

Rainer Mönke

Nature Conservation Creating Employment

'Job-Motor Biosphere' in the UNESCO biosphere reserve Schaalsee

The Job-Motor Biosphere is a joint initiative of the authority of the biosphere reserve Schaalsee and the sponsoring agency 'Förderverein Biosphere Schaalsee e.V.' as well as the Federal Employment Office. The objective of the initiative is to promote start-up companies and sideline income in line with the philosophy of the biosphere reserve. The idea was born in the mid-nineties; the first concrete step was taken in the form of a brain-storming session in Roggendorf in northwest Mecklenburg in 1998. All relevant stakeholders from the region, including local politicians, companies and farmers and even artists got together in an animated 'round table' discussion.

This exchange of ideas resulted in the initiation of very diverse projects for the regional development of the reserve. In order to ensure quality standards for the astonishing number of business start-ups, the Job-Motor Biosphere came to life. It was inaugurated in August 1998 on a day dedicated to business start-ups, which took place in the information centre of the biosphere reserve, the 'Pahlhuus'. Around 80 potential candidates for start-up businesses presented their ideas and received answers to their questions from the newly founded advisory board of the Job-Motor Biosphere, comprising of competent representatives from the employment offices Hagenow and Gadebusch, the local savings bank Ludwigslust, the Chamber of Crafts and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Schwerin, a state health insurance company and the association for promoting businesses Ludwigslust. While aimed at supporting people in setting up their own companies, the event also established important contacts amongst all those participating. The patron of this 'business start-up day' was Dr. Till Backhaus, then Minister of Fishing, Agriculture, and Forestry of Mecklenburg-Western-Pomerania.



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The second event of this type took place in March 1999; this time representatives of the Federal Association of the Small and Medium-Sized Businesses as well as the Ministry of Economics were also included on the advisory board. Thirteen projects were selected from a wide range of areas, which were supported by a two-phase model during their start-up phase: A three month educational phase in business administration and issues concerning the reserve was carried out by the Advanced Training Academy for Economics GmbH in Ratzeburg, the institute for Networked Environmental Planning in Pinnow and both the authority and the sponsoring agency of the biosphere reserve. A subsequent six-month coaching phase served to ensure the success of the planned start-up companies.

The approach of the project Job-Motor-Biosphere was successful and was consistently copied. By April 2003, the fifth 'business start-up day' had taken place in Zarrentin. Within five years, 29 start-up companies were established creating a total of 50 permanent jobs, most noticeably in the area of sustainable services, proving that jobs based on respect for the basic principles of ecology, can be

created in nature reserves. The Job-Motor Biosphere in the Schaalsee biosphere reserve not only sends out signals to the labour market but also contributes significantly to regional development and enables the biosphere reserve to develop its own identity. Recently the Job-Motor Biosphere has increasingly developed business partnerships and strengthened existing networks. Thus it has significantly contributed to the success of the local brand 'Schaalsee Biosphere Reserve – for Body and Soul'.

This pilot project for creating functioning small businesses in the biosphere-reserve region was soon taken up in other reserves in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, for example in the biosphere reserve South-East Rügen and in the Müritz region.

The framework conditions for the promotion of job creation have changed throughout Germany since 2003. This has made it necessary to integrate the activities of the Job Motor-Biosphere into the coordination project 'ProReg-MV', run by the association for the promotion of the integration of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania in the civil society of the EU, 'EuroReg e.V.'. This amended organisational structure by no means reduces the active participation of the biosphere reserve and its sponsoring society and does not affect the continuing success of the project in promoting start-up companies in the biosphere reserve.

Rainer Mönke is responsible for basic principles and international projects at the authority of the Schaalsee biosphere reserve.