clusters. Project website shared on PRO-COAST site.
BIOcean5D	1	March 2025	Yes	Positive	Project website shared on PRO-COAST site.
BioMonitor4CAP	2.5	Email, date unknown		No response	Was contacted at an unknown date.
BIONEXT	2	06/03/2025	Yes	No response	NA

BioTraCes	3	06/03/2025	Yes	No response	NA
Biotrails	3	Email, date unknown		No response	Online form.
BioValue	3	2024	Yes	Positive	Project website shared on PRO-COAST site.
BRIDGE-BS	4	Not contacted			BRIDGE-BS Final Conference will take place on 25 November 2025 in Brussels
CircHive	1	Email, date unknown		No response	Online form
CLEVER	2	08/06/2024	Yes	Positive	Sharing upcoming project meeting plans with the consortium to explore opportunities for joint participation at events (e.g. IPBES plenary). Project website shared on PRO-COAST site.
CO-OP4CBD	0	Not contacted			
D-NOSES	3	Project ended			
DesirMED	3	Email, date unknown		No response	Was contacted at an unknown date.
EcoAdvance	1	Project ended			
ECOCYST	1	Not contacted			
EmpowerUs	4	2024	Yes	Positive	Project website shared on PRO-COAST site.
EUROPE-LAND	1.5	Not contacted			
FARCLIMATE	3	Email, date unknown		No response	Was contacted at an unknown date.
FRAMEWORK	2	Email, date unknown		No response	Was contacted at an unknown date.
GAIA	2	Not contacted			

GoDigiBioS	1	Email, date unknown		No response	Was contacted at an unknown date.
GUARDEN	1.5	Email, date unknown		No response	Online form
IntercropValuES	1	10/03/2025	Yes	No response	NA
Invest4Nature	1	10/03/2025	Yes	No response	NA
LAND4CLIMATE	1	03/06/2025	Yes	Positive	Website linkage, shared communication opportunities, and an invitation to present at the Mid-term Forum in Aachen, Germany.
LEGUMINOSE	1	Not contacted			
MAMBO	1	Not contacted			
MARBEFES	3	Email, date unknown		No response	Was contacted at an unknown date.
MARCO-BOLO	2	08/06/2024	Yes	Positive	Mutual support on social media. Mutual website sharing.
Marine SABRES	3	Email, date unknown		No response	Was contacted at an unknown date.
MISSION ATLANTIC	2.5	Not contacted			
MOSAIC	2	June 2024	Yes	Positive	PRO-COAST is subscribed to MOSAIC's newsletter. Project website shared on PRO-COAST site.
NATALIE	3	Not contacted			
NaturaConnect	1.5	10/03/2025	Yes	No response	NA
NATURANCE	1	Not contacted			Online form
NATURE-FIRST	2	Not contacted			
NATURESCAPES	1	10/03/2025	Yes	No response	A PRO-COAST member attended an online event organised by

					Naturescapes on 03/09/2024
NBRACER	2.5	11/08/2025	Yes	Positive	Members of PRO-COAST and NBRACER met on 11/08/2025 and identified strong synergies in community engagement and Nature-based Solutions. Members agreed to explore joint activities such as webinar participation, co-creation of storytelling articles, and showcasing case studies.
NetworkNaturePLUS	1.5	Not contacted			
OCEANIDS	2.5	Email, date unknown		No response	Was contacted at an unknown date.
OPEN SCHOOLS FOR OPEN SOCIETIES	1.5	Not contacted			
OptFORESTS	0.5	Not contacted			
OTTERS	1	Ongoing communication	Yes	Ongoing communication	Partner overlap supports cross-pollination of experiences and methods between PRO-COAST and OTTERS.
Planet4B	3	06/03/2025	Yes	No response	A member of PRO-COAST attended an online event organised by Planet4B on 04/10/2024

PLUS Change	2.5	04/06/2024	Yes	Positive	Opportunities for joint communications and a meeting at the IPBES plenary. Project website shared on PRO-COAST site.
PRO-CLIMATE	3	Ongoing communication	Yes	Ongoing communication	Partner overlap supports cross-pollination of experiences and methods between PRO-COAST and PRO-Climate. Project website shared on PRO-COAST site.
RAINFOREST	2	06/03/2025	Yes	No response	NA
RESIST	2	Email, date unknown		No response	Was contacted at an unknown date.
REST-COAST	3	08/06/2024	No	Positive	Sharing announcements and planning potential joint workshops or initiatives.
RestPoll	3	Not contacted			
REWRITE	3	Not contacted			
SCORE	4	Meeting attended		No email contact	Newsletter subscription. A member of PRO-COAST attended an online event organised by SCORE on 11/03/2024
SEACHANGE	1	Not contacted			
SEAwise	2.5	Email, date unknown		No response	Online form

SELINA	2	10/03/2025	Yes	Positive	Mutual support on social media. Exchange of project highlights for joint inclusion in both PRO-COAST and SELINA newsletters. Project website shared on PRO-COAST site.
SUPERB	1.5	Not contacted			
SUSTAIN	1	06/03/2025	Yes	No response	NA
TETTRIs	0	10/03/2025	Yes	No response	NA
ToBe	1	Email, date unknown		No response	Was contacted at an unknown date.
TransformAr	3	Email, date unknown		No response	Online form
TRANSMOD	2	Email, date unknown		No response	Was contacted at an unknown date.
TRANSPATH	2	Email, date unknown		No response	Was contacted at an unknown date.
URBAN GreenUP	3	Project ended			
WaterLANDS	3	05/03/2025	Yes	Positive	Future contribution to the sustainability issue. Project website shared on PRO-COAST site. Proposals for reciprocal consortium presentations and initial links via communications and social media.

Annex 2: Draft letter to networking partners

Subject line: PRO-Coast: Empowering Environmental Change Across Europe

Dear xxx,

I hope this email finds you well.

I am reaching out as part of the team leading the PRO-Coast project (PROactive approach for COmmunities to enAble Societal Transformation). PRO-Coast is a HORIZON-funded initiative, bringing together 20 partners from 14 countries, that is using social science to study how coastal communities and civil society across Europe can best be motivated and empowered to restore and maintain biodiversity and ecosystem services. You can visit our website to find out more details: https://www.pro-coast.eu/en/c

The European Commission has given us special responsibility for clustering with related projects that foster social change, especially if they are developing tools and processes for work in case studies. We came across [*Name of the project*] and were interested in its focus on [*Themes aligned with PRO-Coast*]. Given our shared goal on [*Relevant shared goal*], we believe there could be valuable synergies between our projects.

We would welcome the opportunity to feature [*Name of the project*] on our website and social media if you agree. We would be delighted if you could also consider a link to our project on your site. More generally, we hope you would consider opportunities for collaboration.

I am also reaching out to share an opportunity that may be of interest to [*Name of the project*].

As part of our work, two members of PRO-Coast, myself and Pro. Dr. Ann-Marie Nienaber, are guest-editing a Special Issue in the journal Sustainability titled Shifting Paradigms: Reimagining Human-Nature Relationships for Sustainable Biodiversity Conservation. This Special Issue focuses on the transformative changes needed to reshape human behaviour and attitudes towards nature, highlighting interdisciplinary approaches and emerging conservation paradigms. Given [*Name of the project*]'s research on [*Research aligned with Webinar topic*], we believe your insights could be valuable to this edition.

More details about the Special Issue are attached, and we would be happy to discuss any ideas you might have.

Please feel free to reach out to any of the guest editors if you have questions.

Kind regards,

Dr Julie Ewald
Chair of European Sustainable Use Group (ESUG)
Burgate Manor, Fordingbridge, Hampshire SP6 1EF