

Foreword

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Over the last 20 years, European policymakers have adopted the practice of using Environmental Assessment tools to support decision-making. Formal procedures and guidance are well established within the European Commission and in most EU Member States. However, EA procedures alone do not guarantee that the tools used are always the best and most efficient. Therefore the European Commission launched a series of comprehensive research projects to understand decision-making for the environment and to develop science-based EA tools. The project TESS (Transactional Environmental Support System) funded under the EU's Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development was one such project.

TESS has made three major contributions to understanding Environmental Assessment and decision making for the environment in general. It has provided the first Pan-European analysis of EAs, showing that countries where their density is highest have least urban sprawl, and that EA density in turn reflects positive attitudes of local people to benefits from nature. It has shown that although statutory EAs are important, the prevalence of local informal decisions for managing land and species is many thousand times greater. It has noted that local knowledge gathered for these decisions, and for countryside recreations which generate some €62 billion annually, creates high local ability to provide base data of value for EAs and citizen science. These findings have indicated scope for a system, as designed in the TESS project, to acquire local knowledge that would benefit environmental decision-making at all levels. This is relevant to Europe's 2020 strategy and to meeting the Aichi targets of the Convention of Biological Diversity.

While TESS has now ended, the cooperation it promoted between policymakers and “local decision makers” - such as farmers, gardeners and hunters – continues through a legacy web portal www.naturalliance.eu available in 21 languages. The portal offers best practise examples and support tools, such as free mapping software developed by TESS, for anyone to map areas and species in their local environment. In exchange, users will be asked to record their detailed local data through the portal, on species and habitats in their gardens, fields or forests, in order to help local, regional and national authorities make decisions on land use.

The more local information is available, the easier it becomes for decisions to be taken at EU or national level, for example in the implementation of agricultural and structural fund policies. A project such as this is a good example of how EU-funded research is finding solutions to bring basic scientific research to policy makers. I hope that you will enjoy this publication and make good use of it.