



ARTEMIS

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ARTEMIS 1st Peer Learning Session Report

Raising the Voice of Natural Ecosystems

February 6, 2025 | (Online)



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About this report

This report summarises the key discussions and takeaways from the first ARTEMIS Peer Learning session, held online on February 6, 2025. The session convened over 40 participants from science, practice, and policy sectors across the Euro-MED region and beyond, focusing on effective awareness-raising and engagement strategies for seagrass meadow restoration.

Introduction to ARTEMIS

About the project

The ARTEMIS project (Interreg Euro-MED) accelerates seagrass meadow restoration in the Mediterranean through innovative ecosystem-service-based solutions. It organises a series of Peer Learning sessions to support the four ARTEMIS pilot sites in Crete, Menorca, Sardinia, and Monfalcone, to advance knowledge in areas like restoration techniques, stakeholder engagement, ecosystem service valuation, payment for ecosystem services, and policy development. The programme fosters collaboration with experts and sister projects across the Euro-MED region and beyond, including other ecosystems like forests and peatlands. Sessions will be held online and in-person and every session will feature 3-5 real-world case studies from various restoration efforts. Every session is uniquely adapted to each theme and includes an ARTEMIS Agora, a place for discussions, to inspire participants and offer insights into the long-term processes and world of marine ecosystems and their services, articulating their worth to mobilise actors, and their integration into both the public and private sector. Through cross-disciplinary and international collaboration the ARTEMIS Peer Learning Programme aims to break silos and expand horizons.



Raising the Voice of Natural Ecosystems

The first ARTEMIS Peer Learning session on “Raising the Voice for Natural Ecosystems”, brought together stakeholders from in and beyond the marine sector to better understand the power of compelling narratives in raising awareness and garnering support, and to explore ways to enhance the visibility and impact of seagrass restoration efforts. Key themes discussed during the peer learning session include creating a strong brand, harnessing emotional storytelling, engaging media and

influencers, youth engagement, bridging policy and practice, and private sector engagement for awareness. Keynote speakers brought in best practice examples from across disciplines and ecosystems (e.g. peatlands). Strategies for awareness-raising from ecosystems with more advanced efforts provide valuable lessons applicable to the seagrass sector. The session emphasised the need for clear communication strategies to enhance public, financial and policy support for seagrass restoration efforts.

Key messages

Build a Brand: Make your restoration work stand out with a legit, science-backed identity (like Project Seagrass did with Patagonia) while remaining attractive to multiple audiences and aligning with their diverse priorities.

Tell a Story: Hit people in the feels! Use personal stories, show real-life impact, and get folks to visit restoration sites. Like that girl who traveled forever to see the Sea Ranger Service.

Team Up with the Big Guys: Get media, brands, and influencers on board to spread the word. Think Coldplay showing your stuff during their tour or Minecraft making seagrass meadows in their game.

Empower the Youth: Train young people, get them involved, and let them become your restoration ambassadors (like the Sea Ranger Service does).

Talk to the Policymakers: Show them the benefits, make sure your work is based on solid evidence, and train your team to communicate well. Being a good talker is just as important as being a good scientist.

Show the Wider Win: Don't just talk about carbon; show all the other benefits (jobs, social impact). Adapt your financial pitches to fit different investors.



Core Insights for Boosting Awareness on Restoration Efforts

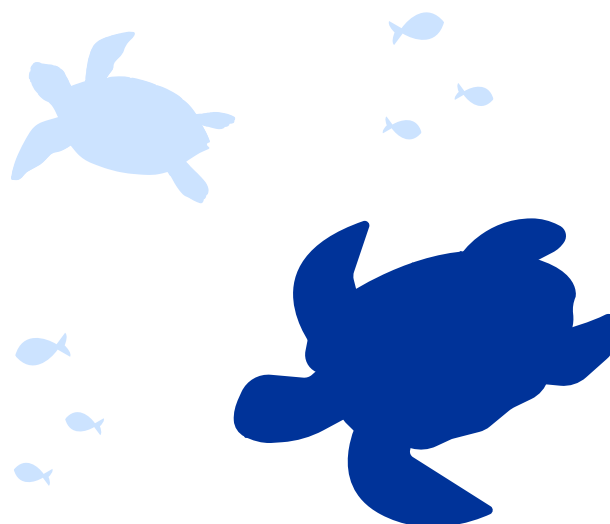
Based on the insights shared, the following core strategies are recommended for boosting awareness about seagrass restoration:

1. Creating a strong brand identity around restoration initiatives

Establishing a recognisable and **science-backed identity** for seagrass restoration enhances both credibility (scientific robustness) and engagement (public appeal). A well-defined brand helps garner public support, secure funding, and engage policymakers. Many initiatives struggle to strike a balance—some prioritise compelling narratives at the expense of accuracy, while others remain too technical for non-expert audiences. Richard Lilley shared how Project Seagrass successfully built its brand through partnerships with Patagonia Films and scientific institutions, ensuring both authenticity and impact. Patagonia was drawn to, and reached out to Project Seagrass because of its authentic approach and shared values, highlighting the importance of seeking partners with aligned missions. Furthermore Richard highlights that **quadruple helix collaboration**—bringing together private sector actors, government agencies, NGOs, and researchers—is key to pooling resources and skills for greater impact. **“Leaning into each other’s skills strengthens collaboration and amplifies efforts.”** said Richard Lilley. Timing initiatives to coincide with major events (e.g., COP) helps maximise political and public attention. Once community groups gain exposure, larger brands and better storytellers can help elevate the work even further.

2. Harnessing emotional storytelling to touch hearts and minds

Personal narratives and **emotional appeals** are powerful tools for inspiring public action and policy support. Studies (Talgorn et al., 2023; Doebling et al., 2023) have shown that emotionally charged storytelling fosters empathy and commitment, leading to increased community participation and buy-in. Drawing from experience, Wietse van der Werf (Sea Ranger Service) emphasised the importance of engaging emotions by bringing young people and policymakers on field visits to witness restoration efforts firsthand, deepening their connection to conservation. He highlighted that accessible restoration sites are crucial for fostering engagement among policymakers and the broader community.





3. The multiplier effect - Building on key partners' message amplification potential

Collaborating with media outlets, corporate sponsors, and influencers has the potential of amplifying the reach of awareness campaigns. Social media engagement, documentaries, and media-backed campaigns have proven to be effective in **environmental advocacy**. **Leveraging well-known brands** can be a powerful tool. Richard Lilley's experience at Project Seagrass highlights that once a strong brand is established, partnerships with mainstream media, recognised brands, and influential groups (e.g., BBC, Coldplay, and Minecraft) can elevate the cause to a wider audience. Additionally, initiatives such as featuring restoration success stories in national news outlets further expand outreach.

Example: Minecraft reached out to Project Seagrass to raise funds and create seagrass meadows within their game, engaging a completely different sector of society.

4. Invest in and empower the next generation of restoration ambassadors

Investing in and empowering the next generation of restoration ambassadors is key to raising awareness and ensuring the long-term success of restoration efforts.

Training and involving young professionals not only strengthens these efforts but also builds a sustainable

foundation for the future. Programmes like the Sea Ranger Service offer employment opportunities while equipping youth with essential conservation skills, creating a new generation of environmental stewards. Wietse van der Werf (Sea Ranger Service) highlighted the importance of engaging youth in on-site restoration work and policy discussions, empowering them to become active conservation advocates. This approach fosters both ecological impact and the development of a passionate, skilled workforce, raising awareness and ensuring that restoration projects continue to thrive.

Example: The Sea Ranger Service trains young people as full-time Sea Rangers, providing maritime qualifications and employing them in nature monitoring, surveying, and restoration work.

5. Bridging policy and practice to spark evidence-based change

Aligning research, policy frameworks, and practical conservation measures is crucial for enhancing impact and securing funding opportunities. Effective science-policy integration ensures that restoration efforts receive the necessary legal and financial backing. Peer learning discussions highlighted how practitioners can engage more effectively with policymakers by fostering ongoing dialogue and developing evidence-based strategies. Inviting policymakers to restoration sites has proven to be a powerful tool, allowing practitioners to demonstrate the real-world benefits of



their work. By involving policymakers directly, practitioners can raise awareness, build understanding, and strengthen the case for policies that support long-term conservation and restoration efforts. ARTEMIS Peer Learning discussions stressed the importance of equipping restoration leaders with training in storytelling, media outreach, and audience engagement. **Effective communication is as crucial as scientific rigor** in seagrass restoration advocacy.

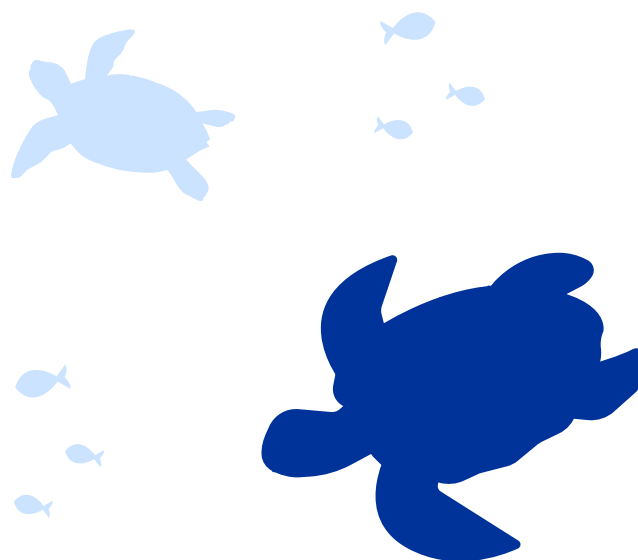
Example: A minister for the Environment and Biodiversity was invited to participate in oyster restoration, allowing her to witness and support the project directly.

He stressed that while carbon is important, the focus should be on **biodiversity restoration and other ecosystem services**, which creates rural jobs and offers long-term social and economic benefits, appealing to investors looking for sustainable impact.

Example: The Great North Bog initiative shifted from relying solely on grants to attracting private sector and green finance by focusing on the broader social and economic benefits of peatland restoration, such as job creation in rural areas.

6. Articulating the multifaceted value: tailoring narratives beyond carbon metrics

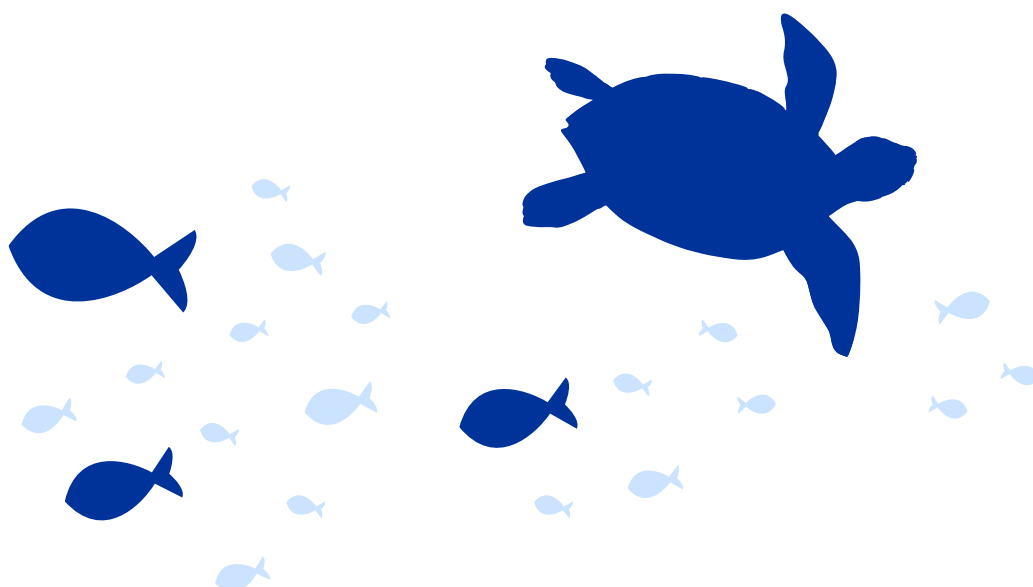
ARTEMIS discussions emphasised the importance of **going beyond carbon and adapting pitching strategies to fit diverse investor needs**. Projects must understand each investor's priorities—whether financial returns, environmental impact, or social benefits (e.g. CSR, ESG)—and tailor the right message accordingly for the project. For example, Paul Leadbitter from the 'Great North Bog' initiative highlighted how shifting from grants to private sector and green finance required adapting to investor expectations.





Challenges & Limitations: What to Address

- **Limited Mainstreaming of Scientific Concepts:** scientific communities often prioritise data-driven communication, making it challenging to translate complex concepts for broader audiences. Overcoming this requires breaking out of the science bubble through diverse communication strategies, including emotional storytelling, capacity building, and strategic media partnerships.
- **Maintaining a compelling yet credible brand:** striking the right balance between scientific accuracy and accessibility remains a challenge, as oversimplification can undermine credibility, while overly technical messaging can deter public engagement.
- **Limited Policy Engagement:** policymakers often lack direct exposure to restoration efforts, making it difficult to translate conservation priorities into actionable policy. Efforts to engage decision-makers through site visits, such as bringing ministers to restoration sites, have shown success but need wider implementation.
- **Lost Opportunities in Media Outreach:** Engaging mainstream media and influencers can significantly amplify awareness campaigns, but restoration initiatives often lack the funding, expertise, or connections needed to secure coverage and sustain engagement.





Inspiring Insights on Awareness-Raising Strategies from Keynote Presentations

The ARTEMIS peer learning session featured insights from ARTEMIS partners, and leading experts in marine and terrestrial ecosystem restoration, policy advocacy, and finance.

Branding & Science Communication

Speaker: Richard Lilley, University of Groningen

Richard Lilley, co-founder of Project Seagrass and the European Seagrass Restoration Alliance, emphasised the need for accessible and engaging science communication to build public and political support for seagrass restoration. He presented successful models of outreach, highlighting the impact of storytelling, branding, and media partnerships.

“Key to success, he emphasised, is maintaining authenticity and a scientifically robust, evidence-based identity to build a credible brand. He underscored the importance of a quadruple-helix collaboration framework—bringing together public authorities, industry, academia, and citizens—to drive sustainable and impactful ecosystem restoration and awareness raising. Richard Lilley stated, ‘We really felt that seagrass was facing a marketing or communication issue,’ emphasising the need to distill science and get it to the public.”

- Successful conservation efforts require a clear, engaging narrative that resonates with the public. This means understanding the target audience, using simple but compelling language, and presenting scientific evidence in a way that inspires action.
- Partnerships with Patagonia, BBC, and Coldplay have demonstrated the power of media collaborations to significantly boost visibility. Some of these come by chance, and you have to take them, and others you have to actively work your way towards. These brands provide credibility and access to larger, mainstream audiences, helping conservation messages reach beyond the scientific community. Richard highlighted success stories with [Patagonia](#) Films, [BBC](#), [Coldplay](#), and [Minecraft](#), which significantly expanded the reach of seagrass conservation messages.
- High-quality imagery and video storytelling are crucial for broadening engagement. Visual content creates an emotional connection, making conservation efforts more relatable and urgent.
- Inviting policymakers to restoration sites helps secure institutional support and funding. Seeing restoration work firsthand allows decision-makers to understand its importance in a way that reports and data alone cannot convey.



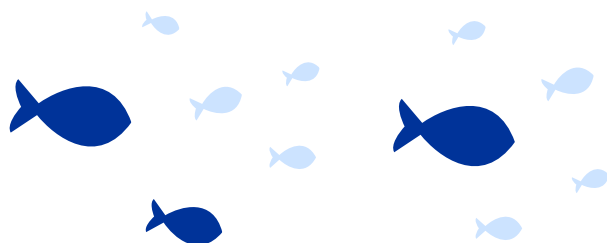
Emotional Storytelling & Youth Engagement

Speaker: Wietse van der Werf, Sea Ranger Service

Wietse van der Werf introduced the Sea Ranger Service, a social enterprise that trains young people in maritime conservation across multiple fronts, including marine restoration, while providing both social and environmental opportunities, particularly in socially deprived areas.

"Emotions are key to increasing awareness and inspiring action. People protect what they feel connected to."

- Exposing youth to hands-on restoration efforts fosters a new generation of conservation leaders. When people experience restoration work firsthand, they are more likely to develop a personal investment in the cause.
- Partnerships with schools and universities can integrate marine restoration into curricula. This ensures that conservation knowledge is embedded in educational pathways, leading to sustained interest and career opportunities in the field.
- Emotional connections drive long-term engagement and advocacy. Stories that highlight personal experiences, struggles, and successes in restoration work make conservation efforts more human and relatable.
- Training programmes that combine restoration work with storytelling increase public awareness. When young professionals and volunteers share their journeys, they become natural ambassadors for conservation.





Policy Advocacy & Coalition-Building

Speaker: Sarah Vanden Eede, WWF Belgium

Sarah Vanden Eede presented WWF Belgium's efforts to protect marine ecosystems through policy advocacy and stakeholder collaboration, emphasising the need to make marine restoration a mainstream political topic. Sarah also presented on deep-sea mining, highlighting its ecological risks and the importance of sustainable alternatives.

"We need to make marine restoration a mainstream political topic. Without strong policy backing, efforts remain fragmented."

- Marine restoration requires a strong policy narrative which convinces decision makers and those actors involved. This means framing conservation as both an environmental necessity and an economic opportunity, ensuring it remains on the political agenda.
- Coalition-building unites and allows to speak with one voice to amplify advocacy and ensure nature protection is prioritised. By combining diverse stakeholders, a coalition (e.g. 4Sea) strengthens policy influence, demonstrating broad support for restoration initiatives and increasing the likelihood of policymakers prioritising conservation efforts.
- Multi-stakeholder engagement is key to building broad opposition to harmful activities.
- Visual storytelling through digital platforms helps communities understand restoration benefits. Graphics, videos, and interactive tools make complex ecological concepts more digestible for policymakers and the public. By using visualisations, WWF has helped communities understand and support connectivity between dunes, beaches, and hinterlands.
- Awareness campaigns should emphasise alternatives rather than just opposition. Advocacy efforts must highlight both the risks of destruction and the benefits of conservation, using compelling narratives to shift public and political will.



Private Sector Engagement | Bridging Ecosystems & Learnings from the Peatland World

Speaker: Paul Leadbitter, North Pennines National Landscape

Paul Leadbitter, Programme Manager at North Pennines, discussed the evolving funding landscape for peatland restoration, emphasising patience with partners, navigating carbon market complexities, and the importance of highlighting the inherent value of biodiversity value alongside economic benefits. Peatland restoration provides critical lessons for marine and terrestrial conservation finance, demonstrating that large-scale, networked approaches attract more investment, and that a strong narrative, backed by data, is essential for engagement.

"If we want businesses to invest in restoration, we need to show them the return — not just in money, but in resilience, reputation, and real impact."

- The carbon market is immature, and landowners are hesitant to sell due to low prices and market uncertainties. While businesses want to invest, they often lack clarity on what they need, whether it be CSR contributions, carbon credits, or ESG commitments.
- Biodiversity credit systems are new with many promises but little implementation. Standardisation and governance are needed to ensure credibility and prevent a "race to the bottom" in restoration quality.
- The Great North Bog initiative, covering 160,000 hectares, demonstrates that aggregating restoration projects attracts investment. The initiative operates at a landscape scale and brings together multiple organisations to increase funding opportunities.
- There is no established rulebook for nature credits, and conservation practitioners need to be part of defining the system. Due diligence is essential in selecting funding partners, as some organisations may prioritise financial returns over conservation integrity.
- Businesses need measurable data on ecosystem services to justify investments. Establishing baseline assessments and clear impact metrics is necessary to demonstrate restoration benefits.
- Leadbitter emphasised that peatland restoration can play a key role in shaping nature-based financial mechanisms, stating: 'Peat can lead the way in nature credit systems.' This, in turn, can elevate and inspire the development of financial mechanisms for seagrass restoration.



Standardisation, Collaboration & Best Practices in Awareness-Raising

Speaker: Sahar Stevenson-Jones, SER-Europe

Sahar Stevenson-Jones discussed SER-Europe's role in bridging science, policy, and practice in marine restoration and highlighted SER Europe's role in promoting best practices and facilitating the exchange of knowledge.

"Awareness-raising is not just about reaching people—it's about changing minds and behaviours. That requires consistency and collaboration."

- Strengthening connections between researchers and policymakers ensures restoration initiatives receive necessary institutional support. When scientific insights are clearly communicated and aligned with policy priorities, decision-makers are more likely to integrate them into regulations and funding programmes, turning research into action. The EU Nature Restoration Regulation, for example, sets ambitious targets, but its success depends on effective communication between scientists and policymakers to translate goals into concrete national restoration plans.
- Digital tools and professional networks help different sectors exchange successful restoration strategies, improving outreach and engagement. By sharing case studies, data, and methodologies across disciplines, projects can refine their approaches, avoid duplication, and enhance cross-sector collaboration. The Mediterranean Posidonia Network has demonstrated the power of regional cooperation by bringing together practitioners to develop shared guidelines for seagrass restoration, rather than each country working in isolation.
- Streamlining and standardising restoration toolboxes prevent fragmentation and improve accessibility. Many projects develop their own resources, but clear guidelines, international standards, and audience-friendly formats ensure that best practices can be widely adopted and effectively implemented.



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Moving ahead

To drive real impact from the valuable insights shared during this ARTEMIS Peer Learning Session, we encourage collective action to amplify restoration narratives through effective storytelling resources, strategically engage with media, policymakers, and diverse stakeholders to expand reach and influence, and explore innovative awareness raising tools and approaches that showcase the multifaceted benefits of seagrass restoration beyond carbon. We invite you to stay connected for updates on future ARTEMIS activities and collaborative opportunities at: <https://artemis.interreg-euro-med.eu/>

“When emotions ignite our passion, authentic collaboration multiplies our impact, and a strong brand tells the story of nature’s enduring beauty - we transform conservation into a movement of unstoppable change.”

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