

Guido Puhmann / Susanne Reinhardt

Partnerships between River Biosphere Reserves

The administration of the biosphere reserve at the Middle Elbe works very closely with reserves with comparable natural landscapes in other countries. The objective is to constantly assess and improve aspects of the work, including practical action, right up to the management of the entire region. Large-scale projects can be implemented more effectively when many experienced and, better still, international partners, collaborate. This is especially important with regard to the acquisition of funding. Ideally, experiences should be exchanged in both directions.

Cooperation in the world network of biosphere reserves is a significant criterion for the designation and during the regular evaluation by UNESCO. Up to the year 2006, the administration of the Middle Elbe biosphere reserve worked with international partners within the framework of individual projects, for example in 'Wetlands I and II' with Poland, Italy, Albania and Slovenia; among them were regions, which are not designated as biosphere reserves. A long-standing cooperation between biosphere reserves in the sense of the Seville Strategy was as yet not established.

Initiation of new contacts

In the framework of the EUROMAB conference in October 2005 in Austria, the German MAB National Committee organised a workshop for establishing international partnerships for German biosphere reserves. During this workshop initial talks between the administrations of the biosphere reserve Middle Elbe and the Russian biosphere reserve Great Volzhsko-Kamsky as well as the Austrian biosphere reserve Lobau took place. Professional contacts at the individual level had already been made with both reserves in the previous years.

Both biosphere reserves represent the Eastern and Central European river landscapes on the Volga and the Danube. Great Volzhsko-Kamsky is situated in the river basin area of the Volga. Parts are also situated in the river basin areas of the rivers Raifa and Sarali Unit. The administration is located in Sadovy in the Zelenodolsky district. The biosphere reserve Lobau is situated in Vienna and

is part of the National Park Donauauen, its administration is located in Groß-Enzersdorf.

The Austrian colleagues and those from the Russian Federation were interested in the extensive experience of the administration of the Middle Elbe with regard to river and floodplain management,

development of relations and the identification of similar objectives and structures while implementing the MAB programme.

After internal approval processes in the three countries, cooperation agreements were signed in October 2006. The Russian partners plan a return visit to the Middle Elbe in



Visitors from the biosphere reserve Lobau at the Middle Elbe

Photo © Mirko Pannach

especially in projects concerning back-water restoration, relocation of dikes and development of riparian forests.

Upon the suggestion of the German MAB National Committee, the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety financially supported the visit of representatives of the biosphere reserve Middle Elbe to the reserves Great Volzhsko-Kamsky and Lobau in August and September 2006. The visit of several days served to improve the devel-

2007; the partners from Lobau visited the Elbe in 2006 for the first time.

First results

The general consensus among all those involved is that these international contacts are extremely useful for gathering momentum for one's own work. The following future joint activities were worked out:

Cooperation between UNESCO-designated sites in Saxony-Anhalt

Saxony-Anhalt is rich in UNESCO-designated sites representing unique human cultural achievements and landscapes of exceptional significance: Dessau and its Bauhaus, the Elbe River floodplains, Germany's oldest biosphere reserve and, nestling between Dessau and Wörlitz, the 'The Garden Kingdom of Dessau-Wörlitz'. Also fascinating are the Luther Memorials, the place of his birth and death in Eisleben and where he worked on the reformation in Wittenberg; not far away is the middle-age old town of Quedlinburg.

Four closely cooperating institutions are responsible for protecting, maintaining, developing and communicating these landscapes and buildings as well as the exceptional value and brilliant concepts that they embody: the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation, the Luther Memorial Foundations Saxony-Anhalt, the

Cultural Foundation DessauWörlitz and the Administration of the Middle Elbe biosphere reserve. Networking and joint marketing measures have been implemented by the four institutions for some time. Cultural politics and area marketing need a common voice, which can be heard. Therefore the four UNESCO-designated sites regularly coordinate at executive level, organising joint events such as the annual 'Day of the Garden Kingdom' (Gartenreichtag) as well as work together on tourism-programmes of the federal state Saxony-Anhalt.

This cooperation first became tangible and evident to the public in 2001 by the conference 'Silence'. High level events have been taking place every year since then; some examples of the themes of these events are 'Genius loci', 'Time', and 'Memory'. Most

recently in June 2007, the theme was 'Myth'. These two-day conferences were each documented in a book.

The foundations and biosphere reserve administration have the same goals: Improving Saxony-Anhalt's and Dessau's external and internal perception, encouraging sustainable tourism as well as preserving and developing natural, cultural and ecological basic resources on which life depends. Tying the possibilities and contents of each institution makes it possible to attain these goals. The core objective is to realise the value of the cultural and natural potential of this region – not only the economic value. Despite there being need for further development of our inheritance, it must first of all be handed over to future generations unscathed.



- Waterway maintenance and development;
- Involvement of park rangers in tourist management, in public relations and district supervision;
- Beaver management and beaver research;
- Monitoring and measures for the European Union programme NATURA 2000 and
- Involvement of land-users and the population in the process of the development of reserves.

Guido Puhmann is Head of the Administration of the biosphere reserve Middle Elbe, at the Administration of the Federal State Saxony-Anhalt's part of the UNESCO Elbe River Landscape Biosphere Reserve.

Susanne Reinhardt is staff member for public relations at the administration of the Middle Elbe biosphere reserve.

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Elbe River Landscape

The floodplain landscape of the biosphere reserve along the Middle Elbe spans 3,428 km². It covers the area from the Middle Elbe lowlands in Saxony-Anhalt to the north German lowlands in Schleswig-Holstein in its entirety. The region was designated by UNESCO in 1997. Its area called Steckby-Lödderitzer Forst in Saxony-Anhalt was one of the first biosphere reserves in Germany to be designated. The course of the river Elbe is bordered by natural floodplains, the largest floodplain forests in central Europe, adjacent deciduous and mixed forests as well as extensively used grassland. This biosphere reserve extends over five federal states; each federal state has established an own administration: Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt.

The Elbe valley floodplain is an important resting and wintering area for swans and geese. Many farmers consider the birds to be a threat to their harvest. The Lower Saxony biosphere reserve administration has introduced a 'guest bird management' procedure for the purpose of keeping conflicts with farmers to a minimum and thus retaining the



Photo © Biosphärenreservat Niedersächsische Elbtalaue

significance of the Elbe valley floodplain as a bird-resting area. Contractual nature conservation secures undisturbed resting areas, extensive cultivation methods are supported and, where possible, power supply lines are installed underground. Areas of unharvested cereals are left untouched to distract birds from the 'actual'

cultivated areas and whatever losses are made by the farmers are reimbursed. This cooperation programme goes to show that despite the high numbers of geese using the region as a resting and feeding area, losses for farmers can be kept low.

An important focus of the work in the part of the biosphere reserve in Saxony-Anhalt is the management of wetlands. One of the most comprehensive projects, boasting over five million Euros in funding, was the reconstruction of the lake 'Kühnauer See', an oxbow lake now disconnected from the Elbe. Through an over-supply of nutrients it threatened to fill up by sedimentation and some species had already disappeared. The lake was thoroughly desilted and a dam was removed so that today many species have become established again in the lake. The Elbe beaver was threatened with extinction up to the fifties; it found its last retreat in the biosphere reserve. The stock was able to increase up to 1,200 animals.

Photo © Lutz Möller



Further information:

<http://www.elbtalaue.niedersachsen.de>

<http://www.mittellelbe.com>

<http://www.elbetal-mv.de>

[http://www.grossschutzgebiete.](http://www.grossschutzgebiete.brandenburg.de)

[brandenburg.de](http://www.grossschutzgebiete.brandenburg.de)