VOICES FROM OUR LIVING LABS: SPRING, CHANGE, AND RENEWAL

REFLECTIONS FROM A YEAR'S GERMINATION

HOW WAS THIS NEWSLETTER MADE?

Hello from Huiying and Anna 😊

This April edition was seeded in mid-February. It gathers insights, words, and the voices of Consortium members. This issue's theme is our Living Labs. Yet, through February and March, our Living Labs were not really formed yet. Many questions still remain. Who, where, and how?

The quotes and words in the next pages are collected from interviews we have done with Consortium members, and our observations of the Living Labs as they have grown in conversation with Consortium partners. We see the incredible task(s) ahead of us, and the core motivations shared across the Consortium.

Whether you are in the Consortium or a friend of it, we would love to hear your thoughts on reading this newsletter. Please reach out and tell us!

Huiying and Anna

Work Package 2: Living Labs Co-Leads Anna Krzywoszynska and Ng Huiying, are creating a space for participatory action research within FORbEST.

MAKING THE LIVING LABS 'ours'

What are Living Labs? How do they become alive to each of us? In this edition, we reflect on what it means to make the term 'living lab' ours by exploring paths that bring consortium members together to shape living labs today.

Ask someone what a forest means to them, or why they work with forests, and words of love and appreciation bubble up. For some, simply to "be outside in the forest", for others the "sacredness" they carry, and yet others for the foods and creatures they hold—edible mushrooms, birds, insects—and perhaps most of all, the sense of time stretching deeper and farther than we humans know.

Forests are filled with cycles of change and renewal. Foresters have shared observations of students or the public "not used to seeing an actual living forest that also dies". While many foresters or ecologists see dead trees as required components and "an occasion for regeneration" in forest ecosystems; updating the public's understanding of forest disturbances based on science and research can take "years to change some people's minds". These are the words, shared with us—Anna and Huiying—in conversation-interviews with FORbEST members. As these words have been shared with us, now we'd like to share and reflect how these words shape our understanding with you.

Social sciences, ecology, and forestry rarely have a chance co-create together. As FORbEST grows to complete its first full year (just entering our first spring), we take a moment in these next pages to reflect on the opportunity and gift this project brings, to learn and grow together.

WHAT IS INSIDE THIS NEWSLETTER

Page 2 - Transdisciplinary action research: selected words from a social scientist and scientist / seeing the bigger picture of forest-lives This article brings us to insights on transdisciplinary research from Chiang Mai University geographer, Chaya Vaddhanaphuti and Chulalongkorn University ecologist, Pongchai Dumrongrojwatthana, who are building the Nan Living Lab.

INSET BOX
LIVING LAB OBJECTIVES

Page 3 - Project Activities / Consortium Life includes two articles:
From Site Selection to Field Installation: Songmeters in Šumava by Jitka Zenáhlíková
Sila Living Lab Coordination Board Established
By Jordan Palli

NEWS IN BRIEF
A Message From Zoltan Kun: EU Public Consultation On Habitat And Birds Directive

INSET BOX
IMAGES FROM THE FIELD

Geranium versicolor L. in bloom in Bosco del Tassita Park, Palermo, Italy. Credit: Sara Pelladoni.

FORbEST

LIVING LABS IN-DEPTH

TRANSDISCIPLINARY ACTION RESEARCH: SELECTED WORDS FROM A SOCIAL SCIENTIST AND A NATURAL SCIENTIST / SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE OF FOREST-LIVES

Pongchai and his team set up gameplay with residents of Na Lao village, Nan province, while Chaya and team look on.

In a conversation with geographer, Chaya Vaddhanaphuti (Chiang Mai University), he described working with ecologist, Pongchai Dumrongrojwatthana (Chulalongkorn University) as an honour. If, he added, they are to write a journal article together someday, he imagines it would give Pongchai space to reflect on himself and his scientific approach over time. Here we share excerpts from Huiying's interviews with both, as our thanks and contribution to pushing that ambition along.

In your line of work, how do you think we can understand people and their lives with the forest?

Pongchai: "I'm an ecologist by training and I still lean towards that. But in terms of integration, that's increasingly been part of my work. I'm trying to teach my students to see the connection between disciplines.

Forests are complex systems; a scientist may study taxa; an economist might look at the value of such lives. Pure science takes one approach; applied science or economics takes another. And still, we can't communicate with each other. There are no standards. Well, there are a lot of standards, but they aren't well developed yet.

And it's not just about science. There's economics here. There's social science here... Sometimes, you might not want to listen. But you have to understand the broad picture. And people have to eat, live, and spend money. If we want to talk to people, we have to hear them talk. We have to understand their needs. But they are often said to be encroaching on forest land, and sometimes they have reasons why they are forced to do it. We're trying to teach our students to see the holistic picture." (original in Thai)

Chaya: "Upland farmers' lives have changed and so have their tactics. They tell stories about their struggles through coffee. They won't call themselves scholars but just a storyteller. Maybe that's another way, and maybe a more user-friendly way. Because not many people would like a hard academic article to read about injustice in the uplands. They'd rather listen to the stories about how coffee tastes better because of local knowledge, after the struggle of their parents' generation."

Walking with the village headwoman through a young rubber field to get to the forest on the other side, in Nam Ki village, Nan province. Credit: Matjaž Pinter

LIVING LABS OBJECTIVES

The objectives we have for the Living Labs are general principles and directions. They are meant to guide our vision for the next years. We accept that growing a shared vision takes practice and approach the work with patience and curiosity.

These are objectives we in WP2 have put forward for the Living Labs. We will keep refining them. How do they speak to you, and your work?

FORbEST Living Labs:

1. Bring together stakeholders interested in forest management in the Living Lab area, so that the Living Lab becomes the stakeholder platform for organisations in the long term and is consulted and involved in decisions related to forest management.

2. Deepen the understanding of socially, ecologically and economically viable forestry in the Living Lab area, with stakeholders in the area.

3. Advise FORbEST's research consortium on how to make their scientific work more applicable and relevant to foresters, forest managers, and the public.

4. Make project results on forest practices for your area / region available to Living Lab members, and support promotion of these practices to other protected area / forest managers or even to the national level.

5. Share and discuss the results of FORbEST research, and to deliver these to foresters, forestry ministry, and forest users and local people living in and around the area.

BUDDING TASKS BEAR FRUIT! WORDS FROM THE LIVING LABS

From Site Selection to Field Installation: Songmeters in Šumava

by Jitka Zenáhlíková

As part of the Šumava Living Lab, we carried out the installation of acoustic recorders (songmeters) to monitor the biodiversity of birds and bats. The process began with consultations with the Czech University of Life Sciences (CZU) on how to select suitable sites. Based on our conversations, an initial proposal of plot locations was prepared using maps. I then discussed this proposal with the Šumava forest administration and the foresters responsible for the respective areas. Their knowledge of the local conditions was important to assess the suitability of individual sites and for refining the final selection. The installation itself was carried out in the field with colleagues from the CZU, myself, and several foresters who joined us. This process showed how combining scientific methods with practical experience can support both planning and implementation. In this sense, it reflects well the idea of a Living Lab, where different types of knowledge come together in a shared activity.

Sila Living Lab Coordination Board Established

By Jordan Palli

The Coordination Board of the Sila Living Lab was officially established during a meeting held on February 23, 2026, in Italy's Sila National Park. The key aim of the Sila LL is to generate and share comprehensive knowledge on forest conservation and restoration by studying strictly protected, non-intervention areas, using these natural models to inform biodiversity- and climate-friendly management practices. It operates through three thematic areas: biodiversity conservation, sustainable forest planning and management, and public engagement through education, citizen science, and ecotourism. The Living Lab fosters collaboration between institutions, researchers, and local communities to develop and validate solutions for nature conservation, ecological restoration and sustainable resource use, contributing to replicable models aligned with global sustainability goals.

IMAGES FROM THE FIELD

Photos from the Living Labs: We have picked Šumava and Sila: songmeters installation in Šumava, and the mixed beach-fir forest in Sila.

***Left**: Mixed beech–fir forest stand under strict protection in the Gariglione Natural Reserve within the Sila Living Lab. The Reserve is managed by the Carabinieri Forestali Biodiversity Group. Credit: Gianluca Piovesan.*
***Right**: Songmeters installation in Šumava National Park in case study areas. Credit: Marek Mejstrik.*

A MESSAGE FROM ZOLTAN KUN: EU PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON HABITAT AND BIRDS DIRECTIVE

Zoltan Kun is the Head of Conservation for Wild Europe

Many of our Living Labs have an interest in policy, directly or indirectly. As part of the EU simplification agenda, the European Commission announced the so-called stress test of the Habitat and the Birds Directive. Our Living Labs are strongly influenced by these two policies, because of their link to the Natura 2000 network. We encourage you to participate in the current EU public consultation about the stress test which might lead to the revision of the directives. Please submit your input through the EU Have Your Say website through this link.

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