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Nature Returns – a methodology for bringing innovative businesses into Protected Areas

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Nature Returns – a methodology for bringing innovative businesses into Protected Areas

Methodological guidelines for the Nature Returns project

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Collaborations: The project is coordinated by Nature Returns as a company established for running this project together with EuroNatur Foundation and Connectology, and the management bodies of each pilot site joining this project: the Lonjsko Polje Nature Park, the Regional Secretariat for Environment and Climate Action of the Azores, Fundação Principe, the Shar Mountain National Park and the Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism of Montenegro with CZIP/BirdLife Montenegro. The Working Group developing this methodological framework was facilitated by FOS Europe.

Front & back cover: Group visit to Gruta das Torres, Pico Island, Portugal by Luís Costa.

Nature Returns is a business for nature collaboration project by:

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1 Introduction

The project ***Nature Returns*** is a legacy project from the MAVA Foundation that aims to test an innovative approach where the creation of business opportunities contributes to the adequate management of Protected Areas, while simultaneously contributing to increased income and quality of life for residents.

The project takes place from 2023 to 2028 in five pilot sites from Africa and Europe, covering the Lonjsko Polje Nature Park in Croatia, the Pico Island Nature Park in the Azores archipelago in Portugal, the Príncipe Nature Park in Sao Tome and Principe, the Shar Mountain National Park in North Macedonia and the Ulcinj Salina Nature Park in Montenegro.

The process to be followed during the next 5 years includes:

- Training local staff for the use of the Conservation Standards (https://conservationstandards.org/) as a tool for management planning.
- Developing site-specific Management Plans for the identification of the main threats and where businesses can bring an opportunity for delivering conservation objectives.
- Identifying innovative business that can help reverting the threats to the site.
- Promoting and training entrepreneurs to establish businesses that contribute to the site's management, through an incubation fund that is available in the project.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of both the conservation of the site and the businesses.

A generic Theory of Change

This document presents the operational framework of Nature Returns. It sets the Theory of Change (***Figure 1***) as an archetype to be used at site level for the Protected Areas included in this project, and a monitoring programme that will allow to test the Learning Questions to be resolved during the project's period from 2023 to 2028. It responds to the need of a solid methodology that must be tested and adapted for concluding on the feasibility of bringing businesses into site management to solve conservation threats.

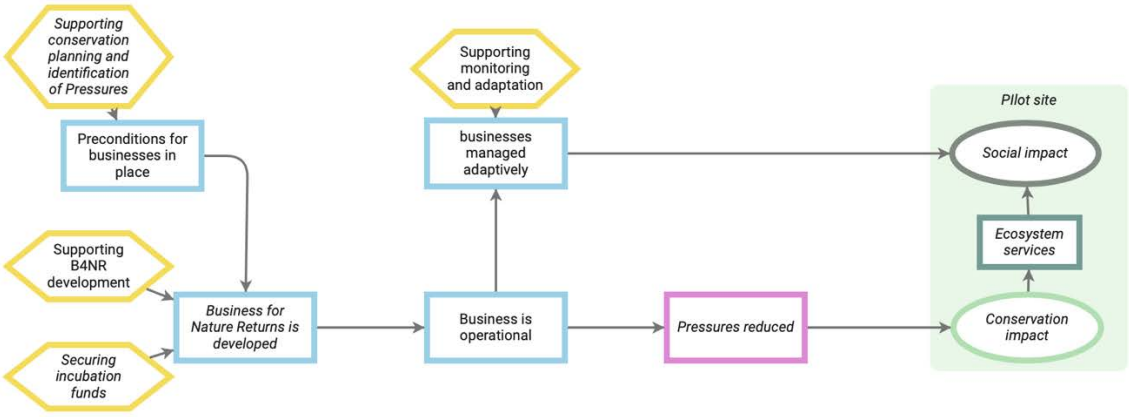


Figure 1. Generic Theory of ChangeThis document presents the operational framework of Nature Returns. It sets the Theory of Change

Where:

- B4NR stands for Businesses for Nature Returns.
- Yellow hexagons refer to the main strategies to be implemented through the project.
- Blue boxes refer to the main Results to be achieved to securing social benefits and reducing Pressures on sites. Pressures can be read as Threats in some terminologies, depending on the timescale they refer to.

The ultimate Goal of this framework is that Pressures on sites can be reduced and cause a positive impact on site conservation through the implementation of businesses, therefore creating a triple-win situation where the Protected Area management body gets their conservation objectives done by saving their resources; entrepreneurs can get a profit from helping the Protected Area to deliver conservation objectives; and the local communities can receive more income and job opportunities.

Who is testing this

The project is coordinated by Nature Returns, a company established for running this project, together with EuroNatur Foundation and Connectology, and the management bodies of each pilot site joining this project: the Lonjsko Polje Nature Park, the Regional Secretariat for Environment and Climate Action of the Azores, Fundação Príncipe, the Shar Mountain National Park and the Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism of Montenegro with CZIP/BirdLife Montenegro.

2 A Theory of Change for business and site management

We have developed a Theory of Change (ToC) as an archetype for every site, illustrating the results to be achieved at site level and its cause-effect relationship. This is shown in **Erro! A origem da referência não foi encontrada.**. The ToC is also available on Miradi Share (www.miradishare.org) by searching for "Nature Returns".

The full framework is simple but needs testing. To develop the businesses for nature returns (B4NR), a series of preconditions are needed to implement the site work, and an incubation fund and capacity building is available for triggering business development; when business is operational, its effectiveness is monitored for adapting the approach; the expected outputs are social benefits and reduction of pressures/threats on the conservation targets, which, together with support from the local communities, lead to conservation and social impact.

This ToC applies to a site-scale. It provides a logical framework for a contribution of businesses for reverting some site-based pressures but is not meant to be the silver bullet to turn around all given conservation pressures or threats; instead, it should be part of the management planning in association with other business-as-usual conservation activities by the management authorities and projects funded otherwise.

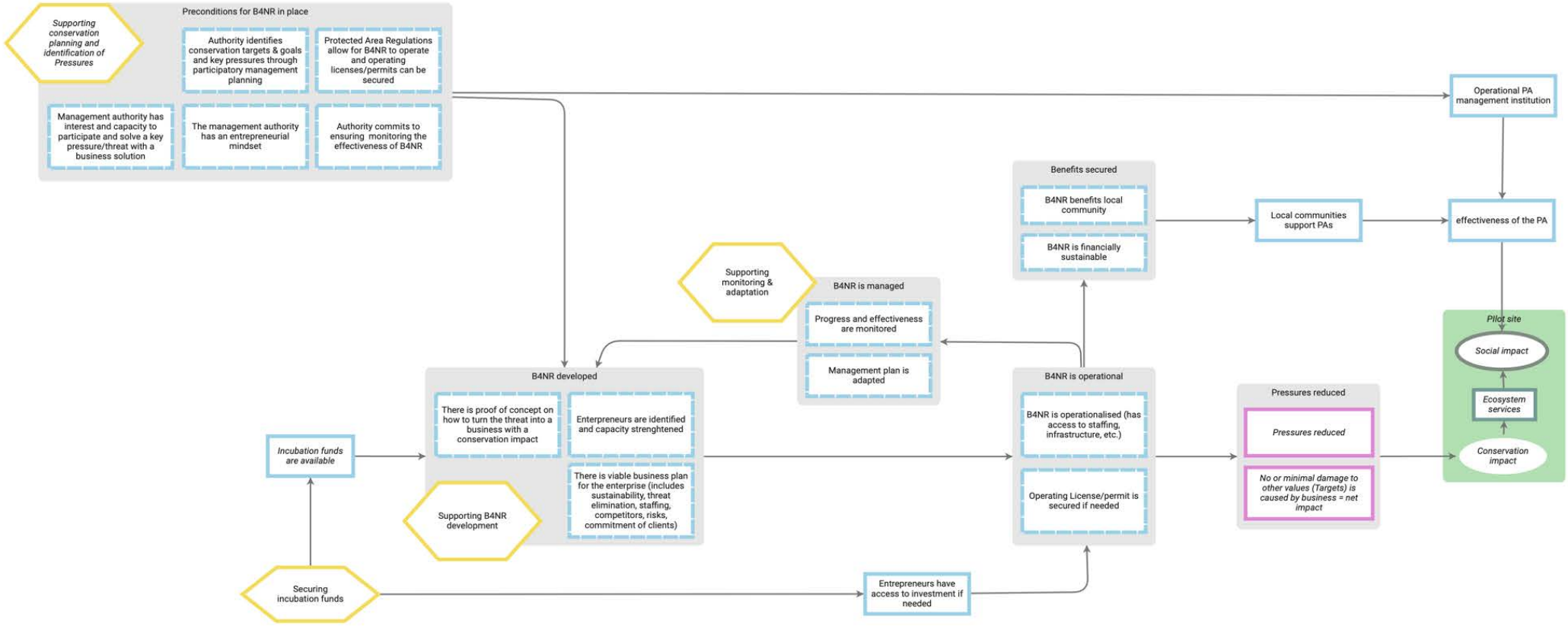
Assumptions and learning questions

For each strategy defined in this Theory of Change, we have listed several assumptions to be verified in this project. The approach in this methodological framework is to formulate Learning Questions that will respond to each assumption during the 5 years of the project. Responding to all these Learning Questions will assess the validity of the Nature Returns approach.

The process of adaptive management of the project may modify this framework leading to a continuous improvement and evaluation of the efficiency of business for nature returns (B4NR). New versions of this methodology can be developed based on learning during the process.

The assumptions and learning questions for the project's strategies and key results are listed in Table 1.

Figure 2. Complete Theory of ChangeThis document presents the operational framework of Nature Returns. It sets the Theory of Change



Strategies (in bold)/Key Results	Assumptions	Learning questions
Supporting conservation planning and identification of Pressures	All preconditions are important for B4N solutions to be possible	*What preconditions need to be met for B4NR to be applicable?*
	The management authority uses the monitoring data about the effectiveness of the B4NR for conservation management	*To what extent does the management authority use monitoring data about the effectiveness of B4NR in management decision-making?*
Securing Incubation money	External seed funding is critical to establishing a B4NR, without it, it might not have been possible to jump start the B4NR	*To what extent is external seed funding crucial for accelerating the development of the B4NR? How much seed money is typically needed and for what?*
	Seed funding is not always needed (e.g. for companies that are already established)	
Supporting B4NR development	The B4NR approach also works in case of non-material threats (e.g. countering poaching through Tourism)	*For which types of pressures/threats is the B4NR approach applicable?*
Supporting monitoring & adaptation	It is possible to have a healthy business yet eliminate the pressure/threat at a given site	*How to ensure that B4NR eliminates or contains the threat (to ensure conservation impact) and not sustain it for business?*
	The Business Plan includes options for adaptation / expansion once the pressure/threat in the site would be tackled	
	The Business Plan includes a clear description of what conservation impact needs to be achieved	
	The license / contract specifies expectations related to (trying to) eliminate the threat	
B4NR is operational	There are additional challenges to B4NR in Protected Areas	*What are the additional challenges B4NRs (inside*

	B4NRs can deal with typical and additional challenges in Protected Areas	*Protected Areas) need to deal with?*
Benefits secured	The expectations of the entrepreneurs have been met	*To what extent are entrepreneurs satisfied with the (potential) returns on their B4NR?*
	The survival rate of the businesses is 100% within the lifetime of the project	
	B4NR contributes to positive image of the company	
	B4NR is able to break-even in the short term and generates profits on the long term	
Local communities support Protected Areas	B4N benefits local people through jobs and income	*To what extent is the involvement of local people in B4NR leading to local people supporting the Protected Area?*
	B4NR benefits local people through enhanced / sustained ecosystem services (including intangible benefits)	
	B4N benefits local people through jobs and income	
Pressures reduced	The B4NR leads to significant pressure/threat reduction	*To what extent is the B4NR reducing the targeted key threat?*
	The B4NR does not cause damage (does not become a threat itself)	
	The B4NR is more cost and time effective and sustainable than the business-as-usual for the Authority	*To what extent is the B4NR solution more efficient and sustainable to the Park Authority than the business-as-usual solution?*
Ultimate success and impact	The threat reduction through B4NR(s) lead to (concrete) conservation impact/improvement	*To what extent does the threat reduction through B4NR lead to concrete conservation impact?*
	The B4NR is combined with additional strategies implemented by the MA to benefit the conservation target(s)	

3 Monitoring framework

In order to test the Assumptions of the Nature Returns approach, we defined Indicators for each Learning Question:

Table 2. Monitoring indicators.

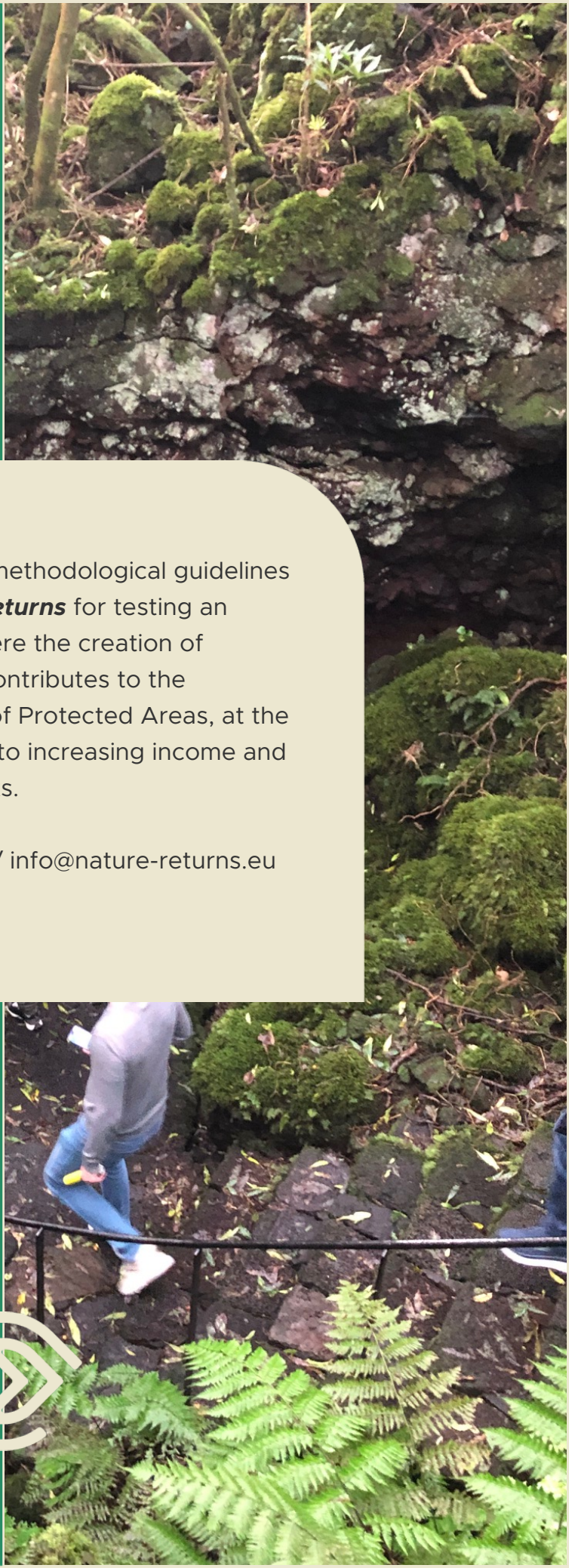
Learning Questions	Assumptions	Indicators
What preconditions need to be met for B4NR to be applicable?	All preconditions are important for B4N solutions to be possible	▪ Management authority has interest to participate and solve a key threat with a business solution (YES/NO) ▪ Management authority has an entrepreneurial mindset (YES/NO) ▪ Regulation of Protected Areas allow Businesses to operate, and operating licenses/permits can be secured (YES/NO) ▪ Authority has identified conservation targets and goals and key threats through participatory management planning (YES/NO) ▪ Authority commits to monitoring the effectiveness of B4NR (YES, SOMEWHAT, NO) ▪ What other preconditions needed to be met for B4NR to be applicable? (qualitative answer)
To what extent does the management authority use monitoring data about the effectiveness of B4NR in management decision-making?	The management authority uses the monitoring data about the effectiveness of the B4NR for conservation management	▪ Existence of adequate monitoring data (YES/NO) ▪ Examples of decisions made based on monitoring data (qualitative answer)

To what extent is external seed funding crucial for accelerating the development of the B4NR? How much seed money is typically needed and for what?	External seed funding is critical to establishing a B4NR, without it, it might not have been possible to jump start the B4NR	▪ What is the seed funding used for? (categories to be defined once the grants have been allocated) ▪ Amount of seed funding received for the B4NR (converted to Euro)
	Seed funding is not always needed (e.g. for companies that are already established)	▪ Examples of businesses that did not require seed funding
For which types of pressures/threats is the B4NR approach applicable?	The B4NR approach also works in case of non-material threats (e.g. countering poaching through Tourism)	▪ Number of B4NR applications for different threats ▪ Success rate in addressing specific threats through B4NR
How to ensure that B4NR eliminates or contains the threat (to ensure conservation impact) and not sustain it for business?	It is possible to have a healthy business yet eliminate the pressure/threat at a given site	▪ Success rate in addressing specific threats through B4NR
	The Business Plan includes options for adaptation / expansion once the pressure/threat in the site would be tackled	▪ The Business Plan includes options for adaptation / expansion once the pressure/threat in the site would be tackled (YES/NO)
	The Business Plan includes a clear description of what conservation impact needs to be achieved	▪ There is a clear description of the Threat – Target relationship, the status, the anticipated changes and the correlation to the B4NR (YES/NO)
	The license / contract specifies expectations related to (trying to) eliminate the threat	▪ The license/contract quantifies expectations related to threat reduction over time (YES/NO)
What are the additional challenges B4NRs (inside Protected Areas) need to deal with?	There are additional challenges to B4NR in Protected Areas	▪ Number of identified challenges and successful mitigation strategies ▪ Rate of business continuity in protected areas
	B4NRs can deal with typical and additional challenges in Protected Areas	
To what extent are entrepreneurs satisfied with the	The expectations of the entrepreneurs have been met	▪ Rate of final result versus expectations

(potential) returns on their B4NR?	The survival rate of the businesses is 100% within the lifetime of the project	▪ Survival rate of businesses
	B4NR contributes to positive image of the company	▪ B4NR contributes to positive image of the company (YES/NO) ▪ Description from entrepreneurs
	B4NR is able to break-even in the short term and generates profits on the long term	▪ B4NR is able to break-even in the short term and generates profits on the long term (YES/NO)
To what extent is the involvement of local people in B4NR leading to local people supporting the Protected Area?	B4N benefits local people through jobs and income	▪ No. of local people hired ▪ No. of self-employed: employers ▪ No. of newly created firms with more than one paid employee ▪ % of income increase through involvement in the B4NR ▪ Outcome harvesting: other livelihood benefits
	B4NR benefits local people through enhanced / sustained ecosystem services (including intangible benefits)	▪ Outcome harvesting: Indication that local people benefit from sustained or restored ecosystem services to which B4NR contributes, e.g. harvesting of Salicornia, shrimps, birds, birdwatching, research, healing characteristics of mud, etc.
To what extent is the B4NR reducing the targeted key threat?	The B4NR leads to significant pressure/threat reduction	▪ % of threat reduction through B4NR ▪ % of threat reduction through supporting strategies ▪ What is the supporting strategy (if any)
	The B4NR does not cause damage (does not become a threat itself)	▪ The extent of environmental damage caused by B4NR (None, Some, Extensive) e.g. by pollution of water, soil compacting ▪ What kind of environmental damage (if any)
To what extent is the B4NR solution more efficient and sustainable to the Park Authority than the business-as-usual solution?	The B4NR is more cost and time effective and sustainable than the business-as-usual for the Authority	▪ Time and funding needed to reduce the threat with B4NR ▪ Time and funding needed to reduce the threat with business-as-usual

To what extent does the threat reduction through B4NR lead to concrete conservation impact?	The threat reduction through B4NR(s) lead to (concrete) conservation impact/improvement	▪ Improvement in conservation status of natural values in areas covered by B4NR (YES/NO) ▪ Improvement in conservation on areas covered by B4NR (qualitative)
	The B4NR is combined with additional strategies implemented by the MA to benefit the conservation target(s)	▪ Contribution ratio of B4NR to conservation improvement (conservation impact vs cost)

We created a scorecard table with all indicators to be assessed every year, to allow adaptations to the whole framework after the results of each pilot site. This will add baseline values for each indicator and a timescale to this table.



This document sets the methodological guidelines for the project ***Nature Returns*** for testing an innovative approach where the creation of business opportunities contributes to the adequate management of Protected Areas, at the same time it contributes to increasing income and quality of life for residents.

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