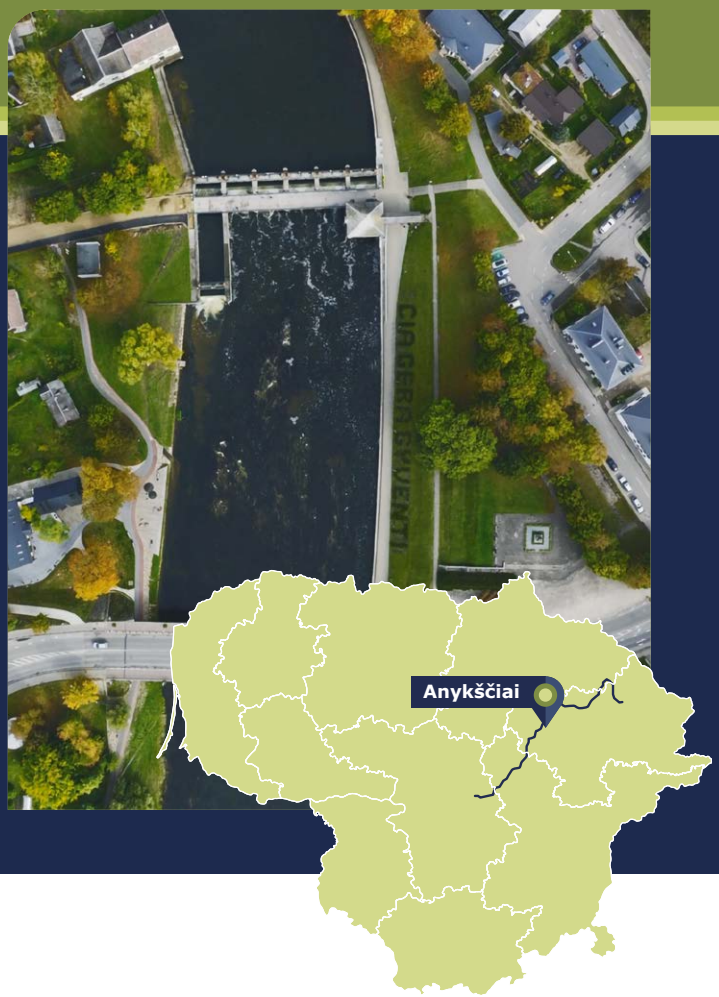
Factsheet

The Šventoji River

Biodiversity, Community, and Transformative Governance

Freshwater biodiversity is declining across Europe, making river protection and restoration an increasing priority. The Šventoji River in Lithuania is a nationally important ecological corridor and key migration route for fish species, while also being central to Anykščiai's recreation, tourism and identity. The Anykščiai dam restricts connectivity and reduces species diversity, yet its reservoir remains a valued part of the town's landscape and daily life. The BIOTraCes case study explores how different actors value the river to support evidence-based, inclusive biodiversity governance.



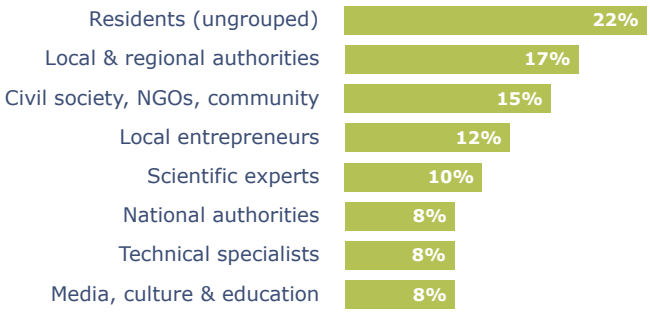
Case Study Findings - Participants

53 interviews

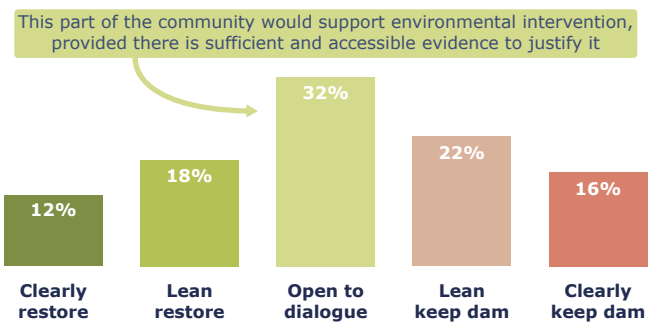
59 people interviewed

8 stakeholder groups

Stakeholder group



Position on the river's future



Perceived values of the dam and the impounded landscape

- **Landscape and aesthetics:** The reservoir's most highly valued feature. It shapes Anykščiai landscape through its water surface, soundscape, viewpoints, and seasonal scenery.
- **Recreation:** Supports swimming, angling, paddling, kayaking, walking and cycling.
- **Connectivity:** The bridge is a key pedestrian/ cycling link across town.
- **Community and culture:** The area hosts events, cultural activities, and informal gatherings, serving as an important public space.
- **Economic and functional value:** Sustains nearby family-run businesses, including cafés, accommodation and kayak rental.
- **History and identity:** The dam reflects the town's industrial heritage and collective memory.

Concerns linked to the dam

- **Flooding:** Possible link to upstream garden flooding (needs hydrological study).
- **Ecological impacts:** Sediment build-up and restricted migration reduce species diversity.
- **Public safety:** The dam poses safety risks to kayakers and swimmers.

- **Downstream river condition and aesthetics:** Low-flow vegetation reduces visual appeal below the dam.
- **Maintenance costs:** The dam requires ongoing maintenance and public investment, though rarely a top concern.

Perceived values Šventoji River and restoration potential

These values were widely associated with the Šventoji River. Across stakeholder groups, respondents generally expected that restoring river connectivity would reinforce many of these values, while recognising that specific outcomes would depend on the restoration approach.

- **Identity and sense of place:** The Šventoji is widely regarded as Anykščiai's defining symbol, central to local identity and collective memory, and consistently valued above the dam itself.
- **Recreation and community life:** The river supports swimming, kayaking, angling, camping, walking, cycling, and providing spaces for family life and community interaction.
- **Emotional wellbeing:** Associated with calmness and stress relief.
- **Natural landscape and aesthetics:** Residents value the river's natural beauty, flowing water, seasonal dynamics, and sense of wildness.
- **Economic value:** The river supports tourism, water-based recreation, local businesses, and contributes to the attractiveness of the surrounding area. Respondents are also associated with a free-flowing river with opportunities for nature-based tourism.
- **Ecological value and stewardship:** The Šventoji is recognised as a valuable ecosystem for fish migration and biodiversity. Respondents linked restored connectivity to healthier habitats, alongside local stewardship - anti-poaching efforts, litter collection, and environmental education.



Pathways to Transformative Governance

About one-third of respondents are open to restoration if backed by robust evidence and professional delivery. Key barriers: uncertainty about change, trust in implementation, and confidence in community benefit. Addressing these requires answering three key questions:

What will actually change?
Reduce uncertainty via independent ecological, hydrological and engineering studies. The Environmental Impact Assessment should clearly explain expected changes to biodiversity, hydrology, water levels, groundwater, recreation and community life.

Will it be done professionally and honestly?
Build trust through transparent communication, meaningful participation throughout planning, and implementation to a high technical, environmental and recreational standard.

How will it benefit both biodiversity and the community?
Show how actions support biodiversity recovery alongside Anykščiai's long-term vision as a resort town - inclusive public spaces, stronger tourism, local business and community wellbeing.

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