



The LifeWatch ERIC Biodiversity
& Ecosystem eScience Conference
PLOVDIV, BULGARIA 7-10 JULY 2026

Agro/Eco/Nature tourism ecosystems as biodiversity stewardship mechanisms: evidence from a transnational sustainable rural tourism route

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8 July 2026



The Biodiversity Data Gap

Europe's less-visited rural territories hold significant biodiversity assets largely absent from formal monitoring systems.

WELL-MONITORED AREAS

Protected areas,
research sites,
urban networks

DATA GAP

Rural landscapes
and communities
largely unmonitored

What we don't measure, we struggle to protect.



RICH BIODIVERSITY



LIMITED DATA



LIMITED PROTECTION



LOST OPPORTUNITIES

The Biodiversity Data Gap

Europe's less-visited rural territories hold significant biodiversity assets largely absent from formal monitoring systems.

What Rural Territories Hold

- Significant landscape biodiversity
- Agroecological knowledge systems
- Short food-supply chains
- Ecological & cultural heritage
- Community stewardship traditions

What's Missing From the Record

- Participation in biodiversity governance frameworks
- Sustainability certification schemes
- EU research infrastructure networks
- FAIR-compatible ecological datasets
- Free circulation of locally-embedded knowledge

THE ECO SEAL

*A progressive sustainability
self-assessment &
peer-learning framework*



Developed through
Erasmus+ Small Partnership
Project — Sustainagro

What the ECO Seal Enables

Biodiversity Awareness

Rural operators document local biodiversity presence and practice

Local Sourcing

Short food-supply chain documentation and improvement

Water Stewardship

Monitoring and reducing water impact across tourism operations

Waste Reduction

Structured waste auditing and circular practices

Ecosystem-Sensitive Visitor Management

Protecting sensitive habitats and species from tourism pressure

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BIODIVERSITY AWARENESS

Document local
biodiversity
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LOCAL SOURCING

Short food-supply
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WATER STEWARDSHIP

Monitoring and
reducing water
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operations



WASTE REDUCTION

Structured
waste auditing
and circular
practices



ECOSYSTEM- SENSITIVE VISITOR MANAGEMENT

Protecting sensitive
habitats and species
from tourism
pressure

TRANSNATIONAL SCALING

Living Ruralities Villages Route



TOURISM SMEs

Small rural operators documenting and improving sustainability practices across the route



MUNICIPALITIES

Local governments anchoring governance, land-use records, and community participation



DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS

Coordinating territorial branding, visitor flows, and cross-border knowledge exchange



PILOTING IN FOUR EU MEMBER STATES

Bulgaria, Greece, Ireland, Italy — enabling comparative, FAIR-compatible biodiversity datasets



Proposed for transnational scaling through the
Living Ruralities Villages Route,
connecting the less-visited rural areas
of EU Member States.



TRANSNATIONAL SCALING

Living Ruralities Villages Route

Proposed for transnational scaling through the Living Ruralities Villages Route, connecting the less-visited rural areas of EU Member States.

Tourism SMEs

Small rural operators documenting and improving sustainability practices across the route

Municipalities

Local governments anchoring governance, land-use records, and community participation

Destination Management Organizations

Coordinating territorial branding, visitor flows, and cross-border knowledge exchange

Piloting in four EU Member States

Bulgaria, Greece, Ireland, Italy — enabling comparative, FAIR-compatible biodiversity datasets

Scientific Contribution



**FAIR-COMPATIBLE
AGROECOLOGICAL DATA**
from dispersed rural operators



DATA NOT CURRENTLY AVAILABLE
Land-use practices, biodiversity stewardship behaviors, and ecosystem interactions across rural tourism areas do not currently exist in any European research or open science repository



GEOGRAPHIC GRANULARITY
Community-scale data at a geographic granularity not currently reached by existing EU biodiversity monitoring infrastructures, especially in peripheral rural regions



FAIR COMPATIBILITY
Structured, comparable datasets generated through ECO Seal — Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable — supporting free circulation of ecological knowledge across the ERA



The resulting datasets constitute a novel contribution to Europe's agricultural biodiversity data ecosystem.



Scientific Contribution

FAIR-compatible agroecological practice data from dispersed rural operators

Data Not Currently Available

Land-use practices, biodiversity stewardship behaviors, and ecosystem interactions across rural tourism areas do not currently exist in any European research or open science repository

Geographic Granularity

Community-scale data from operators at a geographic granularity not currently reached by existing EU biodiversity monitoring infrastructures, especially in peripheral rural regions

FAIR Compatibility

Structured, comparable datasets generated through ECO Seal — Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable — supporting free circulation of ecological knowledge across the ERA

The resulting datasets constitute a novel contribution to Europe's agricultural biodiversity data ecosystem.

Integrating into LifeWatch ERIC

Opening dialogue on how rural tourism data can close Europe's agricultural biodiversity data gap

ECO SEAL PROVIDES

- + Structured biodiversity practice data from rural tourism SMEs
- + Peer-reviewed, self-assessed sustainability indicators
- + Transnational comparability across piloting in four Member States
- + Community-level agroecological knowledge records
- + Scalable methodology for further rural territories



LIFEWATCH ERIC GAINS

- + Novel data layer: community-based rural tourism ecosystems
- + Granular geographic coverage in less-monitored regions
- + Living lab infrastructure for ongoing data collection
- + Connection to Erasmus+ and European research networks
- + New partnership model: municipalities + tourism + research

Opening dialogue on how rural tourism data can close Europe's agricultural biodiversity data gap

KEY MESSAGES

- 1 Europe's biodiversity monitoring has a rural community-scale data gap — ECO Seal begins to close it
- 2 Community-generated sustainability data from tourism operators is FAIR-compatible and scientifically valuable
- 3 The Living Ruralities Villages Route creates transnational infrastructure for ongoing data collection
- 4 Integration with LifeWatch ERIC would unlock a new layer of socio-ecological data for European research



#ECOSeal

#FAIRData

#Agroecology

#RuralTourism

#LifeWatchERIC

#SUSTAINAGRO

#BEeS2026



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THANK YOU!

Questions?

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