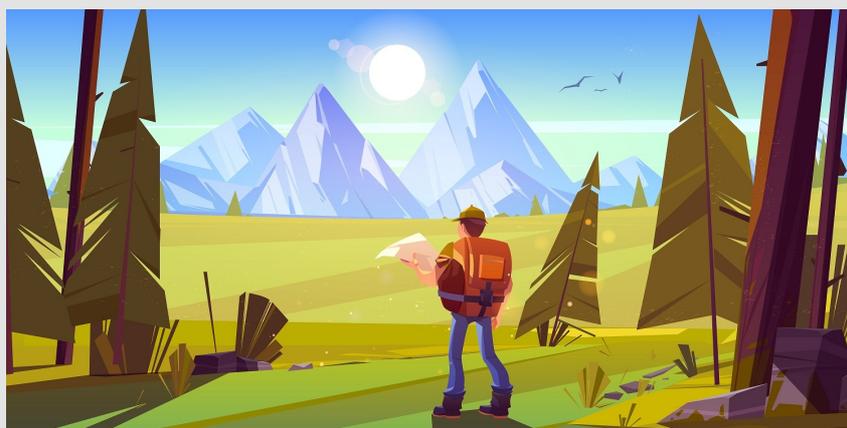




Issue: September 2021



Strategic Section



Overcoming the pandemic: Lessons from an experimental physical eLTER meeting

It is an exaggeration to say that most people barely remember what working on international projects was like before the COVID-19 pandemic. But it is true that we have become used to “the new normal” – seemingly endless virtual meetings, repurposing our homes into offices, all our colleagues suddenly turning into “floating heads” in hazy backgrounds. To some **this almost**

sounds like a dystopian, futuristic novel.

However, the hope is that with the vaccination process going strong the situation is slowly bringing back qualities of “the old normal”, which we’ve been missing for so long. Even if the “new normal” will not be a copy of the old one.

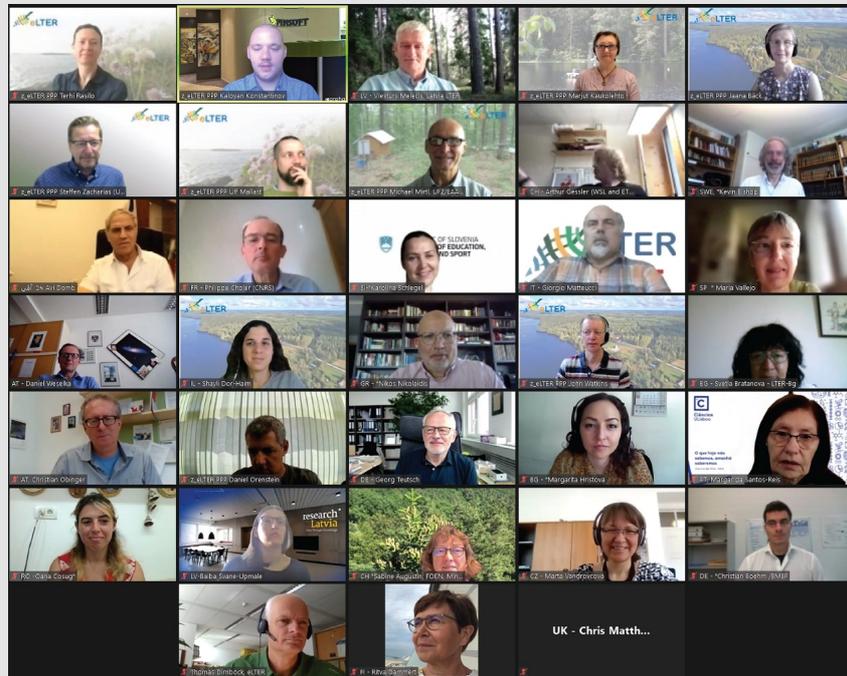
But before this happens an exit and transition needs to happen, which has turned out more difficult than many of us expected. It is clear that we are still months away from full normalization. It is also clear that **isolation is starting to affect working relations** by eroding the sense of team spirit and each other. That is why eLTER decided to experiment with a new style of meetings.

Instead of flying dozens of people from 27 countries across the continent to still not meet physically as complete groups, **we started with key persons to visit groups** of 10-15 from one or few countries or partners.

Photo credit: @upklyak / Freepik

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Highlights



Second eLTER Interim Council: Adopting a Strategic Plan and appointing a Chair

The second eLTER Interim Council took place from 29-30 June 2021 with 50 representatives of 19 countries and the project’s Steering committee. Among the important decisions taken during the meeting were the election of Kevin Bishop (Sweden) as the Chair, and Daniel Weselka (Austria) as the Vice-Chair, and the **approval of the eLTER RI Strategic Plan** and the eLTER Central Services host selection process.

Members decided to direct the Strategic Plan towards both European and global audiences. Although the initiative is rooted in Europe, its ambition is to **contribute towards the solving environmental issues more widely.**

eLTER **builds upon ESFRI recommendations** to reach a comprehensive and inclusive agreement on its vision, mission, and strategic goals. It was agreed that eLTER will explore the relevant experiences of similar international RIs and will elaborate integrated governance options before the 3rd Interim Council.

The Interim Council utilized the sociocracy method of working, also known as dynamic governance. This is a system of decision-making which seeks to create psychologically safe environments and productive organizations. It is distinguished by **aiming at consent, rather than majority voting**, in discussion and decision-making. This approach avoids voting deadlock and the search for impossible perfect decisions.

[Read the full story](#)



The SPRING project has established an EU-wide monitoring system for pollinators

Insects have an important function for both ecosystems and the economy. Almost 90% of flowering wild plants worldwide depend at least partially on pollination by animals. And **more than 75% of all crops also need pollinators** if they are to produce a high yield and good quality. But what about these important helpers? Where are their populations threatened? And what can be done about it? So far, there has been a lack of systematic inventories in Europe that can provide answers to these questions.

A new project called SPRING (Strengthening Pollinator Recovery through Indicators and monitoring) now aims to remedy the situation. SPRING is testing different approaches in European-wide pollinator monitoring which **will impact**

the related recommendations for eLTER standard observations. It has a budget of €5 million, and will carry out part of this census by 2023. Nineteen research institutions will be involved in the project, which is coordinated by Prof. Josef Settele from the UFZ and Dr David Roy from the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology in Wallingford, UK.

“Most parties agree that we need more indicators for the state of biodiversity in Europe”, says UFZ biodiversity researcher Prof. Josef Settele. What about the biodiversity of a region? **Are there already creeping losses that could lead to serious problems?** So far, this can be seen in only a few, well-studied groups of plants and animals such as birds or butterflies.

Contact: Prof. Dr Josef Settele

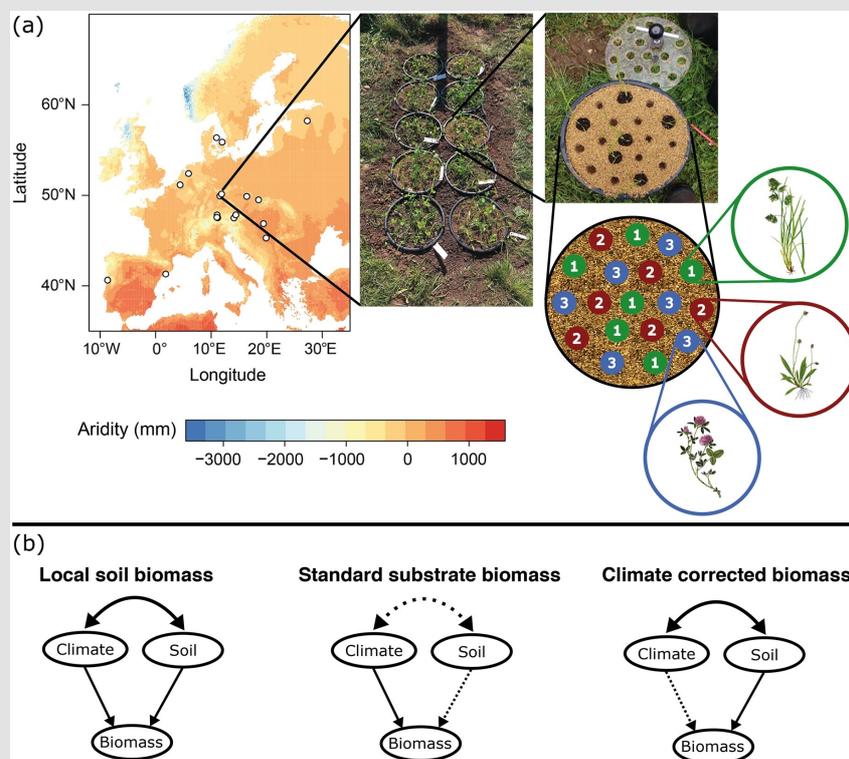
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Photo: Meyer Franklin

[Read the full story](#)

Latest Research



New publication with the participation of eLTER site Zöbelboden: Disentangling climate from soil nutrient effects on plant biomass production using a multispecies phytometer

Plant biomass production is co-dependent on climatic and edaphic factors, which in turn are under increasingly anthropogenic pressure. Disentangling effects of climate and soil on plant biomass production is challenging, especially along large climatic gradients. To address this, a **multispecies phytometer was developed** (i.e., standardized plant community in local site soils and a standardized substrate) and installed in 18 sites across a pan-European aridity gradient.

The study revealed that aridity and phosphorous availability were the strongest determinants of biomass production, with each species experiencing its own unique set of co-limitations. Moreover, **this study demonstrates that the phytometer approach has the potential for disentangling effects of climate and soil on plant biomass production** and offers a flexible protocol for investigating additional drivers such as the link between soil microorganisms and plant productivity. Distributed experiment designs are of increasing importance for unraveling the effects of multiple drivers on ecosystems in a changing world.

Authors: *Peter A. Wilfahrt, Andreas H. Schweiger, Nelson Abrantes, Mohammed A. S. Arfin-Khan, Michael Bahn, Bernd J. Berauer, Michael Bierbaumer, Ika Djukic, Marleen van Dusseldorp, Pia Eibes, Marc Estiarte, Andreas von Hessberg, Petr Holub, Johannes Ingrisch, Inger Kappel Schmidt, Lazar Kesic, Karel Klem, György Kröel-Dulay, Klaus S. Larsen, Krista Lõhmus, Pille Mänd, Ildikó Orbán, Sasa Orlovic, Josep Peñuelas, David Reinthaler, Dajana Radujković, Max Schuchardt, Julienne M.-I. Schweiger, Srdjan Stojnic, Albert Tietema, Otmar Urban, Sara Vicca, Anke Jentsch*

[Read the article](#)

Reporting Back



eLTER in EGU: GERI session

Considered as a **major milestone** in the development of the French national research infrastructure on Critical Zone "OZCAR", The first OZCAR summer school took place from 11 to 16 July, 2021. The venue was the Séolane centre, in Barcelonnette in the Southern Alps and was supported by CNRS and IRD.

The school gathered nearly **60 people, 20 speakers and 40 participants** with diversity in terms of disciplines, age, gender and provenance. An African delegation in particular participated in the summer school. Among the "teachers" were scientists in fields ranging from **fundamental physics to socio-ecology**, offering to the participant a broad overview of the disciplines needed to be interrogated to solve the wicked problems of the Anthropocene.

The main objective of this first summer school ("critical zone for dummies"!) was to present the state of art in terms of the disciplinary knowledge and essential tools (**hydrology, hydrogeology, geophysics, geochemistry, microbial ecology, reactive transport, hydro-meteorology**, geology, ecology, soil science, geomorphology, remote sensing, socio-ecology, etc.) constituting the body of critical zone science. With the active participation of members of Réseau des Zones Atelier socio-ecological infrastructure, this event has contributed to strengthening the eLTER France community, the French mirror of the European eLTER research infrastructure.

V. Entringer, J. Gaillardet & I. Braud

Contact : *Virginie Entringer, entringer@ipgp.fr*

[Read the full story](#)

Upcoming and ongoing events

First OZCAR TERENO International Conference

Date: 05-07 October 2021 | **Place:** Strasbourg, Online

The first OZCAR TERENO International Conference - Advancing Critical Zone science will take place in Strasbourg (and online) from 5 to 7 October 2021.

The event will offer keynote lectures, oral presentations and poster sessions on scientific research on the Critical Zone, which is the most superficial layer of the planet where all human activities concentrate.

The meeting will cover the cutting edge scientific progress in a variety of disciplines: hydrology, geophysics, soil sciences, geochemistry, ecology, socio-ecology and you are cordially invited to contribute to the conference and take the chance to present your research.

[Learn more](#)

ESFRI Days

Date: 06-08 December 2021
Place: Ljubljana, Slovenia

In the context of the three-day event hosted by the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the 78th ESFRI Forum Meeting, the Roadmap 2021 Launch event and the 1st ESFRI Stakeholders Forum Meeting will be held.

The ESFRI Stakeholders Forum is a newly established platform, developed by ESFRI with the ambition to instigate an open dialogue among the different European research infrastructure stakeholders, in order to reinforce the position of Research Infrastructures (RIs) as an essential pillar of the European Research Area (ERA). This concept was presented in the ESFRI White Paper adopted in 2020.

[Learn more](#)

eLTER PPP and eLTER PLUS Mars meeting

Date: 20-22 October / November 2021
Place: Online

Due to the COVID-19 situation the public days are postponed to the end of November in virtual formats, customised for different target groups.

Work Package and Theme specific sessions will take place virtually within the original Mars meeting period, 20-22 October 2021, with the opportunity for all consortia members to participate.

There will be a plenary meeting for the consortia members on 20 October in the morning in order to provide the projects' status and learn about key successes and priority matters till spring 2022.

[Learn more](#)

Microclimate Ecology & Biogeography conference

Date: 28-31 March 2022 | **Place:** Antwerp, Belgium

The event aims to be the first large international conference to put microclimate and its applications in ecology and biogeography on the center stage.

Microclimate enthusiasts with a broad variation in terms of spatiotemporal scales (from the centimeter-scale to the entire globe), ecosystems (from the Arctic to the tropics, from the desert to aquatic to marine ecosystems) and organisms (from plants, over mammals and arthropods, to microbes, and any other species) are welcomed..

[Learn more](#)

eLTER Mallorca Meeting

Date: 28 March-1 April 2022 | **Place:** Mallorca, Spain

The eLTER Mallorca Meeting will be a physical meeting, marking a change from the online format of the previous three events: Mercury, Venus and Mars.

Special attention will be paid to the participation of young scientists and strategic talents from across partnering institutions to learn about eLTER and encourage active engagements.

There will be a dedicated session about job opportunities created by RIs and specifically in the eLTER RI context in the mid term; as well as about communication and new communication platforms.

[Learn more](#)



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