

Gertrud Sahler

Biosphere Reserves, a Response to Infrastructural Challenges

Germany has to face fundamental challenges in the same way as other industrialised countries. Demographical change leads to considerable problems in the preservation of necessary infrastructure in education, culture, transport, administration and medical care, particularly in rural areas with a low population density. Increased competition caused by globalisation also on a regional and local level, requires future-oriented local politics, which use existing strengths and innovation potential. The MAB National Committee considers biosphere reserves as model regions to be an effective device for contributing to this structural challenge.



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Momentum for a sustainable regional development

In contrast to other instruments of regional development, such as 'integrated rural development concepts' (ILEK) supported at the national level or the implementation of 'LEADER processes' in the European Union context, biosphere reserves are created for the long-term. They offer the opportunity for regional development processes to become firmly established.

After adoption of the Seville Strategy, the original focus of the MAB programme has shifted from being an interdisciplinary research programme. Biosphere reserves are now model regions for sustainable development. This makes high demands on the administrations; they must be competent in all aspects of nature conservation as well as in economic and social issues, in education and science. They must also be able to communicate effectively in order to do justice to the demands of the MAB programme and anchor the biosphere reserve in the region by a bottom-up process.

The management of biosphere reserves must have the administrative competence to realise the goal of their becoming model regions for sustainable development. These competencies should include the control and allocation of funds, the development and monitoring of innovative concepts, and especially the solution of problems connected to demographic developments.

Periodical assessment of the German biosphere reserves by the MAB National Committee in previous years has

disclosed very different competencies and rights of participation. Therefore, the chances of an integrated approach cannot usually be used sufficiently. In addition the biosphere reserves are almost exclusively supported by the Ministry for the Environment of the federal state they are part of. It would, however, make sense to take advantage of appropriate support programmes from all departments at federal state level. These could serve to open further economic perspectives in the biosphere reserves and their surroundings as well as inspiring a sustainable regional development, which could hold its own.

German biosphere reserves, to date, represent marine areas, river and pond landscapes and areas of open landscapes or with a high percentage of forest land, in both peripheral areas as well as close to agglomeration areas. Up to now, the selection has only been based on criteria of natural landscapes. This approach is however too limited, from the viewpoint of the MAB National Committee. With regard to the question of how representative a region is for the network of biosphere reserves, the interdisciplinary character of the MAB programme should be taken into consideration. A decision on how representative a region is should also be based on the different economic and social conditions. The MAB National Committee kept this issue in mind when revising the national criteria for designation and evaluation of biosphere reserves. New applications are in the pipeline from two federal states, Saarland and Baden-Württemberg: The biosphere

reserve Bliesgau has already been designated according to federal state law, the biosphere reserve Schwäbische Alb is in the process of being founded, both, as partially urban regions, will make a welcome addition to the German network. This development results in new challenges for us. Biosphere reserves in urban regions must also fulfil the three functions: protection, development as well as research and education. Among other things, we will be dealing with core zones in urban areas and the form they will have to take in order to be able to do justice to the protection function.

The changes to the MAB programme as a result of the Seville Strategy of 1996 will continue in the years to come. However new-style biosphere reserves are not the only new issue to be integrated; regions designated before 1996, often emanating from national parks must also become model regions for sustainable development. In this context, our experiences with the Wadden Sea and Berchtesgaden biosphere reserves can be brought into the international discussion.



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UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Vosges Du Nord / Pfälzerwald

In the Pfälzerwald (Palatinate Forest) the German part of the first transboundary biosphere reserve of the European Union can be found. The German part was designated by UNESCO in 1992, the French part in 1988. The connected regions have been designated since 1998, spanning a total area of 3,018 km². The Palatinate Forest is part of the geo-morphological landform of the southwest German cuesta and its sandstone mountains. Nearly three quarters of the transboundary mountain formation Vosges-Palatinate are covered with woods. What is characteristic for the southern Pfälzerwald and significant for the tourist industry are the impressive sandstone cliffs, which like the many caves, represent the habitat for rare animal and plant species. Furthermore, almost a hundred castles are to be found in this biosphere reserve.

A special feature in comparison to other German biosphere reserves is the winegrowing district Haardttrand, an area also known as the 'German wine route'. Vineyards are also part of the network 'economies in harmony with nature', whereby businesses from many sectors have joined forces since 2004, in order to ensure sustainable development in the biosphere reserve, together with the biosphere administration. Quality criteria and control systems were developed in order to guarantee the quality of products and a low environmental impact.

*Further information:
<http://www.pfaelzerwald.de>*

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