SELINA

SCIENCE FOR EVIDENCE-BASED AND SUSTAINABLE DECISIONS ABOUT NATURAL CAPITAL

Country Fact Sheet

AUSTRIA

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Country Fact Sheet: Austria (AT)

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If you feel there are ongoing or upcoming research projects, policy initiatives or legislations, concerning the use of biodiversity, ecosystem condition and ecosystem services knowledge in decisions and policies, missing please contact inge.liekens@vito.be and we update the country fact sheet (until March 2027)

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Contents

1 Update on projects concerning biodiversity, ecosystem condition and ecosystem services assessment and accounting since 2022

The amendment of Regulation (EU) No 691/2011, which sets up a European Union (EU) legal framework for compiling harmonised European environmental economic accounts, includes a new reporting module on ecosystem accounts. The proposed module consists of tables on ecosystem extent accounts and condition accounts as well as on ecosystem services accounts in the form of supply and use tables. In the frame of a project supported by Eurostat, Statistics Austria has taken the first steps to develop methodologies for the compilation of ecosystem accounts. The project report[1] was published in March 2024. Several remaining challenges related to the temporal and spatial resolution as well as to the consistency with other policy relevant spatial data sets were identified and are currently tackled by Statistics Austria in another Eurostat supported project (EU-Grant 2023: European Green Deal).

Austria conducted a study mapping and assessing 15 ES from 2017 to 2019 (Sonderegger et al., 2019). This study was commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Sustainability and Tourism (BMNT) and was based on available EC and ES data.

Based on this, the ÖKOLEITA project has created an ES and habitats database in Lower Austria, integrating these into the Austrian Biodiversity Atlas. This project emphasized citizen science and the involvement of stakeholders from various sectors, ensuring the practical application of research findings. The quantification of ES was conducted by the Environmental Agency Austria. Other stakeholders included decision-makers like politicians and administration and executives like planning offices. Funding was provided by the Austrian Federal States and their foundations and institutions.

The MOIST project (01/24–10/25) aims to map degraded moorlands and peat soils across Austria to support the restoration and conservation of these areas. It integrates existing data and remote sensing information to create a distribution map of peat and other hydromorphic organic soils using geostatistical methods and machine learning. Field surveys will validate the results, and experts will develop criteria to identify areas suitable for rewetting, aiding in carbon retention, water retention, and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

The LIFE project "AMooRe" aims to implement Austria's Moor Strategy 2030+. The project involves 13 partners, including all nine federal states, the Climate Protection Ministry, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism, and universities in Vienna and Kiel. The project comprises 13 work packages, focusing on restoration projects, knowledge building, awareness measures, and stakeholder engagement across sectors like conservation, agriculture, forestry, water management, climate policy, spatial planning, and tourism.

The GREeNvaluation project developed a toolkit to monitor and evaluate the performance of green infrastructure in real-time. It also aims to raise awareness through targeted communication formats beyond the initial target areas. The report was published in 2023. Additionally, the SELINA project under Horizon Europe aims to integrate biodiversity and ecosystem services into decision-making processes, providing robust methodologies for their assessment.

[1] https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/b01d2930-990e-44fb-9121-a9a6b00a1283/library/865e5045-5cee-4f93-be59-f416ecb6fd3a?p=1&n=10&sort=modified_DESC.

2 Examples of uptake in decision processes, regulations and/or legislation

The Biodiversity Strategy Austria 2030 was published in 2023 to align national efforts with EU and international biodiversity goals. This strategy sets quantitative and qualitative targets to protect biodiversity across all habitats in Austria, addressing various sectors. The strategy involves stakeholders such as governmental bodies, interest groups, companies, NGOs, scientists, and landowners. It aims to reconcile protection and sustainable use, offering financial compensation for additional management efforts or income losses due to conservation measures. Progress is regularly reviewed by the National Biodiversity Commission, with interim and final reports scheduled for 2026 and 2030. The strategy's implementation is financed through public and private funds, including a biodiversity fund created by the Austrian government and EU co-financing programs. The **Biodiversity Fund** is an instrument for financing projects at national level to improve the situation of biodiversity in Austria. It supports initiatives aimed at designating new protected areas (IUCN: I+II, V+VI) or upgrading existing protected areas.

More specific, the "Moor Strategy Austria 2030+" provides a strategic foundation for bogland conservation in Austria. It was developed by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions, and Tourism (BMLRT) alongside federal states, scientists and stakeholders through a participatory process. The strategy paper was published in 2022 and aims to contribute to the protection and restoration of peatlands in Austria by promoting cooperation between various stakeholders and strengthening awareness of the importance of peatlands for environmental and climate protection.

Under the leadership of the Austrian Energy Agency, the KDZ (Centre for Public Administration Research) and the Vienna University of Economics compiled a report commissioned by the Austrian Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology on possible options for operationalizing the EU climate targets by 2030. The focus was on the possible operationalization of the targets at the federal state level. Among other things, the report discusses starting points for supporting the federal states in the implementation and integration in financial compensation.

In 2022, the European Commission approved Austria's CAP Strategic Plan, which implements the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for the years 2023-2027. An important part of this plan is the ÖPUL2023 agri-environmental programme, an Austrian initiative to promote eco-friendly and sustainable agricultural practices. While half of the funds come from national sources, the programme places great emphasis on biodiversity and compensates farmers for providing additional environmental services as part of their participation.

In 2023, as specified in §6 of the Austrian Climate Law, the Austrian climate progress report was published by the Austrian Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology. It discusses the current state of the greenhouse gas reduction targets and provides future outlooks.

The Austrian Ministry of Climate Protection announced the expansion of the Gesäuse National Park in 2023. A total of 113 hectares of land will be added to the National Park which supports the geographical unity of the area, promoting ecology. The Neusiedlersee National Park will be expanded by 140 ha (announced 2024).

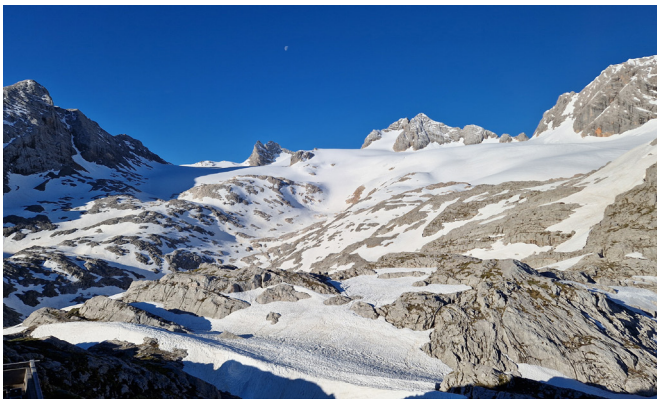
3 Perceived barriers and needs to enhance uptake

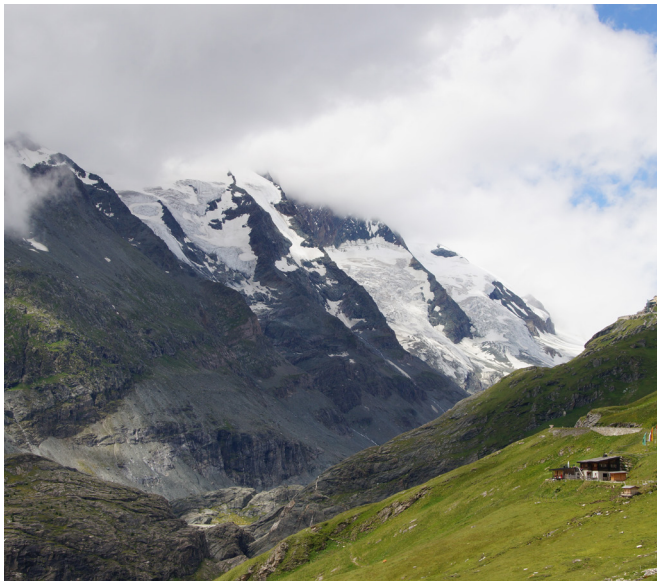
3.1 Barriers

- Expert networks exist, but lack in activity.
- Austria is split into nine federal states, which have their own legislation for specific domains (e.g. nature and environmental protection). This limits national strategies and assessments.
- Provision of standardized and harmonised data.
- Data reliability, technical limitations for data integration.
- Political common understanding for transformation and change.

3.2 Needs

- Active networks
- Independent hubs / contact points for ecosystem services
- Base funding for hubs, which conduct measures for user uptake (provision of information, workshops, networking events, consultancy).





4 On the way to transformative change

The overall conclusion of the IPBES global assessment (IPBES 2019) was that Goals for conserving and sustainably using nature and achieving sustainability cannot be met by current trajectories, and goals for 2030 and beyond, may only be achieved through transformative changes across economic, social, political, and technological factors.

Transformative or transformational change refers to "a fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values" (IPBES, 2019). Simply said, doing things differently, rather than doing less or optimising the system.

A means to enhance uptake is bringing people of the quadruple helix together and exchange information and learn from each other. Another is to establish projects that can show that it works and lead to possible pathways of transformative change.

4.1 Community of practice

For now, no SELINA CoP is active. However, there are several networks active in the biodiversity domain: the Network Biodiversity Austria (Netzwerk Biodiversität Österreich), as well as the Biodiversity-Hub, "Österreichischer Biodiversitätsrat" and the National Hub Biodiversity and Water. A **network map** available online shows experts in different domains of sustainability or research fields.

4.2 Seeds of transformative change

Network of Transition Town Initiatives in German-speaking countries

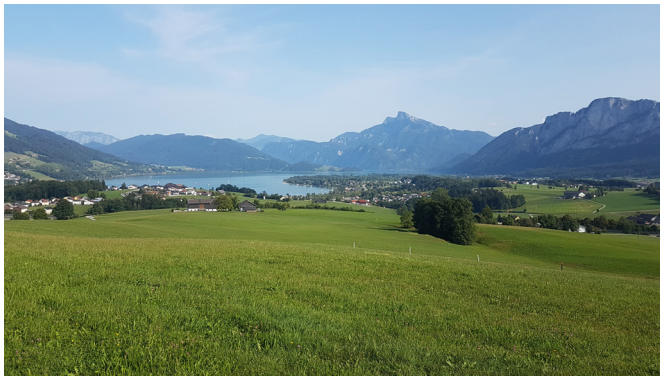
- Connecting and supporting transition town initiatives in German-speaking countries.
- Promoting and practicing a sustainable lifestyle on a local scale (within their respective towns).
- Initiate a transition on an individual level to ensure a sustainable, liveable future.

OPTimising FORest management decisions for a low-carbon, climate resilient future in Europe (OptforEU)

- Provide an improved characterisation of the Forest-Climate Nexus and FES.
- Utilise end-user focused process modelling.
- Empower forest end-users to make informed decisions to enhance forest resilience and decarbonisation.
- Provide a novel DSS service.
- Bridging different EU strategic priorities, robust science, and stakeholders in the forest and forest-based sectors.

Restore4Life

Restore4Life's Overall Objective is to develop an online Restore4Life Wetland Restoration Decision Support System that will allow large-scale holistic wetland restoration activities in the Danube basin and Europe through extensive dialogue and co-creation with multiple actors (knowledge holders, policy actors, citizens) as part of the Danube basin lighthouse of the Mission "Restore our ocean and waters by 2030".



5 References

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Project duration: 1 July 2022 – 30 June 2027

Keywords: biodiversity, ecosystems, ecosystem services, natural capital accounting, evidence-based decision-making, transformative change

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PROJECT PARTNERS

- Leibniz University Hannover
- Stichting Capitals Coalition
- Ecostack Innovations Limited
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- Pensoft Publishers
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