



SUPERB
Upscaling Forest Restoration

Transformative stakeholder engagement: a strategy for the SUPERB demonstration areas

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For questions, please contact info@prospex-institute.org





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Granados Agüero, Alba Paula, Nina Horstmann, Yulia Poskakukhina, Wim Cofino, Anna Begemann, Bengt-Gunnar Jonsson, Lucie Loubaton, Amanda Oliveira Puerari, Gesche Schifferdecker and Rina Tsubaki (2023), *Transformative stakeholder engagement: a strategy for the SUPERB demonstration areas*, EU Horizon 2020 SUPERB project.

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Executive Summary

This document presents the **overarching strategy** for engaging communities, landowners and other stakeholders in the restoration work in the twelve SUPERB large-scale demonstration areas (demos). It sets the **vision and objectives for stakeholder engagement** in the demos and lays out the respective **activities** to be implemented during and after the project. In addition, the document provides an overview of the **engagement formats** and the **challenges and enablers** to stakeholder involvement captured in the twelve demo-specific, internal engagement strategies developed by the demos.

The strategy is grounded in the ***transformative stakeholder engagement*** approach developed within SUPERB for guiding the demos' collaboration with stakeholders. Transformative stakeholder engagement **moves beyond the traditional practice of consultations to co-creating** forest restoration processes with an inclusive range of local and other actors. By incorporating **diverse perspectives and knowledge** in restoration decision-making this co-creative approach is geared at advancing effective, sustainable and socially just forest and forest landscape management in Europe.

1. Introduction and outline

SUPERB (Systemic solutions for upscaling of urgent ecosystem restoration for forest-related biodiversity and ecosystem services) is a project funded by the EU Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme to restore thousands of hectares of forest and forest landscape across Europe and create lasting transformative change toward large-scale restoration. Different innovative restoration approaches are tested in twelve large-scale demonstrators (demo areas / demos) that represent a wide variety of European habitats, each with unique pressures, challenges, and local needs and expectations.

To maximise impact and achieve transformative change in the demos, the SUPERB project puts forward an innovative approach of **transformative stakeholder engagement** in restoration planning, monitoring and upscaling. In SUPERB, stakeholders are defined as all actors that can either be affected by or can affect the solutions being developed within the project. Transformative stakeholder engagement centres on **co-creating restoration processes with this diversity of actors**. Transformative refers to the potential of stakeholder engagement **to foster effective, sustainable and socially inclusive forest restoration practices**. By aspiring to involve a broad range of stakeholders in demo decision-making, SUPERB aims to enable the development of such practices on location and their upscaling across Europe.

Co-creation with stakeholders is a pivotal principle in the SUPERB project Grant Agreement (GA). It is grounded in an established body of research. This research has shown that to have a chance of success forests restoration activities must be implemented in partnership with key stakeholders and local communities in particular (Mansourian 2017). Such stakeholders also include landowners, public authorities, businesses, forest managers and a wide variety of other individuals, groups and organisations, each with their own and in some cases conflicting objectives and interests. Thus, engaging diverse local and other stakeholders in forest restoration has been found to contribute decisively to achieving socially and ecologically sustainable outcomes.

This document presents the strategy for involving local communities, landowners and other stakeholders across the twelve SUPERB demos during of the project and beyond. Its vision is to **guide the demos towards mainstreaming the co-creative approach** of transformative stakeholder engagement in their restoration efforts over time. This gradual outlook reflects the need to work with each demo's context and experience in involving stakeholders, with a lookout to **enabling an increasingly close and broad-based engagement practice**.

1.1. Document background

This document has been developed by Prospex Institute (PI), which leads the SUPERB project's work on stakeholder engagement, in close collaboration with the demos and other project partners. In the project PI provides guidance, tools and support for the stakeholder engagement processes of each demo, using an innovative approach geared at making these processes more targeted, professional and impactful. As part of this PI has helped the demos carry out their stakeholder mapping and is supporting them in organising three stakeholder workshops, which are part of the stakeholder engagement strategy for the twelve demos.

In addition, the communication team of project partner the European Forest Institute (EFI) leads on supporting the demos with an innovative approach to public communication and outreach that is a crucial element of local and wider stakeholder engagement. Therefore, the demo stakeholder engagement strategy also include the communication activities developed and conducted jointly with the demos by this team. More broadly, it covers all other stakeholder



engagement guidance that is being developed within SUPERB by PI, EFI and other partners together with and for the demos.

In addition to the strategy presented in this document, the demos developed individual strategies with additional stakeholder engagement activities for the duration of SUPERB and beyond. Where relevant the present document refers to these individual strategies (which are non-public). It also gives an overview of the engagement formats and the challenges and opportunities to stakeholder engagement captured in these strategies.

1.2 Document outline

The document proceeds as follows.

Chapter 2 sets out the vision for stakeholder engagement in the twelve SUPERB demos.

Chapter 3 presents the strategy developed within SUPERB for involving local communities, landowners and other stakeholders across the twelve demo areas.

Chapter 4 describes the activity formats that PI has presented to the demos for consideration in their individual stakeholder engagement strategies. It also outlines the main challenges and enablers to meaningful stakeholder engagement identified across the demos.

2. Vision and objectives

The stakeholder engagement strategy presented in this document is grounded in a project vision that sees the inclusive involvement of stakeholders as key to creating a lasting enabling environment for large-scale forest restoration across Europe. The strategy seeks to advance this vision by aspiring to *transformative stakeholder engagement*, while respecting the need to enact this approach at a pace that fits the circumstances of each demo.

Chapter 2 reviews the evidence that underpins transformative stakeholder engagement, introduces its main principles and elaborates on the demo objectives that follow from it.

2.1 Evidence base for transformative stakeholder engagement

SUPERB's foregrounding of co-creative stakeholder engagement rests on an established body of research. During the last decades, European academics and policymakers have recognised that forest management efforts (such as restoration activities) take place not in a vacuum but in complex forest landscapes where multiple stakeholder groups with various and diverging interests coexist. Research pointing in this direction argues that stakeholder engagement and in particular the participation of local communities is crucial for successful and sustainable forest restoration for several interrelated reasons, as outlined in *inter alia* Fox and Cundill 2018; Harshaw & El-Lakany 2017; Mansourian 2017; Reed 2008; Reed et al. 2018.

Firstly, involving communities, landowners and other local stakeholders in decision-making processes can help deliver restoration policies and practices appropriate for a given social and environmental context. This ensures that project outcomes are aligned with local needs and values, resulting in higher levels of key stakeholder satisfaction and support. Secondly, by involving stakeholders who have a deep understanding of the local natural environment and the socioecological system in which it is embedded, projects can benefit from their knowledge and experience. This leads to more effective and targeted restoration activities and increases the likelihood of achieving the desired ecological and societal outcomes and long-term sustainability.



Thirdly, the active participation of local stakeholders in restoration decision-making processes strengthens their transparency and accountability. This can enhance public trust and legitimacy for restoration projects, instilling confidence in their objectives and actions. The resultant legitimacy provides a solid platform for ongoing support and cooperation, facilitating the smooth implementation and long-term success of the endeavours. Fourthly, meaningful participation can increase stakeholders' interest in nature and their understanding of ecosystem complexity. It can also make them more aware of the benefits that (their participation in) forest restoration can bring to them individually and to society. This too can lead to greater motivation among stakeholders (including landowners) to cooperate on protecting and preserving forests for future generations.

Thus, overall, co-creative stakeholder engagement can contribute to long-term project sustainability by fostering a culture of local environmental stewardship, ensuring that the restored ecosystem is valued and cared for over time by people who have direct knowledge and experience of the forests. Building on the evidence base in favour of such stakeholder engagement, SUPERB has developed the concept of **transformative stakeholder engagement** to define the approach at the heart of its strategy for involving communities, landowners and other stakeholder in restoration efforts across the demos.

2.2 Transformative stakeholder engagement

Transformative stakeholder engagement is an approach developed within SUPERB that is at the centre of the strategy presented in this document. This approach aims to facilitate environmentally and socially beneficial long-term forest and forest landscape restoration in Europe. Transformative engagement entails establishing lasting and meaningful collaboration with stakeholders, empowering them as active agents of transforming restoration towards more sustainable and equitable practices.

The underlying premises of transformative stakeholder engagement draw on post-normal science. This is a scientific movement that acknowledges the limitations of conventional scientific knowledge and emphasises the significance of engaging with stakeholders to incorporate their diverse knowledge and experiences into decision-making. The local knowledge includes understanding of the forest terrain and its historical use and experience from previous forest management processes. By embracing transformative engagement, restoration initiatives can effectively leverage the collective insights of stakeholders and transcend the traditional scientific paradigms that typically informs forest restoration.

Transformative stakeholder engagement as defined by SUPERB looks to establish a shared vision for forest restoration that is co-owned by all stakeholders. Thereby it aims to generate the societal support needed for successful forest restoration and its upscaling. SUPERB's transformative stakeholder engagement approach is based on the principles of co-creation, inclusivity, transparency, capacity-building, conflict resolution and management, and evaluation. These principles are the keystones of the project's strategy for involving stakeholders across the demos, as illustrated in the detailed definitions below.

- **Co-creation:** Co-creation is the central pillar of transformative stakeholder engagement. It involves working collaboratively with stakeholders to develop restoration goals, strategies, implementation methods and evaluation outputs that balance their different interest and needs. This helps ensure that stakeholders have a sense of ownership and buy-in for the project, which can strengthen their commitment to sustaining its successes. The demos will aim at engaging stakeholders in co-creation from the beginning and to seek their input and feedback at every stage of the project.



- **Inclusivity:** Engage a diverse range of stakeholders representing different groups and interests, including local communities, landowners, NGOs, scientists, policymakers, and other relevant actors. Stakeholders are, in the context of SUPERB, all actors that can either be affected by or can influence the solutions that are being developed within the project. This ensures that the project also involves ‘unusual suspects’ who are not necessarily already working with the demos. In the SUPERB demos inclusivity is fostered by following a rigorous method for stakeholder mapping (Prospex-CQI).
- **Transparency:** A transparent engagement process is critical to building trust and maintaining open lines of communication with stakeholders. This involves ensuring stakeholders’ access to accurate and timely information about project goals, objectives and outcomes. Transparency can be achieved through various means, such as regular internal reporting and knowledge sharing with stakeholders. The demos will strive to be open and honest with stakeholders about the project's progress, challenges and decisions, and to be responsive to their questions and concerns.
- **Participation:** Meaningful participatory engagement is essential for building relationships and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. To achieve this, stakeholders should be involved in a variety of engagement activities, such as workshops, consultations, surveys and others. These activities should be designed to encourage participation and ensure that stakeholders’ voices are heard and considered. Professional moderation of these activities can help ensure that they are productive and respectful and that all stakeholders have an opportunity to contribute. PI will support the demos in developing the skills for such professional moderation and in adopting a variety of engagement methods.
- **Capacity-building:** Capacity-building involves providing stakeholders with opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge to meaningfully engage and contribute to the project. This can include training, mentoring and knowledge exchange activities that support the development of technical, interpersonal and leadership skills. Capacity-building can help to empower stakeholders to take a more active role and to make more informed and effective decisions. In their evaluations of their engagement activities the demos will identify capacity-building needs among their stakeholders.
- **Conflict resolution and management:** To enable project success, it is crucial to anticipate and address potential disagreements among stakeholders. Stakeholder engagement is instrumental in identifying and preventing potential conflicts. It is also indispensable to managing the conflicts that do arise and mediating between different opinions and interests. Conflicts may arise from stakeholders’ diverse views on nature and diverging interests in the landscape. They may also result from particularities of the decision-making process, the nature of the information available on restoration, and interpersonal issues. Developing mechanisms for the mediation and resolution of conflicts is essential for finding broadly acceptable or compromise solutions that support the project's objectives. Such mechanisms should constructively address the contested issues and acknowledge all stakeholders’ perspectives and needs. It is also important to recognise that conflict is not inherently negative and can lead to learning, innovation and socially beneficial compromises. By proactively addressing potential conflicts the demos will work towards minimising disruptions and delays, building trust among stakeholders, and increasing the chances of achieving their goals.
- **Evaluation:** Evaluation is essential to ensuring the engagement process's effectiveness, identifying successes and areas for improvement, and enabling the continuation of the project wins beyond its lifetime. For this it is important to establish clear evaluation criteria



and to regularly assess the engagement process for its effectiveness in advancing project objectives. The demos' consistent evaluation of their engagement activities will help them adjust the latter in a process of continuous improvement and learning.

By drawing on the principles of transformative stakeholder engagement as much as possible the demos will establish engagement processes that are meaningful, accountable and constructive to their restoration work achieving its goals, both during and after SUPERB.

2.3 Objectives for the demos

The strategy presented in this document embody the vision that over time the demos will progressively incorporate the principles of transformative stakeholder engagement into their restoration work, leading to positive outcomes for the forests and the public good. In other words, this deliverable envisions that in the coming years the demos will:

- Become familiar with the full range of stakeholders in their area and will include this diversity of actors by various means in restoration decision-making.
- Set up accessible channels for regular and transparent communication tailored to the different stakeholder groups.
- Strive to involve their stakeholders in co-creating restoration processes at all stages. This means drawing on the various kinds of knowledge that the stakeholders can contribute and continuously informing decisions and practices with stakeholder input to accommodate different perspectives.
- Develop opportunities for different stakeholders to cultivate the skills and knowledge necessary for them to participate meaningfully in restoration discussions and decision-making.
- Be aware of disagreements and conflicts among stakeholders and have processes in place to tackle such situations and mediate between competing interests and positions.

At the same time, this document recognises that the demos have joined SUPERB with different levels of experience in stakeholder engagement. Some are at an early stage that involves initiating conversations with stakeholders; informing them about the importance of forest restoration; identifying their interests and concerns and the knowledge they can bring to the table; becoming familiar with any conflicts around restoration in the area, etc. Other demos have significant experience and well-established stakeholder networks. They are moving towards co-creating and co-owning their restoration projects with their stakeholders and have practised mediating between the competing interests around restoration.

Therefore, the main objective of the stakeholder engagement strategy is to guide the demos towards transformative engagement while considering their different starting points and realities. The strategy is directed at helping the demos capture a broad range of stakeholders, explore the potential and existing conflicts out there, and make sure to engage local communities and landowners.

3. Strategy for engaging stakeholders in the 12 demos

This chapter presents the strategy that has been developed within SUPERB for engaging local communities, landowners and other stakeholders in the 12 project demos, as put forward in the GA. The general objective of this strategy is to enable the demos to identify and engage with an inclusive set of stakeholders at all stages of the project in a way that aspires to the



principles of transformative engagement and helps the demos mainstream this approach in the future. The following activities are covered in the chapter: 3.1 stakeholder mapping; 3.2 stakeholder workshops; 3.3 [Transformative Narrative Guide](#);¹ 3.4 media engagement workshops; 3.5 communication activities for enhanced stakeholder engagement; 3.6 [Toolkit for future monitoring of forest restoration acceptance and governance](#);² demo scalability plans³ and engagement of associate partners.

3.1 Stakeholder mapping

The starting point for all the stakeholder engagement envisioned in the demo areas for SUPERB is the stakeholder mapping that the demos conducted with PI guidance and support in January-March 2022. The central objective of the mapping was to help the demos identify the full range of local and other actors who are affected by or may affect their restoration activities; so that the demos can work towards engaging these different stakeholders in a meaningful way during and after the project. The emphasis fell on looking beyond the stakeholder groups with whom the demos already have an established relationship. In other words, the demos focused on capturing less-familiar stakeholders or stakeholder with less access to decision-making on forest restoration in the area.

Why the emphasis on broad-based stakeholder mapping? Academic literature has extensively explored the benefits of including different groups of actors in any research activity and decision-making process of societal relevance (Hirsch Hadorn et al., 2008). As public participation and multi-actor governance are increasingly being promoted in Europe at different levels (local, regional, national, etc.), there is a growing need to understand who the key actors are that need to be engaged. In other words, it is necessary to identify the individuals and groups that will be affected by or will affect the output on the ground, a research project, or a policy.

There are many methods to analyse and identify stakeholders. Stakeholder mapping is one of the most versatile and useful. It can be understood as the process of identifying stakeholders at an early project stage to determine the foundations for later engagement activities and strategies. The stakeholder mapping in the SUPERB demos followed the Prospex-CQI methodology⁴. This methodology is a form of purposive sampling designed to identify and engage key stakeholders in large-scale research projects without missing any group. It allows the mapping to be done in a strategic and balanced way so that the stakeholders sampled are relevant to the project objectives (Gramberger et al., 2014).

To facilitate the mapping, together with the demos PI defined the following categories of stakeholders generally relevant to forest restoration:

1. Forest landowners and (in-situ) managers
2. Policymakers and regulating actors
3. Forest/landscape value chains and other economic actors

¹ The Transformative Narrative Guide was completed as *Forest Storytelling and Engagement for Change – A toolkit for effective stakeholder engagement and communication*, Bounegru et al (2024).

² This toolkit was completed as the *Decision-Support Tool for Forest Restoration – Overview over Products on Policies, Governance, & Societal Perspectives*, Kazungu and Hunziker (2025).

³ Upscaling plans were developed by five SUPERB demos (in [Croatia/Serbia](#), [Germany](#), [Scotland](#), [Spain](#) and [Sweden](#)), with advice transferable to other restoration pilots.

⁴ The Prospex-CQI methodology is part of the Stakeholder Integrated Research approach, developed by Gramberger et al. (2014) (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10584-014-1225-x>).



4. Financing actors
5. Communities, civil society, and mediating actors
6. Education and research

In dialogue with PI the demos then identified a balanced set of individuals for all the stakeholder categories and sub-categories, as applicable to their contexts. The demos' stakeholder mappings served as a tool for securing (as much as possible) a broad and representative set of participants for their first stakeholder workshops in June-November 2022 (3.2.1). The mapping will be used in a similar way for the second and third stakeholder workshops in the demos in 2023-2025 (3.2.2 and 3.2.2). Prospex-CQI stakeholder mapping is an open-ended process. Hence the demos were invited to continue adding entries to the different (sub-)categories at their own pace during and after the project.

3.2 Stakeholder workshops

The stakeholder workshops are a series of three physical events in each demo area, planned to take place in 2022-2025 and organised by the demos with support from PI. The general purpose of these workshops is to ensure that (a) the demos' restoration work takes place as much as possible in co-creation with their local communities, landowners and all other stakeholder groups; and (b) that this happens across the main project phases: setting the restoration goals and plans; implementing the envisioned restoration solutions; reviewing the restoration work and elaborating directions for upscaling.

The stakeholder workshops are a cornerstone of helping the demos move towards transformative stakeholder engagement. They are the demo activities that entail broad-based stakeholder engagement and deliver learnings on how to deepen, diversify and expand it. Therein they provide the foundation for any additional engagement activities that may be developed by the demos. The stakeholder mapping that the demos conducted in January-March 2022 enables them to invite to each workshops a diverse and inclusive range of participants (circa 15 per workshop) (3.1). This allows the demos to reach new groups and to raise awareness among stakeholders who do not see how decisions on forests affect them.

The stakeholder workshops are explicitly directed at integrating the principles of transformative stakeholder engagement into the demos' restoration efforts. For instance, they entail transparency to the workshop participants about how their input will be considered and how SUPERB plans to involve the demo stakeholders next. The demos are also invited to draw lessons from the workshops on how to better engage certain stakeholders and to build their capacity for meaningful participation. Likewise, there is dedicated space in the workshops to explore and address potential conflicts, by discussing the governance (or non-technical) factors affecting restoration.

The paragraphs below describe the three stakeholder workshops in greater detail.

3.2.1 First stakeholder workshop: vision and design

The 1st stakeholder workshops in the demo areas took place in June-November 2022. The workshops aimed to involve stakeholders in co-creating the vision and design for the restoration work to be implemented in the demos as part of SUPERB. Specifically, their main objective was to inform the demo restoration goals and workplans with stakeholder knowledge and perspectives. There was also a complementary objective: to identify together with the stakeholders the potential governance constraints and opportunities to the workplans: i.e., the



non-technical factors pertaining to how, by whom and with what complementary and competing interests and perspectives decisions on restoration are made and implemented.

The demos produced reports on their workshop. These reports were geared at drawing lessons from the workshop for both the demo restoration workplans and for the further planning of engagement activities in the demos. For instance, the demos will use their reports on the 1st stakeholder workshop to identify the thematic focus for the 2nd.

3.2.2 Second stakeholder workshop: implementation

The 2nd co-creative stakeholder workshops in the demo areas are planned for late 2023 / early 2024. The main objective of the 2nd stakeholder workshops for all demos will be to inform an inclusive range of stakeholders about how restoration work is progressing and to collect their feedback. This feedback will inform the continuation of the demos' work. At the workshops the demos will present the overall state of their restoration activities to the participants. In addition, they can use the workshop to collect stakeholder input on specific aspects of their work that require in-depth attention. For instance, they can discuss with the stakeholders challenges to the restoration process which the workshop participants' knowledge could help address.

In four demos, an additional objective of the 2nd stakeholder workshops will be to tackle specific disagreements with and among stakeholders around the demo restoration plans. These four demos have been selected for a deeper focus on governance due to the more pronounced nature of such disagreements in their area. During the workshop project partners researching forest restoration governance will facilitate a discussion on the demo-specific governance challenges and conflicts that they had identified through interviews with demo representatives and stakeholders earlier in the project. The workshop participants will be invited to share their experiences on these topics. They will help find overlaps and differences among the competing stakeholder perspectives and to identify how the issues in question have been handled in the demos. Overall, the workshop will serve as a starting point for co-creating solutions to these issues.

All demos will use the experiences and conclusions of their 2nd stakeholder workshops to revisit and adjust the demo-specific sections of their stakeholder engagement strategies. The reports that the demos will produce on the workshops will be instrumental for this follow-up work. These reports will also help the demos incorporate stakeholder feedback into their restoration activities and to plan for the 3rd stakeholder workshops on review and upscaling.

3.2.3 Third stakeholder workshop: review and upscaling

The 3rd stakeholder workshops in the demo areas are planned for May 2025. They will involve a representative set of stakeholders in reviewing the restoration activities that will take place in the demos in the preceding years. They will also mobilise stakeholder knowledge and perspectives to elaborate directions for upscaling the restoration practices developed and tested by the demos. The specific focus and format of the 3rd stakeholder workshops in the different demo areas will be elaborated jointly by PI, the demos and other partners later in the project. In this, the SUPERB partners will draw on all preceding project experience and outputs. The workshop reports will discuss how the stakeholders' feedback on the reviewed restoration work can be used to strengthen and upscale its continuation beyond SUPERB.

3.3 Transformative Narrative Guide

SUPERB aims to support the demos' steps towards transformative stakeholder engagement in a lasting way. For this purpose, the [Transformative Narrative Guide](#) will be developed by the EFI communication team in cooperation with project partner King's College London. The



Guide will equip the demos with a toolkit for effective stakeholder engagement and communication beyond the project. It will offer unconventional, research-informed yet practical approaches, techniques and inspirations to support its users in adapting and responding to external influences and unexpected changes in public perceptions and stakeholder landscapes in the future.

After SUPERB's completion the demos will be able to use the methods and case studies in the Guide to continue learning about and monitoring public discussions to detect emerging perspectives, fault lines and new stakeholders who may influence their work in the future. In addition, they will be able to use the Guide to promote the development of restoration narratives among their stakeholders, as a means to inform their restoration process with diverse views on forests and their social significance.

While the Guide will be primarily an online resource, it will be made in a print format to serve on-demand needs. A compact version of the Guide will also be translated into the demo languages to ensure greater accessibility and wider usage. A first version of the Guide will be presented and discussed with the demos shortly after November 2023, aiming at co-designing and further developing it with the demos and their stakeholders through the events introduced below: six public engagement workshops and eight media workshops organised in collaboration with selected demos. These events will be planned and conceptualised with demo managers and adapted to local needs and challenges.

3.4 Public engagement workshops

One important aim of transformative stakeholder engagement in SUPERB is to help the different actors living and working around the demo forests to become more aware of their roles as stakeholders in restoration. This objective looks at inspiring and enabling the actors in question to contribute to restoration in ways beneficial to their welfare and the public good. To co-design the Transformative Narrative Guide and to raise broad-based awareness around forest restoration in the demo areas, in collaboration with selected demos the project communication team at EFI will organise six in-person public engagement workshops in those project locations. The workshops will involve a wide range of stakeholders from demos' stakeholder mapping, including but not limited to communities, landowners, practitioners, policy and governance actors, (private) financiers and civil society.

3.5 Media engagement workshops

The media's capacity to report on forest restoration issues accurately is pivotal to promoting constructive social dialogue and cooperation on forest management and to ensuring a transparent and inclusive process of decision-making around it. To build this capacity, eight workshops for local, national and international media will be organised by the EFI communication team in several selected demos, which will be involved in the workshop planning and organisation. The workshops will apply approaches and techniques employed through EFI's science-media initiative, the Lookout Station, to train journalists and media representatives using systems thinking tools.

There will be four online workshops and four in-person field trips for journalists. Both sets of workshops aim for the participants to gain deeper insights into the demos' restoration efforts. The field trips will focus on training the journalists for this purpose. The online workshops will also aim to result in published media stories to support further communication and dissemination of information around the demos' work.



3.6 Communication for enhanced stakeholder engagement

Continuous, transparent and interactive communication with different stakeholders is integral to transformative stakeholder engagement. Therefore, over the course of SUPERB the demos will collaborate with the project's communication team on everyday communication activities in their areas. For instance, the demos will contribute to SUPERB Social Media campaigns and to the project's Storytelling blog, the Restoration Stories. Restoration Stories aims to update local communities on the restoration work in the demo areas and to give them a voice in the process. It invites the demos and local stakeholders to share personal restoration stories and to express what restoration projects meant to them. Where possible, the blog's stories will also be published via international platforms and, preferably, in local outlets.

The demos will also receive support from the communication team in building their skills at developing engaging narratives for communication, as well as on-demand communication and outreach advice for their various stakeholder engagement activities.

3.7 Governance challenges toolkit

Having established processes in place to recognise and tackle (potential) conflicts around the social and political aspects of restoration is a core component of transformative stakeholder engagement. Research has shown that acknowledging and addressing such governance challenges is a key enabler of forest restoration success (Mansourian 2017). However, this non-technical side of the story is often overlooked in project planning and implementation. Towards the end of SUPERB, the demos will receive a [toolkit](#) developed by the Swiss Federal Institute for Forests, Snow and Landscape Research WSL, the University of Freiburg and EFI. This toolkit will help them better understand the importance of tackling the social and political side of restoration and will provide them with the means to detect potential restoration-related conflicts. The toolkit will build on two interview-based assessment rounds of governance challenges and conflicts in the demo areas, conducted in cooperation with the demos and their stakeholders.

3.8 Demo upscaling plans and engaging associate partners

Transformative stakeholder engagement looks towards enabling the extension of effective, sustainable and socially beneficial forest restoration practices to further forest areas, with the help of new partners. Fostering such upscaling of the demos' restoration work is a central SUPERB objective. For this purpose, four selected demo areas will cooperate with the project's upscaling team and in particular on developing upscaling plans on how to replicate their good practices at scale.⁵ The replicating will be laid out to happen with the close involvement of local communities, landowners, public agencies, forestry practitioners, funders and other relevant actors. The plans will inform a template on upscaling also prepared by the SUPERB upscaling team. All demos will be able to use this template to promote the adoption of their successes beyond the local area. In addition, to advance upscaling all demos are strongly encouraged to engage actors in their area who have signed up as SUPERB's associate partners. To do so, the demos are invited to consider the list of the project's associate partners to remind themselves of the partners based in their countries and to begin inviting them to general and targeted engagement activities.

⁵ At the end upscaling plans were developed by five demos, in [Croatia/Serbia](#) (Đodan et al 2025), [Germany](#) (Janzen et al 2025), [Scotland](#) (Ferraretto et al 2025), [Spain](#) (De Dios García et al 2025) and [Sweden](#) (Granberg et al 2025).



4. Overview of the demo-specific engagement strategies

In addition to the overarching strategy developed within SUPERB for involving communities, landowners and other stakeholders in the demos, the demos have prepared individual non-public strategies for further stakeholder engagement in their locations. To support the demos in this process PI presented them with a range of formats as input for designing their additional stakeholder engagement activities. This chapter begins by outlining these formats. Next it informs the reader about the main challenges and enablers to meaningful stakeholder engagement identified across the demos. The deliverable closes with a discussion of the learning and upscaling opportunities these challenges and enablers present to the project.

4.1 Engagement formats and their aims

Engagement tools and formats are essential components of stakeholder engagement strategies for forest restoration initiatives. By utilising a range of such methods, forest restoration projects can ensure that diverse stakeholder groups are actively involved in restoration, and that their voices are heard throughout the entire process. Each method serves a different purpose and can be tailored to the needs of specific stakeholder groups. During the development of the demos' individual engagement strategies PI supported them with a non-exhaustive selection of engagement tools and formats. The demos used this selection to inform the activities in their individual strategies. The selection is presented below.

1. **Stakeholder workshops:** bringing together stakeholders to discuss issues, exchange ideas and identify solutions. This method can be used to engage a broad range of stakeholders and can help identifying shared goals and priorities.
2. **Focus groups:** gathering a small group of stakeholders to discuss a specific topic or issue in depth. This format can be used to gain insights into stakeholder perspectives, concerns, and preferences, and can be particularly useful for engaging local communities.
3. **Field visits:** invite stakeholders to visit demonstration sites to see restoration efforts in action. This method can be used for raising awareness on the benefits and challenges of forests and their restoration and can be a powerful tool for building support for restoration efforts.
4. **Surveys/questionnaires:** collecting feedback and opinions from stakeholders through a structured set of questions. This tool can be used to engage large numbers of stakeholders and can be useful in identifying stakeholder priorities and preferences. It can also help gather feedback on specific aspects of restoration.
5. **Social media and online platforms:** using social media and online platforms to engage stakeholders in discussions and share information. This method can be useful for engaging a wide audience, including younger stakeholders and stakeholders who may not be able to attend in-person meetings.
6. **Storytelling:** using storytelling techniques to engage stakeholders and share information about restoration efforts. This format can be useful for engaging local communities and can be particularly effective in rural areas.
7. **Demonstration events:** hosting events that showcase restoration efforts and provide opportunities for stakeholders to learn about the project. This method can be used to



engage a broad range of stakeholders, including policymakers, landowners, and economic actors.

8. **Collaborative problem-solving:** working with stakeholders to identify solutions to specific problems or challenges. This method can be useful for engaging a broad range of stakeholders and can be particularly effective in identifying solutions that are acceptable to all parties.
9. **Participatory mapping:** using maps to engage stakeholders in discussing the project and to gather information about stakeholder perspectives and priorities. This method can be useful for engaging local communities and can be particularly effective in rural areas.
10. **Community events and festivals:** partner with local communities to host events and festivals that celebrate restoration efforts and provide opportunities for stakeholders to engage with the project. This method can be especially effective as a platform for local populations to voice their concerns and ideas and can be particularly effective in rural areas.
11. **Mobile app development:** developing mobile applications that includes information about the project, interactive features such as quizzes, and a platform for stakeholders to ask questions and provide feedback. Such mobile tools can be an innovative way to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including young people.
12. **Artistic expression:** encouraging stakeholders to express their opinions and experiences on restoration through various forms of artistic expression, such as photography, painting or poetry. This format can be an effective way to engage stakeholders who may not feel comfortable expressing themselves through more traditional methods.
13. **Citizen science:** involving non-specialists in the scientific data collection process through citizen science initiatives. This method can increase the broader public's understanding of the project and make citizens feel more invested in its success.
14. **Role-playing:** organising role-playing exercises where stakeholders take on the role of different actors, such as landowners or policymakers. This format can help stakeholders understand each other's perspectives. It can also assist projects in developing more effective communication strategies.
15. **Online forums:** creating online forums where stakeholders can discuss the project and share their opinions. This method can be a convenient and accessible way to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including those who may not be able to attend in-person events.
16. **Interactive mapping:** using interactive mapping tools to visualise and explore the project's impact on the landscape. Interactive maps are useful tools for engaging stakeholders who are interested in the ecological aspects of the project.

By identifying the engagement methods that are best suited for addressing their specific needs the demos can effectively involve stakeholders, build support for their restoration efforts, and facilitate the long-term success of the latter. To do so, it is important to first form a good understanding of local challenges to stakeholder engagement and of the enabling factors that can help address them. The demos have carried out this exercise for their stakeholder engagement strategies. The next part of this chapter provides an overview of the challenges and enablers for meaningful stakeholder engagement identified across the twelve demos.



4.2 Challenges and enablers for stakeholder engagement

A key component of the individual demo engagement strategies is identifying opportunities for constructive stakeholder input. However, the process of meaningful stakeholder engagement also presents challenges that demand strategic consideration. It is important to address these challenges and to leverage respective enablers to ensure successful stakeholder engagement. In this section, we aim to provide an overview of the main such challenges and enablers encountered across the twelve SUPERB demos. By doing so, we offer the SUPERB partners and other readers a holistic understanding of the stakeholder engagement experiences that characterise large-scale forest restoration in Europe.

4.2.1 Overview table

The challenges and enablers in question are presented in the table below. The structure of the table and the dimensions included (political, economic, social, legal/institutional, technical, and environmental) are based on indicators for upscaling developed by the project's upscaling team. The analysis is the result of a systematisation process carried out by PI.

The table focuses on different dimensions of the restoration process (political, economic, social, legal/institutional, technical, environmental). Each dimension will present a distinct set of challenges and respective enablers to stakeholder engagement. By addressing the specific challenges within each dimension and leveraging the related enablers, the demos can tailor their strategies and actions to effectively engage stakeholders and drive successful restoration outcomes.

Dimension	Challenges	Enablers
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of knowledge and interest in the benefits of forest landscape restoration from politicians.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raise awareness among politicians (at the local, regional, and national levels) on the benefits of forest landscape restoration and establish permanent spaces to provide information and facilitate consultation.• Conduct targeted advocacy campaigns to raise awareness among politicians and policymakers about the benefits of forest landscape restoration. Highlight, if considered necessary, the potential political and institutional benefits of supporting restoration in the long term.
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited resources and design of funding schemes for restoration projects and activities.• Lack of economic viability for forest owners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish initial contact with financing actors interested in forest landscape restoration (banks, consultancies, etc.) and employ approaches to demonstrate the benefits of investing in restoration efforts.• Promote the engagement of the demos, with the support of the associate partners, to existing platforms working on sustainable finance such as the Global Landscape Forum Investment Case, UNEP Finance, etc.



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess the feasibility of applying to certification programs.
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder fatigue Competing and clashing interests among stakeholders around the implementation of restoration activities in the demo areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the implementation of inclusive and professionally led stakeholder engagement processes that prioritise the participation of underrepresented groups. Establish regular communication channels with stakeholders to ensure that their needs and concerns are heard and addressed. Communication mechanisms need to ensure that complex scientific output is shared in accessible language and that stakeholder input is considered. Develop and implement social safeguards that ensure that the restoration activities do not negatively impact the livelihoods of local communities. Promote the exchange and sharing of knowledge and best practices among the Demos.
Legal/Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overlapping jurisdictions, clash of different regulatory frameworks and/or out-of-date legislations. Lengthy and complex administrative processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for the harmonisation of different regulatory frameworks and update out-of-date legislation to ensure that they support restoration activities. Engage with relevant authorities and stakeholders to resolve overlapping jurisdictions.
Technical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty in acquiring seeds and other planting material. Access to skilled entrepreneurs for restoration actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support nurseries Education/training of practitioners that are to perform non-traditional forest management for restoration
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreeing on relevant environmental targets for restoration, which biodiversity values and ecosystem services should be prioritised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-creation of setting environmental targets for restoration

4.2.2 Discussion

Within the political dimension, an important challenge is the limited knowledge and interest among politicians regarding the benefits of forest landscape restoration. This can impede the necessary policy support and resource allocation for effective restoration activities. To tackle this challenge, it is crucial to raise awareness among politicians at various levels, including



local, regional and national, about the advantages of forest landscape restoration. Additionally, establishing permanent spaces for information dissemination and facilitating consultation directed at politicians can enhance understanding and engagement. Conducting targeted advocacy campaigns and emphasising the potential political and institutional benefits of supporting restoration in the long term can further encourage political buy-in and collaboration.

The economic dimension presents challenges such as limited resources and the need for appropriate funding schemes for restoration projects and activities. Another significant challenge is the lack of economic viability for forest owners, which can hinder their participation in restoration efforts. To overcome these challenges, establishing initial contact with financing actors interested in forest landscape restoration and demonstrating the benefits of investing in restoration can help attract financial support. Promoting engagement with existing platforms working on sustainable finance and exploring certification programs are additional enablers that can enhance economic viability and incentivise participation in restoration activities.

Within the social dimension, challenges such as stakeholder fatigue and competing interests among stakeholders regarding restoration activities arise. To address stakeholder fatigue, it is important to implement inclusive and professionally led stakeholder engagement processes that prioritise the participation of underrepresented groups. Establishing regular communication channels with stakeholders to address their needs and concerns, ensuring accessible communication of complex scientific information, and implementing social safeguards to protect the livelihoods of local communities are key enablers to fostering meaningful engagement. Additionally, promoting the sharing of knowledge and best practices on stakeholder engagement across the demos can enhance collaboration with and among the stakeholders and boost the social benefits of restoration initiatives.

The legal/institutional dimension presents challenges such as overlapping jurisdictions, clash of regulatory frameworks, and lengthy administrative processes. These challenges can create barriers to effective restoration implementation. To overcome them, advocating for the harmonisation of regulatory frameworks and updating outdated legislation to support restoration activities is crucial. Engaging with relevant authorities and other stakeholders to resolve overlapping jurisdictions can also facilitate smoother implementation. By addressing these challenges through proactive measures, SUPERB can help create an enabling legal and institutional environment for successful restoration initiatives in Europe.

The technical dimension involves challenges such as difficulty in acquiring seeds and other planting materials, as well as limited access to skilled entrepreneurs for restoration actions. To address these challenges, supporting nurseries and ensuring the availability of quality planting materials can enhance the technical feasibility of restoration projects. Additionally, providing education and training opportunities for practitioners involved in non-traditional forest management approaches for restoration can build capacity and address the shortage of skilled professionals. By leveraging these enablers, the project can overcome technical challenges and effectively implement restoration actions.

In the environmental dimension, challenges include agreeing on relevant environmental targets for restoration and determining which biodiversity values and ecosystem services should be prioritised. Co-creation of environmental targets for restoration can address these challenges by involving relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process. This inclusive approach ensures that diverse perspectives and priorities are considered, leading to more comprehensive and consensus-driven environmental goals. By actively engaging stakeholders in the setting of environmental targets, the project can foster a sense of ownership and promote ecologically sound restoration practices.



4.2.3 Looking ahead to demo cooperation and upscaling

The challenges and enablers outlined above require targeted approaches and solutions in each demo, considering their unique context and circumstances. However, by acknowledging the commonalities and shared experiences among the demos, SUPERB can foster learning and collaboration across the demos to address these challenges more effectively. This can help the demos progressively integrate transformative stakeholder engagement into their work, buttressing the long-term sustainability of their restoration initiatives. The enablers to stakeholder engagement identified and activated in SUPERB can serve as starting points to be adapted and applied in other forest contexts. Therefore, their collaborative foregrounding in the demos' work will advance SUPERB overarching objective of promoting effective and socially beneficial forest landscape restoration in Europe.



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