

# Slovenia: Demonstrating the importance of freshwater biodiversity

An innovative media campaign based on a flagship EU species - the otter - helped the AQUAVIVA project increase Slovenian public awareness about biodiversity loss and its negative impact on freshwater ecosystems.

When carrying out the simple task of turning on a tap, people are often unaware that the quality of the water they're using depends on the conservation and maintenance of natural freshwater ecosystems. Raising awareness about the need to preserve everyday ecosystem services can be aligned with campaigns involving the habitats and species within those ecosystems. Effective public awareness campaigns that help to halt biodiversity loss frequently use flagship species to influence public attitudes. For example, otter conservation actions could have knock-on benefits for a wide range of other species in freshwater ecosystems.

## Positive influence

Thus the main objective behind the awarded LIFE Information and Communication project AQUAVIVA (**LIFE10 INF/SI/000135**) was to positively influence people's attitudes to water biodiversity and nature protection issues using the

Habitats Directive listed species the Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*) as a representative of aquatic life. The campaign emphasised the need to preserve freshwater ecosystems for a host of different species, as well as for important ecosystem services.

The project thus supported the implementation of European environmental policy and the nature directives, including the goals of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to halt biodiversity loss by 2020, as well as supporting the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (targeting improvements in water quality in the Danube and its tributaries).

The project was coordinated by LUTRA Institute, an independent environmental NGO devoted to the conservation of freshwater and riparian ecosystems that support the Eurasian otter. There were also two project partners: the Institute for Water; and communications company, HOPA.

*The European otter (lutra lutra) was central to AQUAVIVA's campaign to raise awareness about freshwater biodiversity in Slovenia*



Photo: Hrvoje T. Ošanić

AQUAVIVA's main communication and advertising campaigns included placing highly visible advertisements on public transport buses and in shopping centres, organising riverside exhibitions and promoting a collection of fashion knitwear illustrated with patterns of freshwater diatoms (tiny algae). The innovative designs have featured on cat-walk models (and on fashion websites) in Ljubljana, Slovenia, the United States (New York) and also in Japan. The project also held 30 workshops for the general public and 59 education days for schoolchildren.

Among several other innovative actions, the LIFE team organised exhibitions of waste products (collected from rivers and springs) to act as a deterrent and to raise public awareness of the threats to aquatic biodiversity. Other notable successes included an art competition for schoolchildren and workshops for the general public. The latter events were typically organised alongside traditional events (fairs, river celebrations, etc.). Otter-themed nature education days were also popular as they brought nature conservation education out of the classroom and into the local natural environment, such as rivers, lakes and streams.

The project also set up info-points in the Technical Museum of Slovenia (in Ljubljana) and in the Aqualutra centre situated in Goričko Landscape Park. These featured outdoor models showing water flow and retention models under various conditions, natural and degraded.

Online communication activities were divided between the project website and social media channels, helping to encourage people to share their opinion about nature conservation issues.

An opinion poll, conducted in September 2014 on behalf of the project found that there had been a 34% increase in

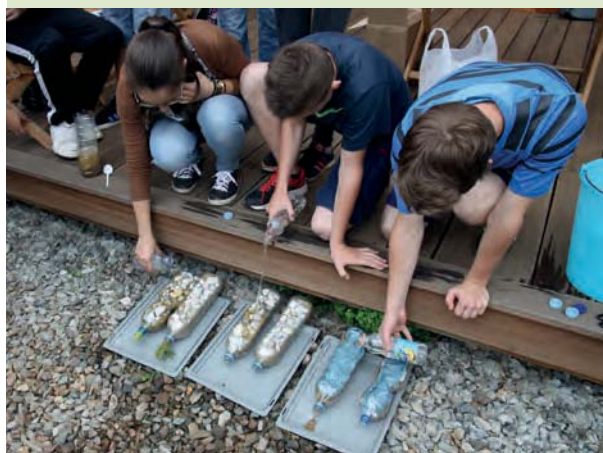
*AQUAVIVA used innovative ways of interesting the public in its message, such as a partnership with a fashion knitwear company*



## AQUAVIVA's key messages

- Water is the most precious natural resource on our planet - important not only for people, but also for other living organisms, especially those living in water habitats;
- Rich biodiversity enhances the quality of life. A rich biodiversity of water habitats means good water quality;
- Integrated water resources management means life for aquatic organisms, as represented by the otter.

*A wetlands workshop held by the project*



awareness of biodiversity loss in Slovenia compared with 2010 (when the project's objectives were being drawn up). Importantly, 71% of respondents agreed with the statement that, "biodiversity loss is a serious problem."

Project manager Marjana Hoenigsfeld Adamič attributes AQUAVIVA's success to teamwork. "Our experiences testify that connections with institutions and individuals developed over the course of the project work ...are much stronger and long-lasting than foreseen," she adds.

As a result, the project provides model that could be applied to the whole Danube river basin and beyond.

**Project number:** LIFE10 INF/SI/000135

**Title:** AQUAVIVA - Live Water - from Biodiversity to the Tap

**Beneficiary:** LUTRA, Institute for Conservation of Natural Heritage (private non-profit institute)

**Contact:** Marjana Hoenigsfeld Adamič

**Email:** marjana@lutra.si

**Website:** <http://aquaviva.si/en>

**Period:** 01-Sept-2011 to 31-Aug-2014

**Total budget:** €548 000

**LIFE contribution:** € 235 000

