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ResiRiver

Organised by: graie OHM Vallée du Rhône

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Webinar ResiRiver "Rhine-Rhône"
Video replay and summary of discussions

As part of the ResiRiver project, Graie and OHM Vallée du Rhône organized a webinar on Monday 6th October 2025, **to share questions, knowledge, and experiences regarding restoration work on two major European rivers, the Rhine and the Rhône.**

The replay of this webinar is now available in French and English on the Graie YouTube channel.

> SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

The webinar provided an opportunity to share the restoration initiatives undertaken on the Rhône and Rhine rivers through three main presentations.

A. Barillier (EDF) presented the **restoration project for the Old French Rhine in Kembs**; **Dr. R. Schielen (RWS)** detailed the **"Room for the River"** program further downstream on the Dutch Rhine; and finally, **C. Moiroud (CNR)** presented the **restoration program for the French Rhône.**

The presentations by these three experts provided an opportunity to learn about the history of the different approaches, to understand their context and the issues they address, to share engineering practices and nature-based solutions, and to discuss the monitoring and the results achieved.

In the light of these shared experiences, Prof. M. Pusch (IGB), F. Arnaud (CNRS), A.Barillier (EDF), Dr. Ralph Schielen (RWS), and Christophe Moiroud (CNR) further discussed the similarities and specificities of these various projects. Moderated by I. Costaz and B. Morandi (Graie), this panel discussion identified topics that would be of interest to develop on the Rhine and the Rhône rivers and help river managers to plan future SfN projects over a 10- to 30-year horizon.

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<u>An opportunity to delve into the comparison of the restoration efforts undertaken on the Rhine and Rhône rivers.</u>

The two rivers and their floodplains have undergone similar historical developments (e.g. embankments for flood control, channelization for navigation, hydropowerc development, etc.). R. Schielen (RWS) notes that the restoration projects on the Rhine and Rhône are the result of a shared awareness of the impacts of past management practices and a desire to change them.

Projects often have multiple objectives within a single project (e.g. flood protection, good ecological status (WFD), economic development), potentially due to the co-benefits provided by nature-based solutions (NbS), as highlighted by M. Pusch (IGB).

A. Barillier (EDF) points out, however, that the actions implemented are influenced by a different prioritization of issues depending on the national contexts. Accordingly, on the German and the Dutch Rhine, flood protection is the primary objective in the implementation of NbS, whereas projects on the French Rhine and the Rhône are primarily guided by ecological ambitions before taking this issue into account. Practices are more interventionist on the German Rhine than on the French Rhine, where restoration has been deliberately more passive (“let the river do the work”).

Discussions during the panel discussion also highlighted differences in the restoration approaches on the two rivers. Initially focused on ecological habitats for the Rhône river, it has now shifted to processes; whereas on the French side of the Rhine the restoration initially focused on processes and has gradually shifted to habitats.

<u>Strengthening the knowledge sharing and expertise between the rivers.</u>

The speakers emphasize that there have been some great successes in terms of restoration, but that they need to be more widespread and extended to a larger scale. M. Pusch (IGB) welcomes the opportunity to share experiences provided by the Interreg ResiRiver program.

F. Arnaud (CNRS) points out that **exchanges between river managers and research teams** already exist on the Rhine and the Rhône rivers and have already enabled the sharing of assessment tools, monitoring methods, management strategies, etc.

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In terms of knowledge, it would be interesting to go further and extend these exchanges to the entire Rhône and Rhine rivers systems, for example to conduct cross-analyses of geo-historical trajectories, hydro-sedimentary monitoring (sediment tracking) or sediment contamination.

On a more operational level, the speakers encourage exchanges to **improve their methods of river restoration and the implementation of NbS in rivers management strategies**. F. Arnaud recalls how the experience of the Rhine sediment management plan has nurtured the approach of the one for the Rhône river. M. Pusch (IGB) emphasized the importance of integrated thematic approaches, particularly those that break down barriers between “flooding” and “environment” in order to consider the various issues addressed by NbS.

The aim is also for further discussions to be more specific and technical, for example on **sediment injection** practices (a shared restoration method) or on **invasive species** management practices (a common issue for the two rivers). Project management and its timing are clear identified challenges.

<u>Increasing the efforts to integrate restoration initiatives into regional planning.</u>

C. Moiroud (CNR) emphasizes the need to turn restoration projects into regional projects, thereby broadening their social and spatial scope.

In this regard, the speakers highlight the role that **Humanities and Social Sciences** can play in supporting this change, particularly in understanding the **social perception** of projects that have already been completed or in assessing the **acceptability** of future projects on sensitive or even controversial topics (e.g. flooding, recreational activities, management of contaminated sediments).

The use of **ecosystemic services** is also a tool proposed for assessing the restoration and implementation of NbS in future projects. M. Pusch would find it interesting to establish a link between the ResiRiver program and the River Ecosystem Service Index (RESI) project, which is working on this assessment in Germany.

<u>Extending exchanges to other major European rivers.</u>

The speakers agree on the wealth of shared topics between the Rhine and the Rhône rivers and on the value of furthering the sharing of knowledge and experience on

restoration. M. Pusch (IGB) and A. Barillier (EDF) even proposed to extend the exchanges to other rivers such as the Danube and the Elbe.