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Changes Lead to New Perspectives

The Swabian Alb prepares its application as a UNESCO biosphere reserve

The expected designation as a biosphere reserve represents a great opportunity for managing the structural change in the Swabian Alb region. This article portrays the eager preparations, which have been going on in preparation for the application to UNESCO in 2007.

The German Federal Government announced the closure of the Federal Armed Forces location in Münsingen, Swabian Alb in 2001. At first only the Herzog-Albrecht barracks were mentioned, however, at the beginning of 2002 it appeared that the military training ground 'Gutsbezirk Münsingen' and the 'Alter Lager', a collection of over 130 mostly listed buildings were also to be vacated by the end of 2005. This former training ground is one of the largest undivided areas in the federal state Baden-Württemberg. The region is rich with nature and has a unique landscape. It was therefore registered, in its entirety, for acceptance to the European network of protected areas 'Natura 2000'.

The federal state Baden-Württemberg faced up to its responsibility to help accomplish the necessary structural changes in the region, particularly in the town of Münsingen, a small town made up of 13 sub-municipalities with around 14,000 inhabitants. Prime Minister Günther H. Oettinger repeatedly declared his government's intention of initiating a 'biosphere region' – such is the term used in the federal state's Nature Conservation Act – around the former military training ground. Right from the start, the clear objective of all municipalities involved was the designation of the biosphere region as a biosphere reserve by UNESCO's 'Man and the Biosphere' (MAB) programme. The demarcation

process and the legal preparations at the federal state level will very soon be finished successfully.

From the first demarcation draft to the current regional setting

In July 2005 the district of Reutlingen submitted an initial demarcation draft to become a biosphere region. To save time, the discussion was initially based on the demarcations of the towns of Bad Urach and Münsingen, the municipality of Römerstein and the independent Gutsbezirk Münsingen; further municipalities were not considered. Within the setting of this initial demarcation draft, areas had to be identified as being suitable for core area or buffer zone. Even then it appeared realistic that the minimum area of 30,000 hectares could be exceeded due to the willingness of bordering municipalities to come on board.

A significant prerequisite for the acceptance of the idea of establishing a biosphere region in the district of Reutlingen were the impulses given by the 'federal state project for the preservation and development of nature and environment' (PLENUM) and by the programme 'active regions'. Since April 2001 around 300 projects for sustainable, regional development were realised with the help of 8,7 million euros of funding from PLENUM and 'active regions'; 77 of these projects were in the low-impact tourism sector. Numerous product and marketing innovations are nowadays well-known, at least in Baden-Württemberg. These projects pave the way towards showing the region that nature conservation is worthwhile, both for individuals and for communities. At the same time the

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The planned biosphere reserve Swabian Alb

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region's efforts with regard to sustainable development aim to achieve outstanding and long-term results for nature and the environment; the extent of the fixed-term funding depends on just these outcomes.

It was clear right from the start that the biosphere region could only be developed successfully if the greatest possible transparency prevailed and all stakeholders could be successfully involved. The ministry responsible, the Ministry for Food and Rural Development of Baden-Württemberg, therefore opted for a three-level governance structure:

- The 'operational working group' in which the local stakeholders play a role is located at the Regierungspräsidium (governmental entity in charge of several districts) Tübingen.
- The 'permanent advisory board' headed by Minister Peter Hauk enables an effective exchange between nature protection associations, farming associations, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce Reutlingen and the regional associations.
- The 'steering committee', headed by the official of the Ministry for Food and Rural Development in charge makes functional decisions and prepares political decisions.

The decision to utilise this structure was, in retrospect, fully appropriate. To include all stakeholders at the appropriate level into the governance structure contributed significantly to the enormous degree of acceptance of demarcating the biosphere region.

Another fully appropriate decision, in retrospect, was the decision to be physically present in the biosphere region early on. In June 2006 a 'start-team' was established for that purpose, a highly motivated group of six representatives from the Regierungspräsidium Tübingen, the district office of Reutlingen as well as the Federal Agency for Property Issues, the owner of the former military training ground. The start-team keeps up the dialogue with all those involved in the biosphere region and all those who want to become actively involved. The current focus is on the preparation of the application to UNESCO, on the creation of a network of information centres and on the establishment of a website. The initial scepticism of many of those involved – from the local authorities as well as from economy – was soon replaced by a growing interest. Now these very stakeholders have understood that demonstrating commitment for a future UNESCO biosphere reserve could represent a great opportunity.

The first demarcation draft was mainly based on factors of nature conservation. The elaboration was carried out by the Regierungspräsidium Tübingen. The demarcation and zoning was thoroughly discussed with many municipalities located outside of the area of the first draft. The opportunities arising from a reasonable demarcation of the transition area for all those concerned were stressed then. The municipalities concerned had to weigh this up with regard to the demand of the federal state that they have to cover 30 percent of most costs as from the year 2011. All the municipalities and districts agreed on the principle of an allocation formula.

The planned biosphere region Swabian Alb now spans a total area of 80,000 hectares – a considerable size. It reaches across 28 municipalities in the three districts of Reutlingen, Alb-Donau-Kreis and Esslingen and the two administrative districts Tübingen and Stuttgart as well as the independent Gutsbezirk Münsingen. Of this total area about 3,2 percent make up the core area. It comprises of slope and canyon forests, which are no longer used in any way and have been allowed to develop naturally. The towns and municipalities contribute to the core area with 1,000 hectares of municipal forest-land. In this way the UNESCO criterion of a minimum of

3 percent of core area is fulfilled. The core areas are enclosed by buffer zones, which account for 37 percent of the planned biosphere region. The transition areas make up around 60 percent.

In December 2006, the steering committee agreed to the demarcation and zoning. The text of the governmental decree, which was developed in an exemplary participatory manner is virtually completed today. The decree was drafted taking into account the suggestions, ideas, and doubts of all the municipalities and associations concerned.

The steering committee also decided on a location for an administrative and information centre. It is to be located at the military training ground Münsingen in Alter Lager in two of the listed buildings. This administrative and information centre should incorporate a network of all the existing contact points, for example the nature protection centre Schopfloch, the Federal State stud Marbach, Bad Urach and the centre for environmental education Listhof in Reutlingen. A communi-

cation concept for this network will be developed including made-to-measure solutions with individual focuses; additional information measures are also planned.

What happens next?

The Council of Ministers of Baden-Württemberg approved the demarcation and zoning of the region, the financial framework and the draft decree at the end of April 2007. The draft will be submitted for the official hearing so that the decree can be passed in autumn at the latest. Only then will the biosphere region Swabian Alb really exist. This is a significant prerequisite for further steps, ranging from making the necessary arrangements for the administration and information centre to the upcoming personnel decisions. Furthermore the application to UNESCO for designation as a biosphere reserve has to be worked out. Dependent on the way that those bodies involved work, the designation by UNESCO should be possible by the end of 2008, in 2009 at the latest.

With the decision to become a UNESCO biosphere reserve, the Swabian Alb took up the opportunity of developing into a pioneer region and playing high up in the 'champions league' of cultural landscapes. To the public authorities, sustainability means putting all decisions to the ecological test. Independent of the scientific verdict on the demarcation and the zoning of the region, just the debate on the subject of sustainability should have a positive effect on this region mid-term. For many of those concerned, it may not always be easy to personally relate to all principles and specifications of a biosphere region, or rather – depending on the hoped-for designation by UNESCO – a biosphere reserve. Anyhow, time has come to fill them with life.

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*Further information:
<http://www.biosphärengbiet-alb.de>*

How can a Biosphere Reserve in Darfur Save the Remaining Wildlife?

The biosphere reserve Radom is situated in the south of the crisis region Darfur in Sudan, close to the border of the autonomous Southern Sudan and the Central African Republic. Since the rebellion in 2003, especially West Darfur has been the scene of cruel and scarcely manageable hostilities. Within the context of this difficult situation young scientists in Radom have spent three years carrying out comprehensive research work with the help of the 'Young Scientist Award' granted by the MAB programme. The goal of these studies was to record the status of the ecosystems, of the flora and fauna as well as the socio-economic development of the park. Based on that data, recommendations for the government authorities were compiled and regulations drafted to improve the management of the park and to involve the local inhabitants.

This study represents a detailed analysis of the manifold problems of the region. After the end of the civil war in South-

ern Sudan in 2005 and the Darfur-crisis, hundreds of thousands of people were left homeless. This resulted in a rapid increase in population in Radom due to the fertile land there. Illegal settlement and cultivation was a result. The new settlers compete with the traditional nomad-tribes in the region for water and land. Exploitation of the land and firewood felling increase the danger of desertification.

These factors put a burden on flora and fauna. Additionally illegal arms dealing and the lack of controls lead to an increase in poaching. The stock of big game is greatly depleted; elephants, the white rhinoceros and buffalos have disappeared.

The study makes it quite clear that research in biosphere reserves goes much further than nature conservation alone. The recommendations of the research team aim to end activities, which have not only resulted in the wiping out of wild animals but, if continued, will make

Radom inhabitable very soon. For instance, it is high time to inform the inhabitants to disband certain settlements and to improve the infrastructure.

Detailed Information is provided in an article in the magazine „A World of Science“ (Vol.5, No.2) released by UNESCO's sector for Natural Sciences, www.unesco.org/science/edito_en19.shtml.



Gamekeepers in the Radom biosphere reserve

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