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Cooperation and shared strategies for biodiversity research programmes in Europe

newsletter, december 2011



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Editorial

During the last year, the partners of BiodivERsA have been working hard to speed up the pace of joint activities and establish the driving conceptual forces behind the network's action. In June 2011, the BiodivERsA consortium met in Paris at its second General Assembly, which set the scene for lively discussions on some of the major strategic aspects of BiodivERsA's work. Hard evidence of the network's efforts lies in the successfully implemented 2010-2011 BiodivERsA call for proposals on "biodiversity and ecosystem services and their valuation", through which 7 projects were funded for a total amount of over €8.8 million. In addition, this very successful meeting resulted in the endorsement of BiodivERsA's first common research agenda, largely supported by the topic emergence mechanism developed by the network in February 2011 (see our last Newsletter). External experts were invited to present and discuss the hot topics of the agenda in order to identify BiodivERsA's thematic funding priority for the 2011-2012 BiodivERsA call for proposal, further demonstrating the network's ability to implement its strategic vision through annual transnational joint calls for research proposals combining excellent science, a strong policy or societal relevance and a clear European added-value.

Launched in November 2011 and supported by 10 countries, the third BiodivERsA call focuses on "biodiversity dynamics: developing scenarios, identifying tipping points and improving resilience", with a total reserved budget exceeding €6 million. While the first and second BiodivERsA calls (2008 and 2010-2011) have been managed respectively by FRB

and ANR, this third call is now managed by the Estonian Science Foundation, ETF (see partner profile in this issue). Such a turnover in the call management is very positive as it strengthens links and fosters trust among partners within the network. It also promotes their involvement in BiodivERsA's activities, providing that particular attention is paid to the lessons learnt and transfer of experience from one call to another.

In this 10th edition of the BiodivERsA newsletter since 2005, you will gain a close insight on the network recent activities, the contents of the currently open BiodivERsA 2011-2012 call on biodiversity scenarios, tipping points and resilience, the results of the previous 2010-2011 call on biodiversity and ecosystem services, and the key topics of BiodivERsA's first common research agenda. You will also find spotlight articles about three of our new partners, MFAL (Turkey), BNSF (Bulgaria), and ETF (Estonia). Finally, BiodivERsA has shed its style and refreshed its communication tools, which you will also find presented in this newsletter.

I wish you a pleasant reading!

Xavier Le Roux,
Director of FRB, coordinator of BiodivERsA
on behalf of the BiodivERsA consortium



2011-2012 Call for Proposals on Biodiversity Dynamics: developing scenarios, identifying tipping points and improving resilience

For a full description of the call for proposals and how to apply, please see our website at <http://www.biodiversa.org>.

Altogether, 10 countries have confirmed their participation in this transnational programme: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and Turkey. **The total provisional amount of the call is over 6 M€.**

Scientific teams from these 10 countries are invited to form transnational research consortia with a total of at least 3 different countries participating in the call, and to submit proposals before the **16th of February 2012**. Nevertheless, a **mandatory pre-registration** of the projects (title, summary, consortium and preliminary budget figures) is required by the **15th of December 2011**.

The call will address the three following themes, **across all ecosystems and organisms:**
a) Developing integrated biodiversity scenarios;
b) Understanding and predicting biodiversity resilience and tipping points;
c) Decision support for biodiversity policy and management.

To be eligible for the theme "a) developing integrated biodiversity scenarios", projects should aim at developing scenarios, i.e. exploring plausible future trajectories of biodiversity. Modelling approaches aiming exclusively at better understanding biodiversity dynamics without scenario development are excluded.

The research proposals will be evaluated against criteria of **scientific excellence and policy relevance**. It is also expected that the **European scope** of the projects will provide a clearly identified **added value** to the research carried out.

The budget available by agency/country is provided online on <http://www.biodiversa.org>, as well as a FAQ, a partner search tool and the applicant form for indicative purposes only. An EPSS will be available for the full application submission at a later stage. As national eligibility rules apply to this pan-European call, the potential applicants should consult relevant documents and contact their **National Contact Point** for more information (links to documents and contact details are available on the website).

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BiodivERsA 2010 Call for Proposals Results

BiodivERsA 2010-2011 joint call on biodiversity, ecosystem services, and their valuation

Pursuing the goal of offering a recurrent source of funding for European biodiversity research, BiodivERsA partners launched in November 2010 a joint call focussed on biodiversity and ecosystem services. This call for research proposals, developed in between BiodivERsA's two periods of European Commission funding, had the following axes:

- **relationships between biodiversity and ecosystem services;**
- **valuation of biodiversity and ecosystem services** (monetary and non monetary), and
- **a better integration of biodiversity and ecosystem services into society and policy.**

Out of the 53 full project proposals submitted, 7 were funded by BiodivERsA for a total amount exceeding 8.8M€, yielding a success rate of over 13%. The selected projects bring together 6 to 10 teams from 3 to 7 countries. Each project received over 1M€.

Following is a short description of the selected projects' aims and ambitions. A longer and more detailed description is available on the BiodivERsA website at www.biodiversa.org.

CONNECT will translate and embed research findings in biodiversity and ecosystem services existing in the policy and public debate.



BiodivERsA 2010 Call for Proposals Results

APPEAL - Assessment and valuation of Pest suppression Potential through biological control in European Agricultural Landscapes

Bringing together scientific teams from Sweden as coordinator, and from Austria and Germany, the APPEAL project calls on the expertise of landscape, community and molecular ecologists as well as environmental and socio-economists. Starting with the observation that biological pest control is one ecosystem service threatened by agricultural intensification, and identifying a number of uncertainties and gaps in the current knowledge, the APPEAL team will explore the relationships between biodiversity, as mediated by agricultural land-use at different scales, and the structure, diversity and variability of natural enemy-pest-alternative prey food web interactions, and the value of biological control. The project's expected outputs include mapping biological control across landscapes in Europe and test how different future land-use scenarios of changed agricultural intensity and landscape structure will influence biological control.

CONNECT - Linking biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services: advancing insights in tradeoffs and synergies between biodiversity, ecosystem functioning and ecosystem service values for improved integrated biodiversity policy

Coordinated by scientists from The Netherlands, the CONNECT project networks teams from France, Germany, Spain and Sweden. CONNECT bridges across disciplines by linking expertise in functional ecology, biogeochemistry, ecosystem dynamics, geography, hydrology, market-based economics, socio-psychology, anthropology and environmental political science. The objectives of CONNECT are twofold. First, to scientifically investigate the relationship between biodiversity, ecosystem service provision and their socio-economic values in European landscapes. Secondly, to effectively translate and embed the scientific research findings in the existing biodiversity and ecosystem services policy and public debate. The main expected outcomes are: 1) an empirically tested decision-support framework for analysis of synergies and tradeoffs between biodiversity, ecosystem

services and associated socio-economic benefits, and 2) practical guidelines for the design of effective conservation policies based on improved scientific understanding of the relationship between ecosystem services and biodiversity.

FarmLand - European Network on Farmland Heterogeneity, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

Within FarmLand, a French team of researchers will lead teams from Germany, Spain, and self-funded teams from the United Kingdom and Canada to tackle a cross-cutting issue linking questions on agriculture, landscape heterogeneity, and support of regulations and cultural services.

Considering the importance of agricultural coverage of European landscapes, where farmland biodiversity makes an important contribution to agricultural production by providing ecosystem services such as crop pollination and biological control of crop pests, the project's consortium has developed its research questions and intends to test the idea that new policies for agriculture could restore biodiversity and associated ecosystem services by increasing farmland heterogeneity, without reducing cropped area and possibly advise on such policies.



INVALUABLE - Integrating Valuations, Markets and Policies for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

The INVALUABLE project will mobilise teams from Germany, The Netherlands, and Spain, and is coordinated by French researchers. Its highly cross-disciplinary consortium pools competencies in ecology, economics, sociology, political science, environmental management and law. While Market-based instruments are popular in the field of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and are increasingly promoted by public authorities, NGOs, international organizations, and others, they embrace a variety of instruments ranging from negotiated contracts to the sale of certified products, tradable quotas or mitigation banking. The INVALUABLE team reckons that common characteristics, definition, and underpinning theory of these tools remain unsettled to date. The project will lead to a typology of market-based instruments that will clarify the levels of expectations regarding their contribution to biodiversity and ecosystem services and will identify ways to improve them and their policy performance.

SCIN - Soil Crust InterNational - Understanding and valuing biological soil protection of disturbed and open land surfaces

Scientific teams from Austria, Spain and Sweden have joined forces under German coordination to build the SCIN project, which involves researchers in the field of classic and molecular systematics, taxonomy, plant ecology, ecophysiology and adaptation. Biological soil crusts are the biologically modified soil surfaces that form naturally in open areas. They are typically composed of cyanobacteria, algae, micro fungi, lichens and bryophytes in varying amounts and can be the only vegetation cover in arid and semi-arid regions such as hot and cold deserts or xerothermic steppe vegetation and contribute to several ecological services. In this context, the aim of SCIN is to achieve both better appreciation of the functioning and importance of biological soil crusts in Europe and to add value by contributing to the development of better and simpler soil protection practices and policies.



BiodivERsA 2010 Call for Proposals Results

SmallFOREST - Biodiversity and ecosystem services of small forest fragments in European landscapes

SmallFOREST is a project coordinated in France that involves teams from Estonia, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and Belgium. This highly interdisciplinary project involves scientists from fields such as forestry, ecology, agronomy, social sciences, economics, political science and geography, and is very concerned with stakeholders' engagement.

SmallFOREST investigates the relationships between biodiversity, services provided by forest patches and their socio-economic values in European agricultural landscapes.

The SmallFOREST project focuses on European forest fragments often embedded in an intensively used agricultural matrix. Despite their small size, these forest patches often act as refuge for biodiversity and may provide a wide range of ecosystem services to populations and human society. Biodiversity in agricultural areas and ecosystem services of small forest fragments are mutually dependent as they are determined by a similar set of drivers. The main objective of this project is to quantify ecosystem services and biodiversity in small forest fragments among agricultural landscapes and across different regions in Europe, and to analyse how their mutual relationships vary between landscapes. SmallFOREST also assesses the extent to which these ecosystem services are valued differently.

The URBES project will guide the sustainable management of biodiversity and ecosystems in urban areas.

URBES - Urban Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

Coordinated in Sweden and involving teams from Austria, Germany, The Netherlands, Spain and Finland (self-funded), the URBES consortium pools European expertise in ecosystem ecology, urban and landscape ecology, urban and environmental economics, landscape architecture, political sciences, and land-use and urbanism sciences.

Given the predominance of urban population in Europe, the URBES project aims at improving understanding of how urban biodiversity and ecosystems work, how they change, and what limits their performance. This will guide biodiversity and ecosystem governance in an ever more human-dominated world. The consortium will strive to translate research insights into principles, landscape designs and applications. A major expected output is the development of a toolbox intended to promote sustainable management of urban biodiversity and ecosystem service generation.



Focus on the Common Rolling Agenda

To foster a coherent vision for the setting of priorities in biodiversity research at the European level, as well as to avoid wasteful overlaps in project content, BiodivERsA has established a common strategic agenda to support European biodiversity research. This agenda is built upon existing research and biodiversity strategies and priorities (at agency, national and international levels) allowing the identification of common thematic priorities among BiodivERsA partners.

The topics that revealed a shared interest from BiodivERsA partner countries were discussed during the General Assembly meeting in June 2011, leading funding agencies to agree on a rolling agenda with 7 priority themes to be addressed in upcoming joint calls. These topics are divided into two groups of priority, topics in the same group bring deemed of equal priority. The BiodivERsA agenda for joint calls will be updated yearly to remain relevant against pressing issues in the field of biodiversity research, policy and management.

BiodivERsA Common Rolling Agenda

Priority group:

- Alien and native species
- Understanding the origin and loss of biodiversity
- Biodiversity dynamics: developing scenarios, identifying tipping points, and improving resilience (BiodivERsA Call 2011-2012)
- Biodiversity-ecosystem services relationships, and valuation of biodiversity and ecosystem services (BiodivERsA Call 2010-2011)

High interest group:

- Open call for early career biodiversity researchers (as part of a thematic call)
- Improvement of habitats connectivity, functioning green infrastructures, diversifying landscapes
- Biodiversity and climate change
- Management of conflicts between sectors and stakeholders and at various levels for biodiversity

Partners' Profiles

Turkish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock (MFAL)



Biodiversity Research in Turkey is mainly conducted by the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock, the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization, Universities and the TUBITAK (Turkish Scientific and Techno-logical Council).

The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock has responsibility in agricultural research and has 84 years of experience in funding and coordinating research and development projects in the field of agriculture. MFAL coordinates and implements the agricultural R&D activities through **the General Directorate of Agricultural Research and Policies (GDAR)**. **The General Directorate of Agricultural Research and Policies (GDAR)** is the centre of the national agricultural research system.

Under the Administration of GDAR, there are 10 Central, 10 Regional and 26 subject-oriented Research Stations. Mandates of GDAR are plant breeding and production, plant protection, animal breeding and husbandry, animal health, fishery and aquaculture, food and feed, postharvest technologies, biodiversity/genetic resources, organic agriculture, bio-safety, soil and water resources management (www.tagem.gov.tr).

Agricultural research has a mission to develop and transfer solutions to agricultural problems of national priority and provide information access and dissemination to ensure high-quality, safe food and other agricultural products; assess the nutritional needs of Turkish people; sustain a competitive agricultural economy; enhance the natural resources and the environment; and provide economic opportunities for rural citizens, communities, and society as a whole. In order to do this, General Directorate of Agricultural Research (GDAR) sets up priorities of Agricultural Research for the Country and allocates the available resources to the programs and projects according to the priorities. GDAR also follows the application of the projects, to disseminate and publish the research results. To improve the productivity and quality of agricultural products through research and to help improving the incomes of farmers, GDAR carries out empirical researches and projects at the national and international levels all over the country.

Turkey is one of the fortunate countries in the world as a country possessing vital resources for people's food security and has the responsibility to protect and use this important wealth rationally for the welfare of the future generations. Because it has three bio geographical regions called Euro-Siberian, Mediterranean and Irano-Turanian and their transition zones and because its climatic and geographical features

change within short intervals of space due to its position as a bridge between two continents, Turkey has acquired the character of a small continent from the point of biological diversity. Turkey has forest, mountain, steppe, wetland, coastal and marine ecosystems and different forms and combinations of these systems.



Fatma Sarsu, Coordinator of Industrial Crops Research Division

A. Ahmet Yücer, Deputy General Director of Agricultural Research

Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock (MFAL) has adopted a strategy on agriculture for the period of 2010-2014 which sets also the agricultural policy and priorities. Furthermore one of the main research area established by the agricultural research master plan is the biological diversity and genetic resources and the plan encourages the research activities for the purpose of identification of biological diversity and resources and associated traditional knowledge having value for nutrition, food security and safety as well as agricultural production.

<http://www.tarim.gov.tr>



Estonian Science Foundation (ETF)

The Estonian Science Foundation (Eesti Teadusfond – ETF), responsible to and established by the Ministry of Education and Research, is private organisation by law with public functions. Its main mission is to support the most promising research initiatives in all fields of basic and applied research. The highest decision-making body of ETF is its seven-member Council. It appoints four expert commissions, covering different areas of scholarship, and is responsible for final funding decisions.

As a research founding body, the objectives of the ETF are not only to foster the development of basic and applied research and support the most qualified and successful researchers and research groups, but also involve post-graduate and doctoral students in active research and facilitate international cooperation and mobility of researchers. This is attained mainly by the annual call for research project proposals and different programmes for post-docs' and researchers' mobility.

Important part in activities of the Estonian Science Foundation is international relations and cooperation. ETF represents the Estonian research community

at the international level, including cooperation with European organisations and in bilateral agreements. ETF has established close cooperation with many other research councils and foundations across the world.

The ETF is actively involved in the ERA-NET scheme of the EU's framework programme for research, has participated and currently participating in more than 20 ERA-NET or ERA-NET Plus projects. ETF also represents Estonia in some joint technology initiatives (ARTEMIS, ENIAC) article 185 programme (BONUS) and international financing initiatives.

ETF & BiodivERsA

Estonia, inconspicuous on the European map, has a lot of green environment with its whole biodiversity. This is obviously one of the reasons why studying nature and its biodiversity are so popular in the country. Most of universities have their research groups in these fields and it is essential for ETF to participate in international projects dealing with the issues close to nature. Popularity of the second call of ERA-NET BiodivERsA (2010-2011) among our research groups – 14 eligible projects, among which Estonian research groups were involved, in

one also as leading group – demonstrated the right decision we took in being involved in BiodivERsA. Such popularity also underlines biodiversity research as a whole needs cooperation across countries.

According to the work programme, ETF is managing the second call of BiodivERsA2. As Call Secretariat for 2011-2012, it is quite a responsibility to ensure the efficiency and compliance to the Memorandum of Understanding joint call procedure. ETF manages this task in cooperation with the BiodivERsA Secretariat, but also with the National Contact Points, Call Steering Committee and Evaluation Committee. In order to improve efficiency of the Consortium, ETF will take into account the lessons learned from the former call. The schedule is intensive and the challenge will mainly lie in fulfilling all the requirements of Memorandum of Understanding. The establishment of Evaluation Committee in accordance to received proposals in short time and the evaluation of the procedure itself will also be a challenge, but ETF will work on guaranteeing 3 peer reviews from external scientific reviewers and 2 policy expert reviews.

<http://www.etf.ee>



Bulgarian National Science Fund (BNSF)

Over a period of four years the National Science Fund in Bulgaria (BNSF) has played an active role in the development of Bulgarian science and its interaction across social and economical circles and the international research community, based on democratic principles and in correspondence with the new realities in the country. BNSF provides financial support for scientific research to universities, scientific institutions and other organizations engaged in research, by annually launching competitions based on the rationale for development of partnerships and consortia building in performing collaborative research programmes and projects.

BNSF & BiodivERsA

BNSF was approached by Bulgarian scientists to participate in BiodivERsA's second phase and the Fund will take part in the forthcoming 2011-2012 BiodivERsA joint call. As a young structure with a relatively small administration team, participation in BiodivERsA's second phase is in fact BNSF's first experience as a partner in a big-scale European consortium. Since the kick-off of the project, it has already proved to be a promising and valuable collaboration activity for both BNSF staff and the Bulgarian scientific community. For instance, BNSF gets the opportunity to discover different national and international approaches on how to finance

research and manage calls. Within the consortium, BNSF works on involving activities to support the rapid and efficient integration of new members to BiodivERsA network, while taking their specific interests into account. It will also more specifically explore ways to promote the participation of other new Member States, Associated States and Candidate Countries of the European Union. As the National Strategy for Scientific Research pinpoints a lack of research programs in the field of environment, BNSF's participation in BiodivERsA will also strengthen our own policy's efficiency and design measures for structural improvement at European standards.

Bulgaria & BiodivERsA

By introducing international experts in the field of biodiversity research within the Bulgarian scientific community, Bulgaria will benefit from exchange of knowledge and expertise of projects funded by BiodivERsA. The Bulgarian scientific community will have the opportunity to learn and adopt new biodiversity trends. Participation in BiodivERsA joint call 2011-2012 will improve the quality of the scientific research carried out in Bulgaria and encourage competition between various research units.



Violeta Milkova, Chief Expert

BNSF is the leader of the task 1.2 of the ERA-Net: Strengthening the network beyond BiodivERsA membership: integration of new member agencies.

<http://www.nsfb.net>



Presentation of the New Graphic Identity for BiodivERsA

It was time for relooking BiodivERsA with new outfits. So the BiodivERsA communication team (FRB and BelSPO) transformed itself into « designers » for a few months and launched a new website and brochure detailing the consortium activities and worked on a new logo to refresh its identity. This joint effort was done with the collaboration of the Swedish design company « Julian Kommunikation » and of Ally Ireson, British copywriter who supported the team for the formulation of ideas in the most efficient way.



A new logo...

Bridge with the first phase of BiodivERsA, the new logo of the consortium instils a new breath in BiodivERsA's second phase. The logo has been refreshed with a new colour palette. The characters are designed to improve the image of BiodivERsA, giving it a more dynamic and modern touch. The circle shape, the Euro sign and the stars of the logo are the visual representation of BiodivERsA: a network of national funding organisations promoting pan-European research.



... a new brochure...

Designed for BiodivERsA's target audience, the brochure presents the consortium from different angles: the context, work and objectives of our project, the list of partners, BiodivERsA in numbers and examples of funded projects. The document will be the reference to get a quick overview of the consortium objectives and work. It gives information on our activities concerning the collaboration of different countries for annual joint calls. The brochure also highlights BiodivERsA strategic cooperation and explains how the strategic common agenda aims to foster a coherent vision for setting priorities for biodiversity research in order to maximize funding relevance and efficiency. The BiodivERsA database is presented as a tool to provide access to information on current and past European funding programmes that allows biodiversity research

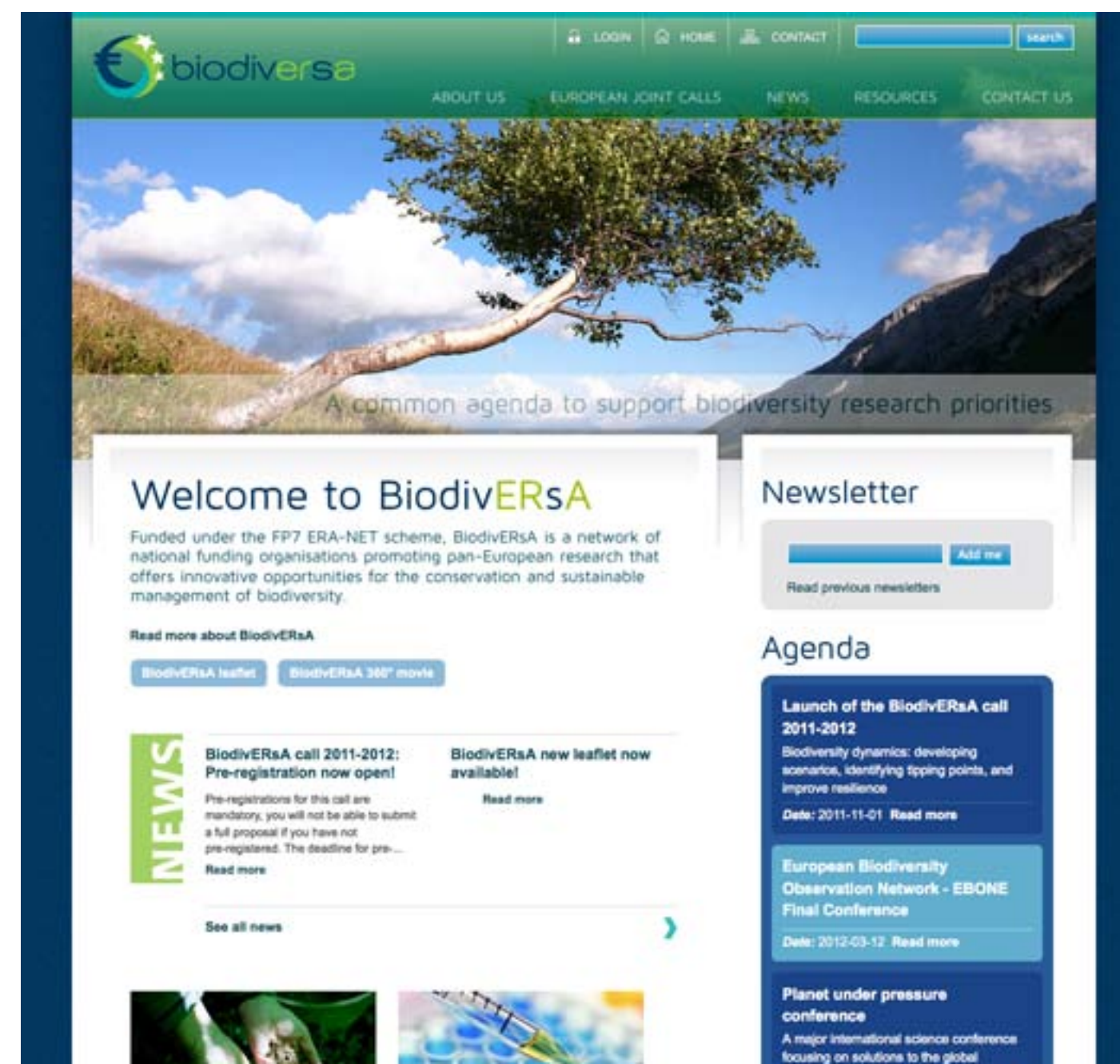
Presentation of the New Graphic Identity for BiodivERsA

managers to analyse funding trends and set future priorities. Last but not least, the leaflet gives some insight on the interdisciplinary approach used within BiodivERsA funded projects and the added-value of offering the opportunity for scientists to work across national boundaries to address pressing conservation and management questions at a European scale.

...and a new website: www.biodiversa.org

The new website follows the same structure as the previous one although some changes were made to improve the navigation and access to strategic information. The site's content will be regularly updated and includes new rubrics, such as one about «Strategic cooperation» (articles about the BiodivERsA common rolling agenda ; the strategic analyses of partners' priorities ; and international strategies and agendas). In order to ensure a better access to information about BiodivERsA activities and other news related to biodiversity research landscape in Europe, the «News» rubric is now divided in «BiodivERsA activities», «Funded projects» and «Other news».

Finally, the implementation of a cooperative platform «Wiki» is foreseen in order to offer BiodivERsA partners with a user-friendly and ergonomic tool of collaboration via the website.



Upcoming activities

Mid-DECEMBER 2011

WP3 BiodivERsA 2011-2012 call for proposals
pre-registration

FEBRUARY 2012

WP1 Workshop on procedures for joint calls,
Lisbon, Portugal
BiodivERsA staff exchange, Paris, France
WP3 Full proposals' submission completed
Review of proposals (up to May 2012)

MAY 2012

WP3 BiodivERsA 2011-2012 evaluation
committee meeting, Tallinn, Estonia
BiodivERsA 2011-2012 funding decision
meeting, Stockholm, Sweden
WP6 General assembly, Stockholm, Sweden

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Upcoming publications

WP1 Framework procedure for joint calls,
including plan for monitoring of
funded projects
WP2 Best practice guidelines for stakeholder
engagement
First analysis of gaps and priorities for
EU biodiversity research
WP3 Report on existing biodiversity research
policies & strategies, & identification of
common priorities
WP5 Materials for promoting selected projects
and research results from projects of the
BiodivERsA 2010-2011 call

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