NICHES

Nature's integration in cities' hydrologies, ecologies and societies

D5.3 NICHES Dissemination and Exploitation Strategy

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Summary

Communication, dissemination, and exploitation are key elements of NICHES to maximise the project's impact and ensure effective long-term knowledge exchange and the uptake of project results during and after the project duration. The Dissemination and Exploitation Plan (DEP) aims to maximise the use of partners' considerable outreach and influence, amplified locally via the co-design arenas to guide communication and provide baselines for evaluating and measuring outreach. The purpose of the DEP is to ensure the clear definition of objectives and interactions between target groups, messages, and means of implementation. The DEP is based on an extensive survey conducted within the NICHES consortium (results are available in Appendix 1).

With the aim of guaranteeing the sustainability of the project's outcomes, the NICHES DEP identifies exploitable results and deliverables and situates them in the relevant context of use. The DEP defines strategic objectives and target groups together with the key messages and ideas that NICHES aims to communicate as well as specific objectives and concrete implementation actions to realize these.

The NICHES DEP presents guidance on communication, dissemination, and exploitation efforts within the framework of the project and outlines how to convey clear, understandable, coordinated, and effective messages and ways for disseminating project results to all interested parties within the various stakeholder groups. This document also describes NICHES' Key exploitable results (KERs) as well as the main communication and dissemination tools for ensuring maximum engagement of key stakeholders and the larger community. These include the project website, press releases, newsletters, posters, brochures, social media, meetings and workshops, scientific publications, etc. and the link between the different tools and target groups is explained alongside suggested indicators for active monitoring of effectiveness.

This is a living document and will continue to be modified throughout the project duration and adapted to any new developments or project needs as they arise.

List of abbreviations

EU	European Union
DEP	Dissemination and Exploitation Plan
KER	Key exploitable result
NBS	Nature-based solutions
KPI	Key performance indicator
SME	Small or medium enterprise
SETS	Social-ecological-technical systems
CSO	Combined sewer overflow
ES	Ecosystem Services

1. Introduction

The Dissemination and Exploitation Plan (DEP) aims to communicate and disseminate project results, to ensure their exploitation and uptake by relevant organisations and experts. To do so, the DEP will help raise project visibility and prompt a socioeconomic transformation towards the utilisation of nature-based solutions (NBS) in urban water management. By using diverse channels, the DEP defines the main actors in the processes of communication and dissemination as well as the key messages NICHES aims to broadcast to its selected audiences.

1.1. What is 'communication'?

Communication entails informing, promoting and communicating the NICHES' activities and results. Communication efforts are targeted to reach multiple audiences and aim to raise awareness about the project's goals and mission without referring to specific project results, but rather communicate more general aspects such as the societal challenges that prompted the proposal of the project as well as the added value of the project's outcomes to the European scientific landscape. Considering the communication activities target a non-specialised audience, it is important to use a less technical language and avoid scientific jargon. Examples of communication tools include NICHES' visual identity (logo, templates, etc.), NICHES website, press releases, etc. Communication activities will take place throughout the entire project duration.

1.2. What is 'dissemination'?

Dissemination refers to the active promotion of NICHES results to the scientific community, as well as to any interested parties that can benefit from them. The target audience of dissemination activities is any potential user of the project's results, e.g. public authorities, industry, policymakers, and civil society and it aims at maximising the uptake of research outputs. This contributes to the progress of science in Europe in general. The time frame of commencement of the dissemination activities begins as soon as the project's produced actionable results.

1.3. What is 'exploitation'?

Exploitation refers to the use of NICHES results for commercial purposes or for policymaking. Apart from being directly targeted to the research community, potential exploitation of results is also aimed at the industry, including small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and other sectors of interest. Successful exploitation of results can lead to new legislation, benefits innovation efforts, the economy, and society and helps respond to an existing demand for data. Activities supporting exploitation will primarily be conducted towards the end of the NICHES project, but also throughout the project on the basis of exploitable results.

2 Who: Target groups & stakeholders

NICHES targets actors and groups involved in diverse facets of NBS, climate, water management, biodiversity research, water management infrastructure, urban planning and policy making, and in the social-ecological-technical systems (SETS) domain. The target audiences have been selected for the purposes of the NICHES project based on their work and potential interest in the project themes and the usefulness of project outcomes for them. The categories and sub-categories are not strictly limited to experts and academics, but focus also on media representatives, public administrations, and civil society.

NICHES stakeholders are based on the target groups and follow the categories and sub-categories outlined in Figure 1 below. The NICHES stakeholders and the methods of engagement with them have been detailed in D5.1 Stakeholder Engagement Strategy.

Fig.1. Target and stakeholder groups in NICHES

3 What: Main project outcomes

3.1. Project outcomes

NICHES will produce a range of outputs and deliverables within the project's life cycle that will be communicated and disseminated actively during the project duration. With the aim of boosting the impact NICHES results on society at large and particularly for its target audiences, the exploitation of results needs to be ensured after the project's completion.

The main outcomes of NICHES include the co-design of an impact assessment and ecosystem services (ES) module, creating baseline and themed NBS scenarios and site potential maps, creating illustrated frameworks for urban water value analyses, a cross-city co-design workshop and so on.

Other outcomes are the co-production of specific transition pathways with the case study cities, the creation of an impact assessment framework, recommendations to cities on NBS integration in policy, the creation of an innovative holistic conceptual framework on NBS, as well as the publication of scientific papers, policy briefs, model code, and a data repository. This is based on a questionnaire conducted among NICHES partners (see Appendix 2)

In addition, it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented dissemination measures, which will be done through regular network analyses to evaluate change in network size, complexity, and linkage strength. Monitoring of the project's public interest over time (e.g. web-page visitation) and/or in response to specific project-related events will be done to identify the impact of NICHES.

3.2. NICHES Key Exploitable Results

Results of a project support the achievement of the aforementioned project outcomes through comprehensive dissemination and exploitation measures. The most valuable results are the so-called key exploitable results (KERs). The NICHES Project Proposal defines a list of key exploitable results, which have been further enriched through the input from NICHES partners in the communication, dissemination, and exploitation survey:

Table 1. NICHES key exploitable results (KERs)

No.	KER	Tasks involved	Scope	Potential users	Added value
1.	**Co-creation of knowledge and understanding of restorative NBS to avoid storm-water run-off**	All tasks	international	decision-makers, technicians, professionals, researchers, NGOs/civil society organisations, stakeholders,	promotion of NBS in an area which are not mainstream, advanced insights.

				scientific community	
2.	**Spatially explicit modelling framework**	T2.1, T2.2, T4.1, T2.1, T2.2.	regional, local, international	decision-makers, policy makers, technicians, planners, stakeholders	show the added value of promoting NBS to deal with CSO, holistic assessment of NBS, advanced insights
3.	**NbS scenario maps and estimates of hydrological and nutrient loading impacts**	T2.3, T2.4, T2.1, T2.2	regional, local, international	decision-makers, policy makers, technicians, planners, stakeholders	show the added value of promoting NBS to deal with CSO, holistic assessment of NBS, advanced insights
4.	**NbS scenario maps and estimates of hydrological and nutrient loading impacts**	T2.3, T2.4, T2.1, T2.2	city, regional, international	water quality managers, decision-makers, policy makers, technicians, planners, scientific community	Provides planning scenarios for agencies to understand efficacy and ideal placement of NBS, show the added value of promoting NBS to deal with CSO, help decision-making processes dealing with CSO and water management, advanced insights.
5.	**Scientific publications on hydrological and ecological impacts of restorative NbS**	T2.1, T2.2, T2.3, T2.4	international	researchers, practitioners, scientific community	contribute to highlight the benefits of restorative NBS to mitigate the hydrological and ecological impacts of CSO, advanced insights
6.	**Scientific publications on social and economic impacts of restorative NbS.**	T3.2	international	researchers, practitioners, scientific community	contribute to highlight the social and economic value of enhanced ecosystem services due to restorative NBS, advanced insights
7.	**Integrated water assessment framework for urban restorative NbS.**	T4.1	international, regional, local	decision makers, policy makers, technicians, NGOs, researchers, planners, stakeholders, scientific community	develop an integrated perspective for urban restorative NBS to deal with CSO, holistic assessment of NBS, advanced insights

8.	**Policy gaps and opportunities for the management of urban water SETS.**	T4.2	regional, local, international	decision makers, policy makers, technicians, researchers, stakeholders, scientific community, local policy makers	mainstreaming restorative NBS in policy making for mitigating CSO, advanced insights
9.	**Transition pathways toward Nature's Integration in Cities' Hydrologies, Ecologies and Societies**	T4.3	international, regional, local	policymakers, policy makers, technicians, NGOs, researchers, planners, practitioners, stakeholders, scientific community	mainstreaming restorative NBS for mitigating CSO, breaking the silos of sectoral planning of hydrological issues, advanced insights
10.	**International final conference**	T5.1	international	scientific community, policy makers	mainstreaming restorative NBS for mitigating CSO, advanced insights

4 How: Tools and channels

Informing and engaging with the NICHES audience beyond the scope of the project is of vital importance for NICHES. The communication of results in an engaging manner for the community is a high priority for NICHES as it allows for fruitful discussions to take place as well as facilitate the efficiency of the NICHES co-design arenas. This Plan is focusing exclusively on external communication and its tools and methods. **Whether a tool helps in the communication, dissemination, or exploitation of NICHES results is indicated within each section.**

4.1. NICHES website

The NICHES website is the main entry-point to the project and is a repository for all useful materials and information about the project's aims, work plan, news, outcomes, project partners, as well as the NICHES case-study cities - Berlin, Rotterdam, Sheffield, Barcelona, and Boston. Moreover, all visual elements as well as promotional materials can be easily accessed and downloaded through the website. The website is thus a tool for **communication, dissemination and exploitation**.

The website has been designed and developed by project partner Pensoft Publishers and adheres to all elements and visual guidelines outlined in D5.2 Visual identity and branding. The website has been designed to match the NICHES logo, which renders the overall visual identity streamlined and recognisable from external audiences.

The importance of the website as a communication tool lies in that it presents NICHES to a wide audience using non-technical language to communicate the main ideas and guiding principles behind the project. In other words, it is NICHES' "business card", which can be shared with new and potential stakeholder groups and other interested parties.

4.2. Social media

4.2.1. Why social media

Social media is a valuable **communication** tool as it presents the opportunity to users to share content with ease, open discussions, and raise awareness about niche topics in scientific research. Thanks to the large variety of platforms, a wide range of interested audiences can be reached and engaged with NICHES in particular and its results.

Using social media for science communication creates trust among NICHES audiences and enhances the overall transparency of the project. Furthermore, communicating the project's ideas and results increases its impact by leveraging an easily accessible and widely used tool such as social media. In the words of Shahbaznezhad et al., "The emergence of social media platforms has dramatically altered the role of customers from passive observers of content to active participants, who are now the co-producers and co-creators of content through their online interactions and behaviours" (2021). Indeed, the recipients of NICHES results also become producers of knowledge through the medium of social media by sharing, discussing, and engaging with NICHES content.

4.2.2. Measuring social media impact

Table 2 presents the benefits and drawbacks of the social media platforms that are of interest to the project.

Table 2. Comparison of the benefits and drawbacks of NICHES social media and the impact within the project.

Social media	Specification	Impact within NICHES
Twitter	**Benefits:** Good for engagement with media outlets, policy makers, professionals and public interest groups. Has a large number of users. Users can be tagged in tweets to encourage dialogue and expand networks. Hashtags can be used to follow specific campaigns. **Drawbacks:** Has limited character space. Uncertainty about Twitter's future as a platform and possible shift to Mastodon.	● Generate interest and share ongoing news and activities through posts/tweets ● Twitter lists: build a community around the project and get relevant news ● Personal messages ● Twitter Analytics
Facebook	**Benefits:** Has a diverse audience and various age groups. No post character limits. Good for sharing images, videos, papers and other results. Good for engaging the target groups in conversations and can draw attention to events by sharing invitations. **Drawbacks:** Less professional and used mostly for personal purposes.	● Generate interest and share ongoing news and activities ● Share media in posts or in separate albums ● Personal messages ● A large number of users ● Event creation of promotion ● Facebook Insights

It is important to note that only Pensoft Publishers manages the NICHES social media accounts and has posting rights so as to ensure a streamlined communication style. NICHES partners can share and retweet NICHES posts through their personal or institutional accounts and additionally can email the Pensoft team with updates, which the latter will publish in due time.

4.3. Promotional materials

NICHES promotional materials refer to all digital and printed materials that serve to promote increased visibility, understanding, and consequent engagement with the project. In the scope of NICHES, in the project proposal the following initial set of promotional materials has been defined:
● Project brochure
● Roll-up banner
● Stickers

During the NICHES kick-off meeting in April 2022, the following additional materials were specified (See Appendix 2 for the survey results):

- Infographic
- Factsheet
- Poster
- Practice abstracts

These materials will be available in digital form as well as in print format suitable for distribution at face-to-face meetings or conferences and will serve as tools for **communication and dissemination**.

The aforementioned promotional materials will be developed and/or printed depending on available resources and the preferences and needs of the NICHES consortium.

4.4. NICHES Newsletter

The NICHES newsletter is a bi-annual news bulletin sent out in the form of an email to a list of subscribers who have agreed to receive it. It is GDPR compliant and is created in SendInBlue software by the NICHES communication team - Pensoft Publishers. All project related news for the last four months will be summarised together with information about project progress, key events and activities, project outcomes. The newsletter will feature a mix of images from project related events, links to news items or relevant initiatives as well as a section announcing future planned events relevant to the project.

The subscription for the newsletter is available on the website and is also periodically announced on social media with the aim of attracting the largest possible number of interested audiences. Past newsletters will be uploaded to the NICHES website in .pdf format and available via the project website. The newsletter serves as both a **communication and dissemination** tool.

4.5. Press releases

Press releases are official statements directed at members of the news media and serve as a **communication** tool. They aim at providing the press with information or announcing a specific event or matter that may be of interest to their readers. Press releases are a proven way of reaching out to the journalism sector, which enhances the visibility of NICHES as a project.

NICHES, at the time of writing this DEP, has one successfully published press release focusing on introducing the project and detailing its kick-off meeting held in Berlin, Germany in April 2022. During the project's duration, press releases will be published for any NICHES event of significance such as the last international conference held in month 35 (February 2025).

All NICHES press releases will be uploaded to the 'News' section on the project website. NICHES partners have defined possible interested recipients of the NICHES newsletter, who will be added to the newsletter subscribers list in a GDPR-compliant manner.

4.6. Local engagement

Local media is a powerful **communication and dissemination** tool for increasing awareness about NICHES on the ground. The project partners have identified local news channels, which may be interested in the project and its results. The partners themselves are responsible for conducting the engagement with local news media platforms outlined in Table 3:

Table 3. List of local media channels with potential interest in NICHES.

City	Media name	Media type
Boston	WBUR Boston	Radio station
Sheffield	Guardian	Newspaper
	Observer	Newspaper
	ENDS Report	Magazine
	Environment journal of CIWEM	Journal
Barcelona	El País	Newspaper
	La Vanguardia	Newspaper
	Betevé	TV channel
Rotterdam	Volkskrant	Newspaper
	Parool	Newspaper
	NRC	Newspaper
	Binnenstebuiten	News programme on NPO
Berlin	Berliner Zeitung	Newspaper
	Berliner Morgenpost	Newspaper
	rbb24	TV channel

4.7. Policy briefs

Policymakers need clear and evidence-based recommendations in order to make adequate changes to legislation, taking into account the science and foundational data. In this way, by

relying on comprehensive research findings, policymakers can make informed decisions for the betterment of society. Policy briefs are thus an effective **dissemination and exploitation** tool to inform this target group. In the context of NICHES, the following possible policy brief topics have been defined and further enriched through the communication, dissemination, and exploitation survey:

Table 4. List of expected topics, scale, target groups, and timeline of NICHES policy briefs

No.	Policy brief topic	Scale	Target groups	Approximate timeline
1.	**Intersectoral cooperation on NBS**	city	n/a	n/a
2.	**Financing NBS**	international	n/a	n/a
3.	**Social and economic values of enhanced ecosystem services through NBS to mitigate CSO**	international - comparison between cities	policy makers, technicians, professionals, general public, civil society organisations	M34-M36
4.	**Transition pathways to mainstream NBS to mitigate CSO**	regional, national - comparison between cities	decision-makers, technicians, financial sector, civil society organisations	M34-M36
5.	**Co-defining transition pathways**	EU, international	local policy makers	M30-36
6.	**Integrated assessment framework**	EU, international	local policy makers	M24-30
7.	**Community vulnerability assessment**	EU, international	local policy makers	M18-24
8.	**Multifunctional use of urban blue spaces**	EU	policy makers	M34-M36
9.	**Transition pathways towards improved NBS policy, governance, design and implementation in cities**	local	city government representatives	M34-M36

4.8. Factsheets

A factsheet is a one-page document detailing a specific idea or a finding in an easily digestible way for **dissemination and exploitation** purposes. Factsheets often place a heavy reliance on visual elements such as graphs, tables, or images which contribute to the overall understanding of the topic in a more user-friendly way. NICHES plans to produce several factsheets on the following topics:

Table 5. List of expected topics, scale, target groups, and timeline of NICHES factsheets

No.	Factsheet topic	Scale	Target groups	Approximate timeline
1.	**Social and economic values of enhanced ES of NBS to mitigate CSO**	city, regional	general public	M34-M36
2.	**Integrated assessment framework to promote NBS to mitigate CSO**	international	decision-makers, technicians	M34-M36
3.	**Climate robust urban waterscapes**	EU	water management authorities	M34-M36
4.	**Good practices for urban water quality management**	EU	water management authorities	M34-M36

4.9. Scientific publications

Scientific publications are an important output for **dissemination** in research projects. In NICHES, the publications will focus on themes such as the hydrological and ecological impacts of restorative NBS, which will assess their deployment for combined sewer overflow management, more specifically. Such scientific publications are targeted to the academic community and contribute to knowledge exchange and potential contribution.

According to a questionnaire filled by the partners (Appendix 2), the journals within which NICHES partners plan to publish their research include:
- The ESP Journal
- ASLO Publications
- Inland Waters - SIL-International Society of Limnology
- IALE Journal "Landscape Ecology"
- The Global Lake Ecological Observatory Network (GLEON)
- JASM Journal
- Science of The Total Environment Journal (STOTEN)

4.10. Exchange and coordination with relevant initiatives and projects

Input in NICHES does not solely stem from partners' direct involvement in diverse research projects or their own research, but also from extensive practical experience in implementation, governance, and transdisciplinary engagement. One type of input is the engagement with different relevant projects and initiatives, which ensures direct access to outcomes. In this way, NICHES enhances its **communication, dissemination and exploitation** impact by identifying opportunities for joint utilisation of outcomes and/or lessons learned in the process of collaborating on novel products.

Relevant projects are listed in Table 6, which consists of ongoing and already concluded initiatives. Communication with the former will help NICHES exchange ideas and potentially collaborate on current tasks, while interactions with the latter will contribute to NICHES' work with lessons learnt from the concluded projects.

Furthermore, NICHES will track the progress of new projects such as the 36 funded projects under Biodiversa+'s BiodivProtect call on "Supporting the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems across land and sea". A full list of the 36 projects can be found here.

Table 6. Relevant projects for NICHES

Name of project	Description/area of interest	Account (social media)
INTERLACE	The INTERLACE project supports actions to restore, rehabilitate and (re)connect ecosystems. It aims to empower and equip European and CELAC cities to effectively restore and rehabilitate (peri)urban ecosystems towards more liveable, resilient and inclusive cities.	@INTERLACE_NBS
CONEXUS	The Conexus project is bringing together Latin American and European partners to strengthen international cooperation on nature-based solutions and ecosystem restoration.	@ConexusNBS
CLEVER Cities	Through exchange between cities, inclusive collaboration and multi-disciplinary learning, the CLEVER Cities project aims to drive a new kind of nature-based urban transformation for sustainable and socially inclusive cities across Europe, Latin America and China.	@CLEVER_Cities
NATURVATION	NATURVATION seeks to develop our understanding of what nature-based solutions can achieve in cities, examine how innovation can be fostered in this domain, and contribute to realising the	@naturvation

	potential of nature-based solutions for responding to urban sustainability challenges by working with communities and stakeholders.	
Re-Nature	ReNature aims to establish and implement a nature-based solutions research strategy for Malta with a vision to promote research and innovation and develop solutions in a pursuit of economic growth, whilst at the same time improving human well-being and tackling environmental challenges.	@ReNature_H2020
MANTEL	MANTEL (Management of Climatic Extreme Events in Lakes & Reservoirs for the Protection of Ecosystem Services, 2017-2021) trained a cohort of Early Stage Researchers to investigate the effects on water quality of the most extreme events, and of more subtle events of lower magnitude, while at the same time providing training in state-of-the art technology, data analysis and modelling, and linking to the water management sector.	@MANTEL_ITN
Inventwater	Inventive forecasting tools for adapting water quality management to a new climate.	@invent_water
NetworkNature	NetworkNature is a resource for the nature-based solutions community, creating opportunities for local, regional and international cooperation to maximise the impact and spread of nature-based solutions.	@NetworkNatureEU
UPSURGE	UPSURGE bridges the gap between the existing knowledge base on Nature Based Solutions and their step-by-step practical implementation for regenerative development of cities focusing on air pollution alleviation and climate neutrality.	@UPSURGE_H2020
REGREEN	Regreen promotes urban liveability, through fostering nature-based solutions in Europe and China using evidence-based tools and improved urban governance accelerating the transition towards equitable, green and healthy cities.	@REGREEN_nbs
OPERANDUM project	Open-air laboratories for nature-based solutions to manage hydro-meteo risks.	@OPERANDUM_EU

BiNatUr	BiNatUr will quantify the role of biodiversity and its linkages with ecosystem services in urban aquaNBS, with an overall aim of improve the planning, building, restoration, and management of aquaNBS.	n/a

Engagement with the aforementioned projects and initiatives will be done through social media, meetings, workshops, forming clusters, etc. This ensures fruitful knowledge exchange and potential exploitation of NICHES results as well as an increase in the visibility of the project. For a more detailed guide on how to conduct engagement, consult D5.1 Stakeholder Engagement Strategy.

When promoting NICHES on social media, the following hashtags are to be used by the communication team and project partners: #NBS; #naturebasedsolutions, #NICHESproject, #NICHEScities, #SUDS, #combinedseweroverflow, #CSO.

4.11. Events

4.11.1. Workshops

NICHES plans to organise a series of workshops in order to facilitate co-design activities on a city level. The focus and frequency of these events will be decided by each partner on behalf of their case study city, catering to the needs of the respective NICHES tasks they are involved in. These workshops foster bidirectional learning, collecting valuable insights for the NICHES project and aims – but also providing new insights, supporting networking and building capacities of the local stakeholders who attend. Workshops are thus a valuable **dissemination and exploitation** tool.

4.11.2. Final virtual conference (M35)

NICHES will organise a final virtual conference, which presents an interactive setting for dialogue and learning, leading to knowledge transfer and reduction of silos in water management. It is targeted to policy & decision-makers, practitioners, urban planners, research community, civil society, and private and public sectors. The final virtual conference is planned to be held at the end of the project and will both present the results of the project and key outcomes, but also provide a platform for learning, exchange and interaction amongst participants.

4.11.3. Relevant international events

International events can serve as a useful **communication** tool for NICHES. Relevant events are outlined in Table 7 and will be added to throughout the course of the project.

Table 7. Relevant recurrent days for NICHES

Date	Event
11 February	International Day of Women and Girls in Science

22 March	World Water Day
3 April	World Aquatic Animal Day
7 April	World Health Day
22 April	Earth Day
9 May	Europe Day
22 May	International Day for Biological Diversity
24 May	European Day of Parks - Europarc Federation
5 June	World Environment Day
8 July	World Ocean Day
11 July	World Population Day
7 September	International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies
13 October	International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction

5 When: Timing of implementation

This document presents a plan for communication, dissemination, and exploitation action for the duration of the project (M1-M36). During the initial part of the project, all dissemination and exploitation activities are being developed with the purpose of raising awareness about the project's objectives and to build an organic network for the project. Target groups and stakeholders will be approached with the goal of setting the stage for further collaboration and exchange of knowledge and results.

All communication, dissemination, and exploitation activities of the project are divided in three stages:

Establishment	Consolidation	Application
M0 -M18	M19 -M30	M31 -M36
• raising awareness • building a network • engaging with target groups	• communication and dissemination of specific results • impact evaluation • network feedback and analysis	• exploitation of results • workshops and co-design events • international conference • impact evaluation of results
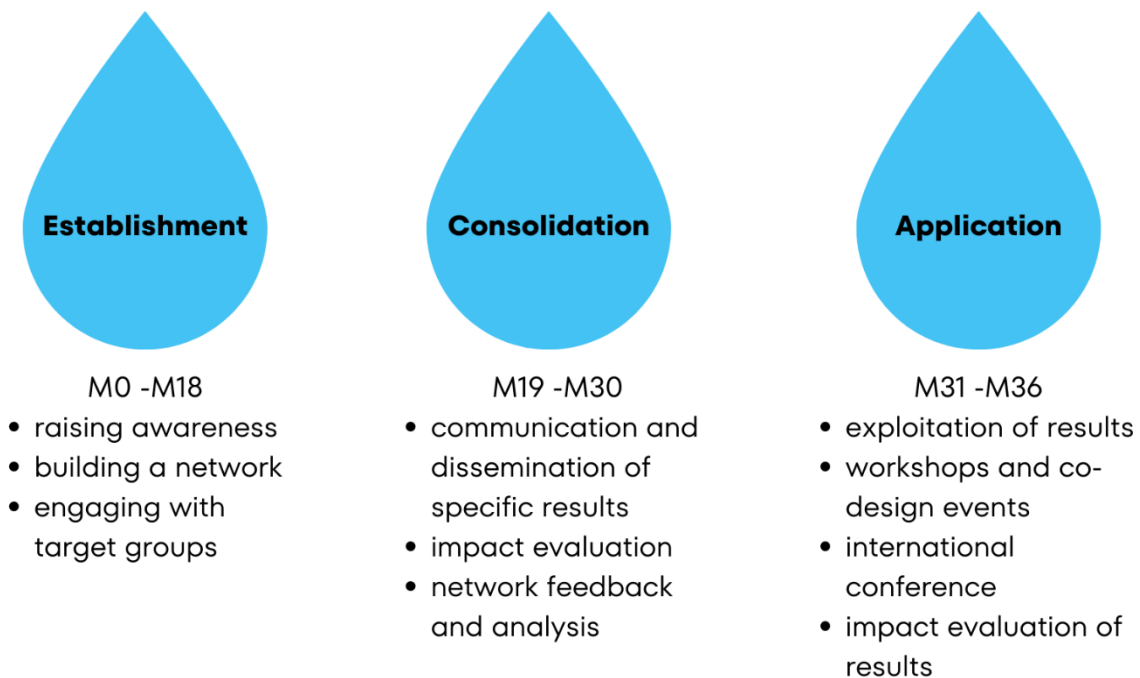
Figure 2. Stages of communication, dissemination, and exploitation activities

- **Stage 1 - Establishment:** During this phase, NICHES focuses on activities aimed at raising awareness about CSO events and urban water management and the project's goals in contributing to a nature-based solution framework. During this phase the target groups and stakeholders of the project will be reached out to in order to construct an organic network and initiate user engagement.
- **Stage 2 - Consolidation:** During this phase the focus will be on communicating and disseminating specific project results. This period will allow for target group-specific dissemination of project results as soon as results are available in March 2023. Furthermore, NICHES will be able to evaluate the project's activities and impact learning from user feedback and responsiveness to project organised events.
- **State 3 - Application:** From month 31 (September 2024) until the end of the project in month 36 (March 2025) the focus will be on active and targeted exploitation of results by organising various capacity-building workshops that can facilitate the co-design process and sharing of results.

Table 8. Key performance indicators of NICHES communication, dissemination, and exploitation tools

Type	Tool	Target	Contribution to impact	Key performance indicator for the duration of the project
C, D, E	**Project website**	All	Inform and engage interested parties through provision of general information about the project and its main outcomes; provide easy access to key results and project publications.	- News items - 50 - Users > 20 000 - Geographical representation > 20 countries - Average session duration >120 sec.
C	**NICHES social media** ● Twitter ● Facebook	All	Introduction of the consortium to the NICHES community, ongoing announcements of project results, insights into the project work.	Twitter: ● 300 posts in total (incl. retweets) ● 350 followers ● Average like/retweet count per post - 4 Facebook: ● 70 posts in total ● 50 followers
C, D	**Promotional materials**	All	Written in popular language, various promotional materials (brochures, stickers, factsheets) will increase awareness about the existence of the project and the topics NICHES focuses on.	Downloads per item: ● Project brochure - 100 ● Factsheet - 150 Printing depends on demand: ● Stickers - 300
C, D	**NICHES E-Newsletter**	All	Provision of information about project progress, key events and activities, project outcomes.	Total amount of newsletters - 6 Subscribers>100
D, E	**Scientific publications**	Academia	Presentation of research findings in high impact journals.	Total amount of publications by all project partners - 3
C	**Press releases**	All	Announcement of significant project results.	Total amount of press releases > 4 Number of views >1500/press release
C, D	**Local engagement**	Government, sectoral professionals, businesses, media & general	Engagement with local relevant initiatives for increased visibility of the project.	Local initiatives to have established contact with (per city)>5

		public, civil society		
D, E	**Policy briefs**	Government, academia, businesses	Knowledge transfer from the project to policy makers for key issues; engagement of scientists in the policymaking process.	Total amount - 3 Number of distributed copies > 150/item
D, E	**Factsheets**	Academia, government, businesses	Transfer guidelines based on findings and developed knowledge on best NBS practices and recommendations.	Total amount - 3 Number of distributed copies > 150/item
E	**Events**	Government, sectoral professionals, businesses	Events organised within the scope of NICHES with the aim of increasing the exploitation potential of results.	Workshops - 3 Participants > 5 Final international conference - 1 Attendees >50

6 Good practices

The NICHES communication team building on years of experience has identified a set of good practices to follow in order to conduct fruitful communication and dissemination activities and ensure effective exploitation. The following good practices are advised to be followed by all project partners:

Table 9. Good practices and measures to achieve them.

Good practices	How to achieve it?
Plan communication efforts beforehand	Make sure to consult the NICHES DEP before conducting communication or dissemination activities and begin planning ahead of time.
Ensure consistency in language	Adhere to a specific writing style and do not use slang. Avoid using jargon-intensive language unless you are certain your audience is familiar with the terms.
Include metrics or data when possible to add credibility to statements	For example, if you're conducting a workshop make sure to document the number of participants as well as rate their interest and contribution to the topics discussed on a scale from 1-5. You can consider asking the participants for immediate feedback based on the size of the event/activity.
Maintain transparency	Be open and communicative about project progress and challenges encountered throughout its duration. Consider sharing details about your own work regarding the project.
Avoid communication overload	For example, ensure only one project partner is responsible for all NICHES social media communication as well as website content creation to ensure the information communicated is done gradually and double reporting does not occur.
Retain a focus only on project related themes	Clearly define topics of interest for NICHES. Make sure to communicate and share only news/events/activities on those themes relevant for NICHES. If you would like to communicate something on a different topic than that of NICHES, make sure to draw clear lines on what is the connection to NICHES.

7 Coordination

This chapter refers to what the role of NICHES partners is in the organisation and implementation of the DEP. Communication is at the heart of NICHES and its success is dependent on numerous cross-cutting activities that run throughout the project's Work Packages, drawing on the combined strengths of the partnership. Each partner is responsible for leading on communication of their own specific tasks and topics to the project's audiences, capitalising on partners' own expertise and spheres of influence. Pensoft and Ecologic are available to assist partners' communications by:

- Providing high quality, branded communication materials on demand (e.g. promotional literature, display materials, videos, social media and web content);
- Scaling up and "amplifying" partners' communications through the project's and Biodiversa+'s channels; and
- Offering expert advice on communications messaging, audience development and stakeholder engagement.

8 Conclusion

Communication dissemination, and exploitation activities are at the core of NICHES, aiming to increase awareness, improve knowledge, and ensure the uptake of NICHES results. By doing so, the project contributes to the exchange of ideas that can positively impact the rate of implementation of nature-based solutions in an urban context and avoid the negative impact combined sewer overflow events have on aquatic life. D5.3 Dissemination and Exploitation Plan serves to guide the timely and effective execution of best practices on how to amplify NICHES' voice among key stakeholders.

References

Shahbaznezhad, H., Dolan, R., & Rashidirad, M. (2021). The Role of Social Media Content Format and Platform in Users' Engagement Behavior. Journal of Interactive Marketing, 53(1), 47–65. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2020.05.001

http://niches-project.eu/

Project partners

NICHES is made possible with the support of:

Appendix 1

NICHES Communication, Dissemination & Exploitation Strategy Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information about the dissemination of project outputs and about key exploitable results (KER) produced during the duration of NICHES. Based on your responses, the Communication and Dissemination Strategy will be produced to best match the needs of the project and the tasks therein. Considering the complexity of the project and the various results that will be generated from the NICHES team members, it is important that each partner provides as detailed a response to the questionnaire as possible. When filling out the questionnaire please don't forget to consider the strategic impact and upscaling beyond the NICHES co-creation activities.

There are 13 questions in this survey.

Your information

Please fill in your information. *

Questions regarding dissemination and communication

1. The following are the **target groups** defined so far. Please use the blank space on the right to comment if you think something is missing or should be omitted, or if you can think of more for each category.

Questions regarding dissemination and communication

2. NICHES will organise a number of **events** throughout the duration of the project. Please suggest examples of events.

	Type *(e.g. policy workshop, webinar, capacity building events, development of models, validation exercise, exchange event, ...)*	Topic *(What is the theme of the event?)*	Target group *(Who is the target audience of this event?)*	Timeline *(Propose an approximate time of when the event should be held.)*
Event suggestion				
Event suggestion				
Event suggestion				
Event suggestion				
Event suggestion				

Questions regarding dissemination and communication

3. What is the estimated number of **publications** you expect to lead on?

❶ Only numbers may be entered in this field.

Please write your answer here:

4. Please suggest **preliminary topics** of the publications. This is non-binding - topics could change at a later stage.

	Name
Publication	
Publication	
Publication	
Publication	
Publication	

Questions regarding dissemination and communication

5. Please define possible topics for **policy briefs** that can come out of your tasks, or be cross-cutting for NICHES as a whole. List the potential target group(s) and scale(s) (city, regional, national, EU, international) for each. Please indicate if you already have an idea of potential timing.

	Topic *(What is the theme of the policy brief?)*	Scale *(city/regional/national/EU/international)*	Target group *(Who is the target audience of this policy brief?)*	Timeline *(Propose an approximate time of when this policy brief should be due.)*
Policy brief suggestion				
Policy brief suggestion				
Policy brief suggestion				
Policy brief suggestion				
Policy brief suggestion				

Questions regarding dissemination and communication

6. Please define possible topics for **factsheets** that can come out of your tasks, or be cross-cutting for NICHES as a whole. List the potential target group(s) and scale(s) (local, regional, national, EU, international) for each. Please indicate if you already have an idea of potential timing.

	Topic *(What is the theme of the factsheet?)*	Scale *(city/regional/national EU/international)*	Target group *(Who is the target audience of this factsheet?)*	Timeline *(Propose an approximate time of when the factsheet should be due.)*
Factsheet suggestion				
Factsheet suggestion				
Factsheet suggestion				
Factsheet suggestion				
Factsheet suggestion				

Questions regarding dissemination and communication

7. Please list a few relevant **social media** accounts that the NICHES project can actively engage with.

This could be other Biodiversa+, EU-funded, or local projects (e.g. in the case study cities), or from your respective city-specific stakeholders, or accounts from the media or general public that deal with related content.

Use the button 'Add line' to list subsequent suggestions.

Questions regarding dissemination and communication

8. Please list any **conferences** you plan to attend or would suggest NICHES to be represented at in 2022 and 2023?

Please specify in brackets whether you are interested to attend or if this event is relevant for NICHES in general?

Use the button 'Add line' to list subsequent suggestions.

Questions regarding dissemination and communication

9. Please suggest **relevant contacts** that might be interested in receiving the NICHES newsletter.

	Name	Email
Relevant contact suggestion		
Relevant contact suggestion		
Relevant contact suggestion		
Relevant contact suggestion		
Relevant contact suggestion		

These could be researchers or stakeholders interested in NICHES topics and results and/or in other engagement materials or activities. They could be beyond the case study cities as well.

Questions regarding dissemination and communication

10. Please list **local media channels** from your country and particularly from the case study cities which might be interested in NICHES results.

These could be newspapers, radio stations, TV broadcasts, online media, podcasts, etc.

Use the button 'Add line' to list subsequent suggestions.

Questions regarding exploitation of results

11. Take a look at the defined **KERs** so far. Please fill in the following details about each.

	What is the scope of this KER? *(city/regional/ national/EU/ international)*	Who are the potential users of this KER? *(List target groups, which you aim to reach with this KER)*	Describe the added value of this KER? *(e.g. How will this KER impact a particular target group? What is the innovation of this KER?)*	Which project task does this KER correspond to? *(List tasks from the relevant WP)*	Additional notes *(Please use this space to edit the already established KER)*
Co-creation of knowledge and understanding of restorative NbS to avoid storm-water run-off					
Spatially explicit modelling framework					
NbS scenario maps and estimates of hydrological and nutrient loading impacts					
Scientific publications on hydrological and ecological impacts of restorative NbS					
Scientific publications on social and economic impacts of restorative NbS					
Integrated water assessment framework for urban restorative NbS					
Policy gaps and opportunities for the management of urban water SETS					
Transition pathways toward Nature's Integration in Cities' Hydrologies, Ecologies and Societies					
International final conference					

Definition of KER: According to the European Commission's definition, a key exploitable result (KER) is an output that has been selected and prioritised due to its high level of importance to the project's objectives. Results that are considered to make use and drive benefits, downstream the value chain of a product, process, or solution, or act as an important input to policy, further research, or education are considered to be KER.

12. If you think there are more KERs to add to this list, please fill them in the blank spaces below.

	What is the scope of this KER? *(city/regional/national EU/international)*	Who are the potential users of this KER? *(List target groups, which you aim to reach with this KER)*	Describe the added value of this KER. *(How will this KER impact a particular target group? What is the innovation of this KER?)*	Which project task does this KER correspond to? *(List tasks from the relevant WP)*
Key Exploitable Result suggestion				
Key Exploitable Result suggestion				
Key Exploitable Result suggestion				
Key Exploitable Result suggestion				
Key Exploitable Result suggestion				

Submit your survey.

Thank you for completing this survey.

Appendix 2

Kick-Off Meeting Questionnaire

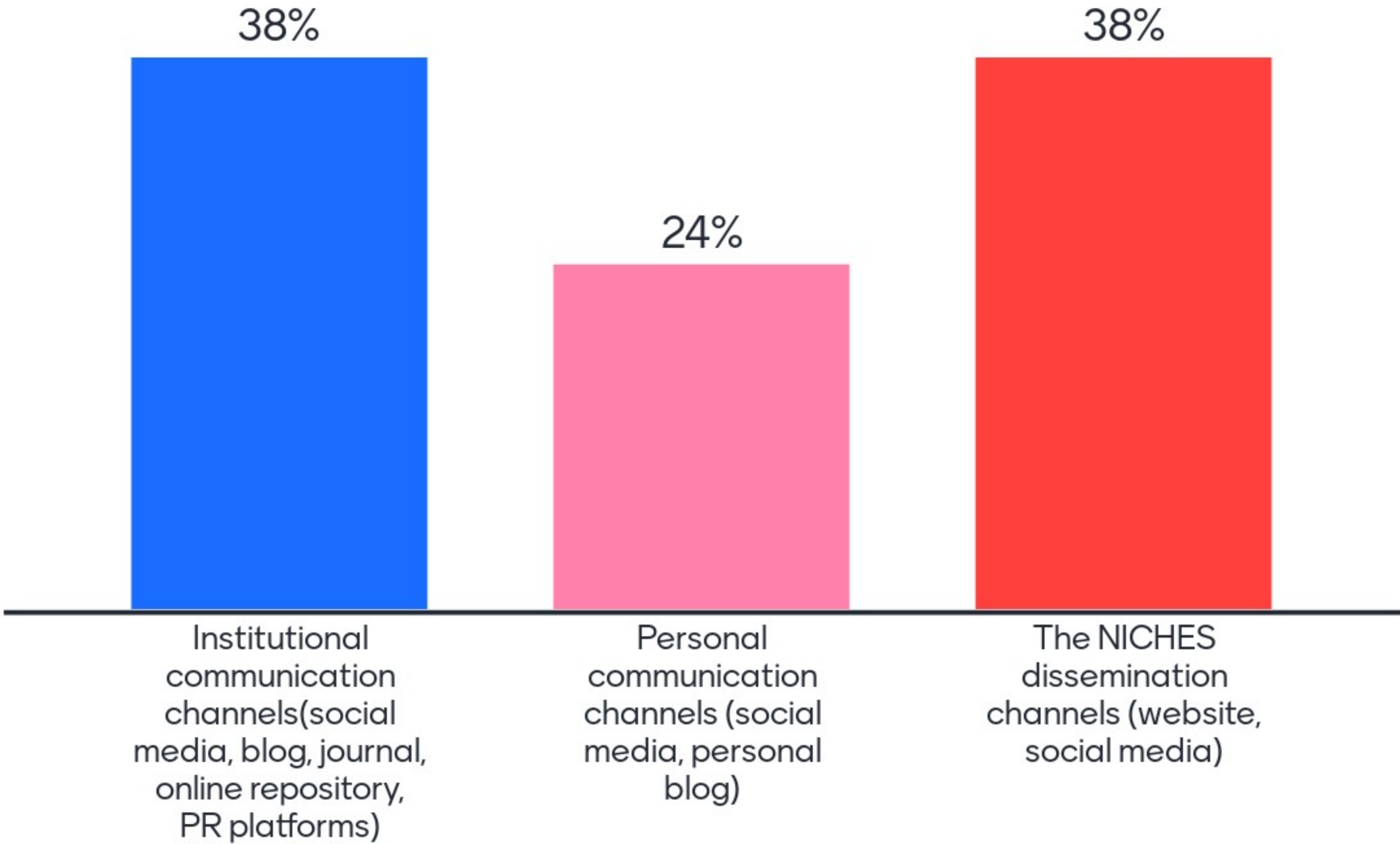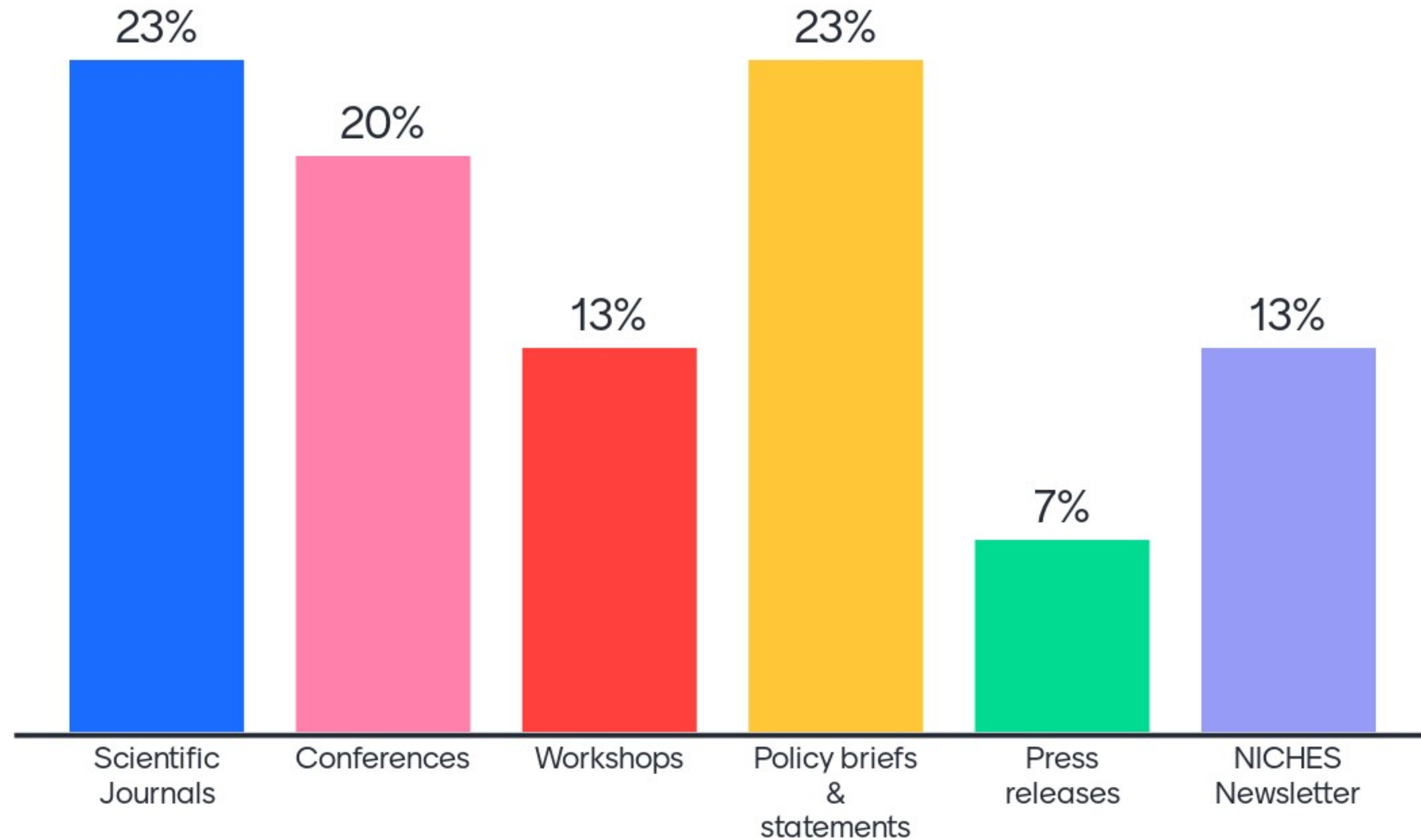Preliminary questions for Dissemination and Exploitation Strategy

Q0. What are the keywords that you associate with NICHES?

Q2. What channel(s) do you think are the most suitable for dissemination?

Scientific Journals	Conferences	Workshops	Policy briefs & statements	Press releases	NICHES Newsletter
23%	20%	13%	23%	7%	13%

Q3. Which journals do you plan to publish NICHES results in?

Nature-based Solutions

UFUG

Landscape and urban planning

Water Research, Environmental Research Letters

Sustainability Science

Ecosystem Services

EST

STOTEN

Nature urban sustainability

Q3. Which journals do you plan to publish NICHES results in?

STOTEN

10

Q4. Do you plan to attend any conferences throughout the project duration? Which ones?
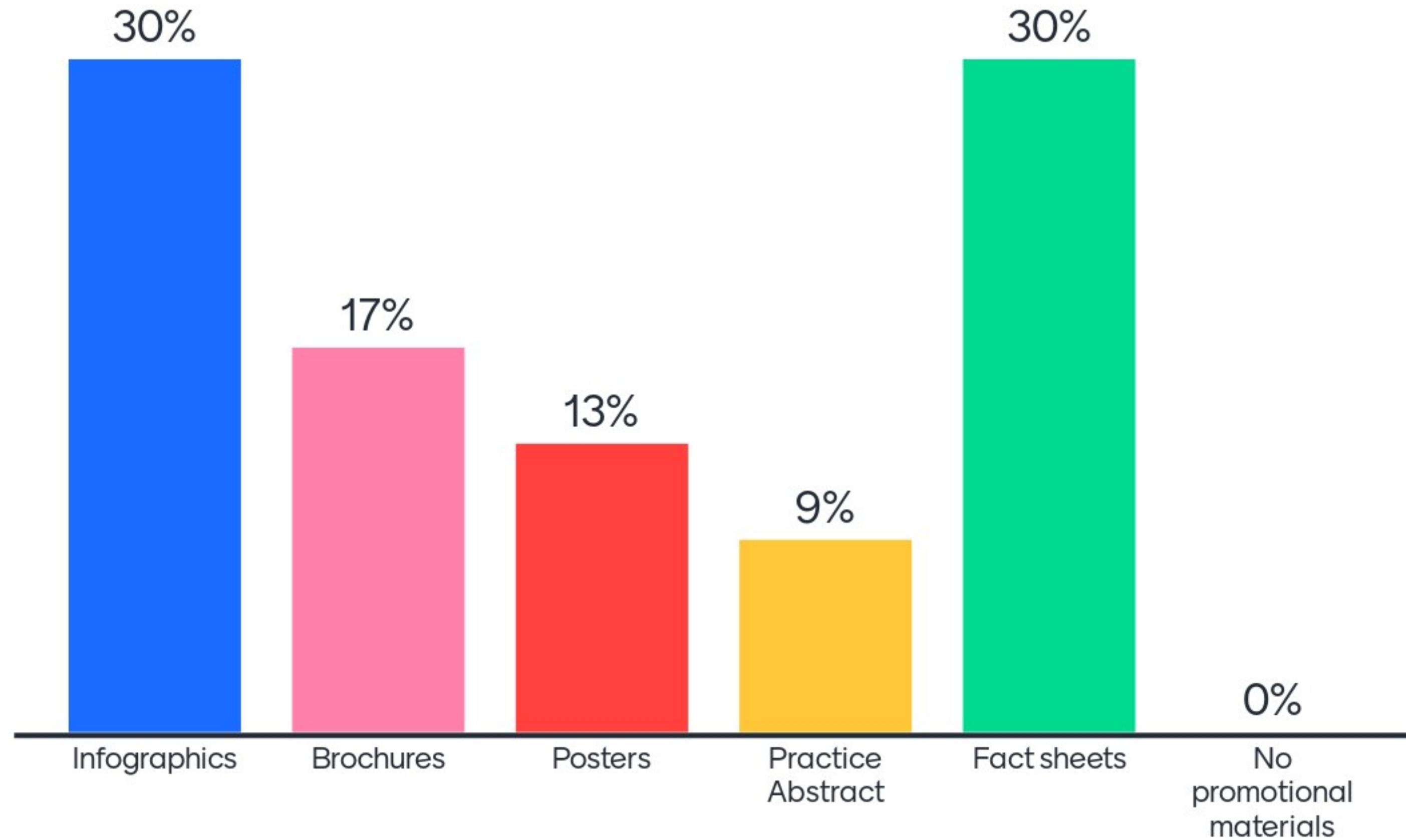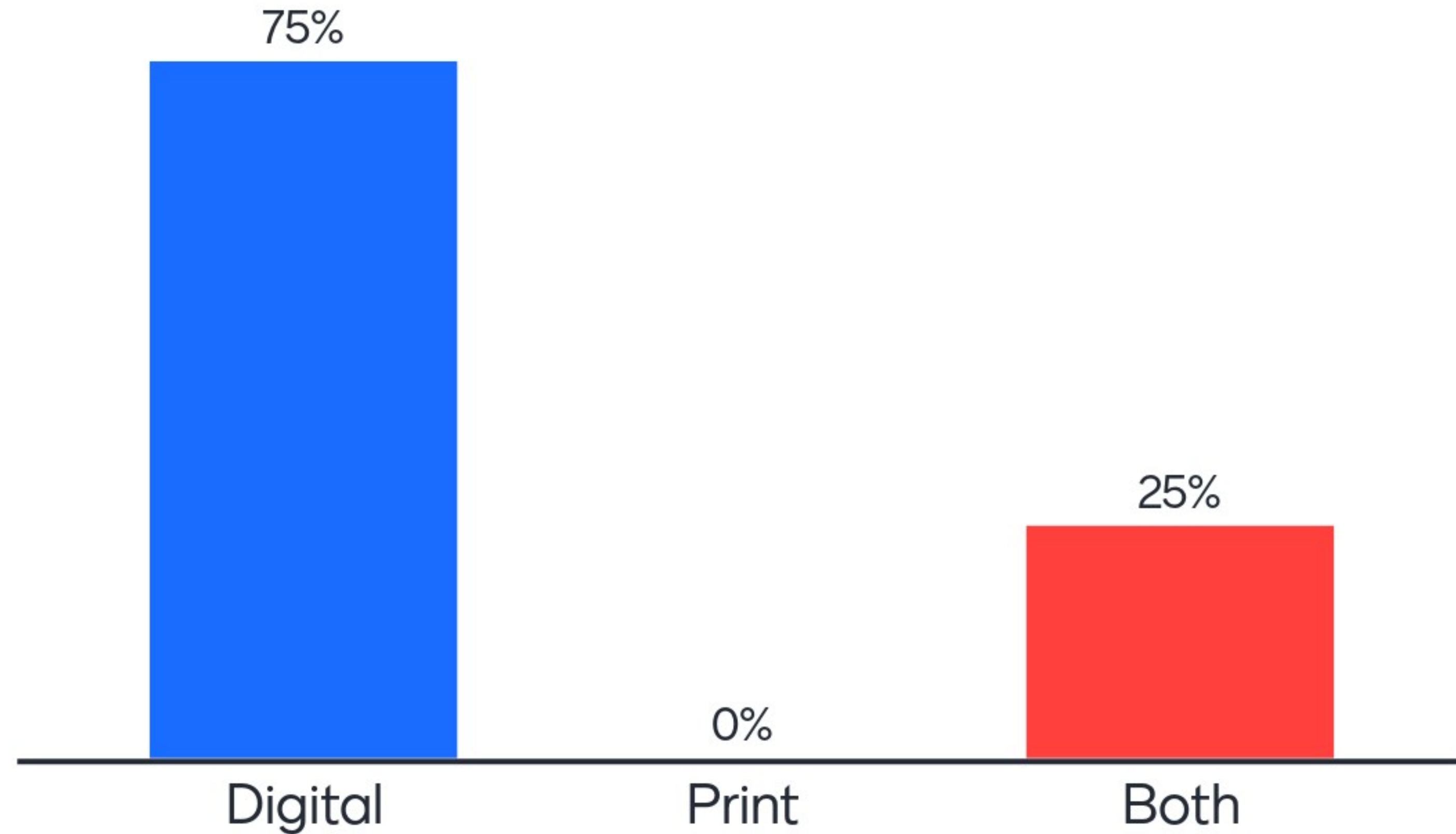
Yes - TBD
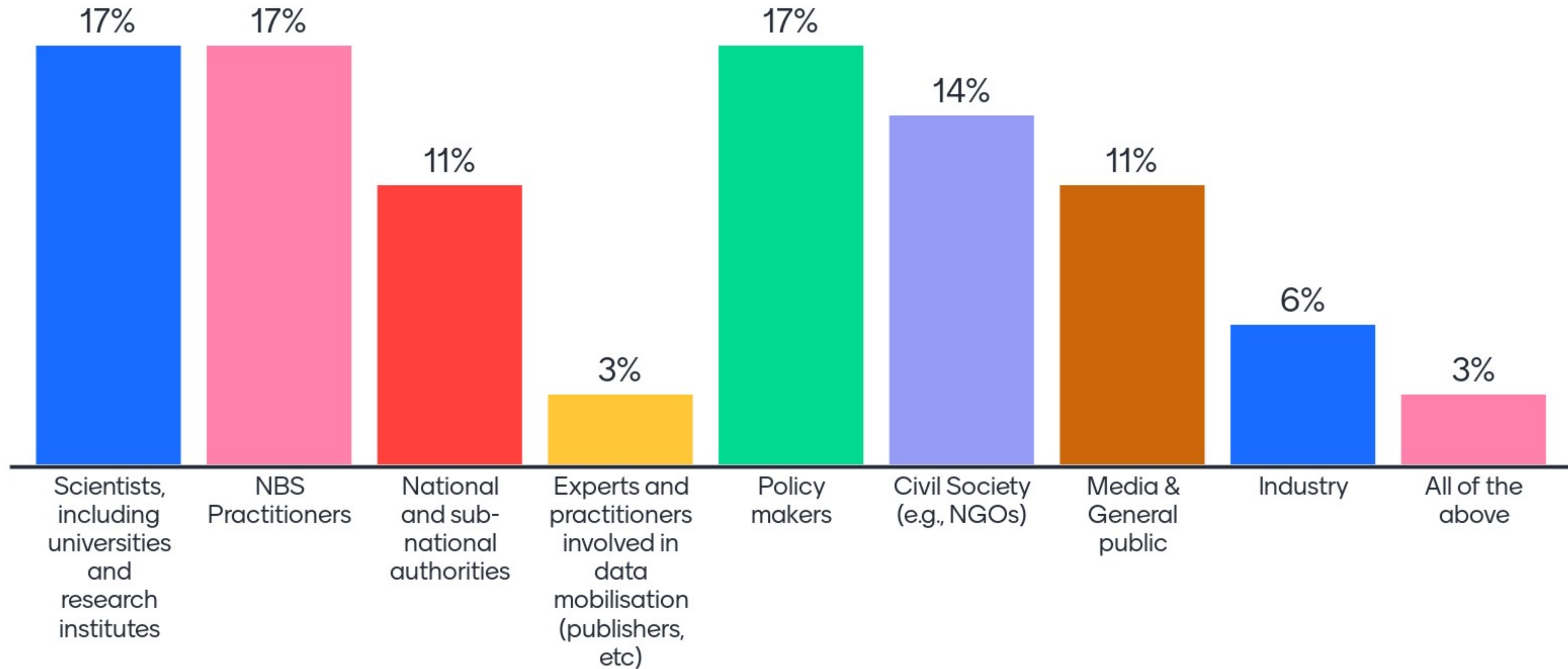
ESP

ASLO

SIL

IALE

GLEON

JASM

Q6. What format do you envision for the promotional materials?

Bar chart:
- Digital: 75%
- Print: 0%
- Both: 25%

Q7. Which of the following target groups would you aim to reach?

Bar chart showing target groups:
- Scientists, including universities and research institutes: 17%
- NBS Practitioners: 17%
- National and sub-national authorities: 11%
- Experts and practitioners involved in data mobilisation (publishers, etc): 3%
- Policy makers: 17%
- Civil Society (e.g., NGOs): 14%
- Media & General public: 11%
- Industry: 6%
- All of the above: 3%

Q8. What is your preference about website domain?
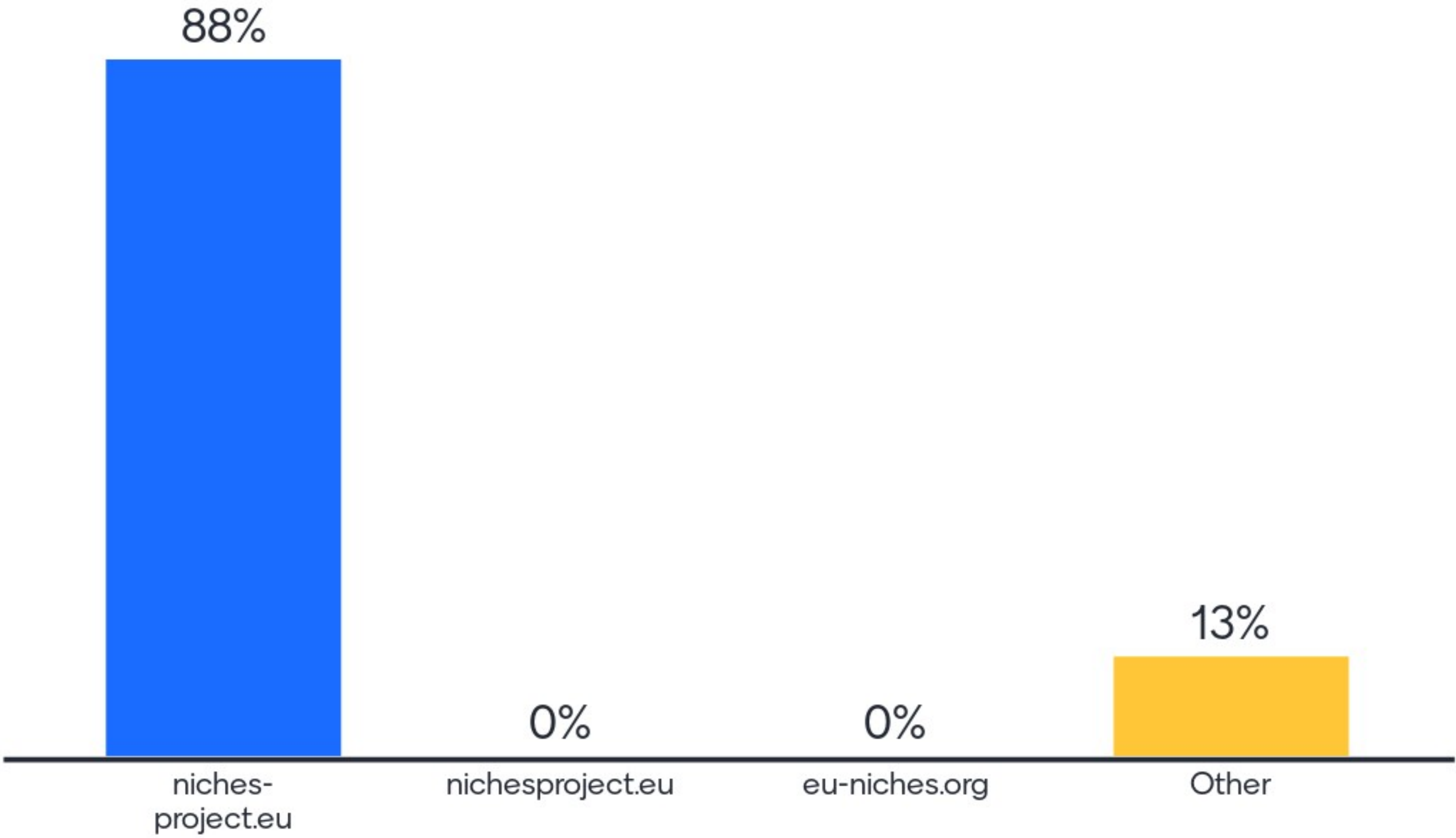
Q9. What are your expected Key Exploitable Results (KER)?

pathways guidance

impact assessment framework

Indicator set

Maps

recommendations to wider cities on NBS integration in policy

Scientific papers, technical papers, policy briefs, model code, data repository

Transition Pathways for Cities

Innovative holistic conceptual framework

8

Thank you for your time!