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Transboundary Biosphere Reserves

Eight biosphere reserves designated in the world today are transboundary. Two are situated in Africa, five in Europe and there is one that counts as being 'intercontinental' involving Spain and Morocco. In addition there are a number of already advanced initiatives for establishing transboundary biosphere reserves, above all in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe as well as in Africa.

The only German part of a transboundary biosphere reserve is the nature reserve Pfälzerwald (Palatinate Forest), which looks back on 24 years of successful cooperation with the French Parc Naturel Régional des Vosges du Nord. The region was designated by UNESCO as a transboundary biosphere reserve in 1998. The designation criteria provide for a periodic evaluation after 10 years; thus one is scheduled for 2008. This will be the first time that two MAB National Committees cooperate on the evaluation of a transboundary biosphere reserve. This is a milestone for the world network of biosphere reserves.

In 1999 the biosphere reserve Vosges du Nord/Pfälzerwald carried out a 'goal-oriented project plan' with financial support from UNESCO. The focus was on analysing cooperation problems between the various stakeholders as well as determining mid and long term goals. Furthermore a joint concept and a transboundary action plan were developed for this region, which spans more than 310,000 hectares.

In 2004 the Franco-German biosphere reserve organised the first world conference of transboundary biosphere reserves in the border area of the Palatinate Forest. Representatives of initiatives for establishing future transboundary biosphere reserves were also invited. The expert workshop 'Following-up on Seville + 5' took place subsequently. Over 150 experts from 25 countries from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe developed further the recommendations of the MAB Programme International Co-ordination Council.

The Franco-German protected area as a model region

Forest areas are being destroyed to a dramatic extent in the tropics and in boreal areas, but just as much in North America and Southern Europe. The Franco-German biosphere reserve is the largest contiguous forest area of Western Europe and demonstrates sustainable forest cultivation on large areas on both sides of the border. This proves that large-scale use of forest resources may go hand in hand with the preservation of biodiversity and respect for the interests of the local population. At the same time peace and understanding among the nations may be promoted.

Government delegations from countries with strict borders such as the Republic of Korea or Belarus frequently visit the biosphere reserve Vosges du Nord/Pfälzerwald in order to learn about its activities, the successes and challenges of transboundary cooperation. Other transboundary world heritage sites such as 'Mont Perdu – Tres Serols' on the border of France and Spain quote the Franco-German biosphere reserve as a role model and value our advice.

Added value of the transboundary cooperation

The Franco-German biosphere reserve carries out many different activities. Among them those projects should be emphasized, which are successful precisely in that they have managed to become self-containing after initial financial support, and have meanwhile developed sound structures. Some of our projects meeting these criteria are

even more distinct: they would not have been possible on a national level.

- Transboundary farmers' markets offer sustainably produced agricultural products, near-natural forestry products and creative craftsmanship from the region, attracting thousands of visitors from both countries.
- Hunters, forest rangers, scientists, environmental educationalists, representatives of the authorities and nature conservation associations cooperate in a transboundary network for the protection of the lynx.
- The transboundary nature forest reserve 'Adelsberg-Lutzelhardt' is the first Franco-German core area. It is supported by a joint research programme, by monitoring and environmental education. It is accompanied by a committee, made up of, inter alia, local stakeholders from neighbouring municipalities and the forest management.

A new dimension in the world network

Transboundary biosphere reserves have aspects and problem constellations, which open a completely new dimension in contrast to solely national areas. If they are dealt with correctly, they can have many benefits, which can only be achieved through cooperation and not by either of the partners on their own.

On either side of a border there are sometimes significant differences with regard to communication, the prevention and solution of conflicts, to hierarchical structures, to decision-making mechanisms and to perceptions of space.



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UNESCO Biosphere Reserve W-Region

Transboundary, Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger

The 'W-Region' is the first transboundary biosphere reserve in Africa. The part in Niger was designated by UNESCO in 1996; after a long process of negotiation, the area was extended to Burkina Faso and Benin in 2002. Today the reserve spans an area of 31,223 km²,



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whereby approx. half is identified as transition area and a third as core area. The name comes from the river Niger, which flows here in the shape of a 'W'.

Settlers shaped the landscape of this region, as early as the Neolithic. Collecting and cultivating wild flowers plays an important role in land use of the local population to this day. The effect on the biodiversity was a reason why the W-National Park in Niger, which represents the core area, was declared as a World Nature Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1996. The W-Region is considered to be a bastion against desertification.

The transboundary area is a model region for testing sustainable economies while integrating the local communities. The

three countries are currently developing a coordination structure for the joint administration of the area, with the support of the European Union. Major problems such as poaching, illegal fishing and clearing should be easier to cope with as a result. The W-Region was the first concrete result of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) environmental initiative, which was resolved at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002.

Further information:

<http://www.unesco.org/mabdb/br/brdir/directory/biores.asp?mode=all&Code=BEN++BKF++NER+01>

There are also the different interpretations and implementation of international conventions and regulations of the European Union. There are different approaches to environmental disaster mitigation, to border and security policies, and to resource management. Lastly, considerable deviations between scientific systems and research methods as well as differing nature conservation legislation and zoning concepts can occur.

A transboundary biosphere reserve can therefore offer many opportunities for harmonising these different systems. This is necessary as large-scale, transboundary complexes of ecosystems and the organisms living there do not respect political borders. Therefore we must protect the common natural heritage through a multiply sustainable development, in active cooperation with the local population – across boundaries and cultures.

Transboundary challenges

In transboundary biosphere reserves, solutions are worked out and collectively implemented; as every other biosphere reserve, they address the local, the regional, the national and the international level through the world network; but at the same time they directly address the international level – and also contribute

these experiences to the world network.

In the biosphere reserve Vosges du Nord/Pfälzerwald we consider our current and future challenges to be, above all:

- climate change and its consequences;
- promotion of biodiversity by networking and defragmenting habitats;
- the protection of life-sustaining systems from the impact of genetically modified organisms;
- water and resource management;
- soil conservation and decreasing the use of area;
- promotion of renewable energies and consequences for forestry;
- transboundary regional development and demographic development;
- taking care of visitors;
- intercultural dialogue;
- promotion of traditional knowledge and cultural diversity;
- education for sustainable development and

- creation of sustainable alternatives to solely market-oriented use and valorisation strategies.

The significance of transboundary cooperation and transboundary large-scale reserves has been explicitly recognised by numerous international bodies, for example by the seventh Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the World Parks Congress in 2003.

The President of the German Commission for UNESCO emphasized the significance of these 'other' biosphere reserves in his foreword to the documentation of the World Conference of transboundary biosphere reserves in 2004: "They add a new quality in the dialogue between nations and people. They tackle the challenge to implement sustainable development and at the same time to contribute substantially to transboundary dialogue and to establish a culture of peace through collaboration and co-habitation."

We hope that this view will be shared by others, particularly with regard to the upcoming UNESCO biosphere reserve conferences such as the EUROMAB conference in 2007 or the World Congress in 2008. The initiative of the German MAB National Committee to carry out the periodic evaluation of Vosges du Nord/Pfälzerwald together with the French sister-committee deserves special attention at the international level.

Roland Stein coordinates the Franco-German cooperation at the Vosges du Nord/Pfälzerwald biosphere reserve and other international cooperation projects. He is chairman of the European working group 'Transboundary Nature Conservation' based at the World Commission for Nature Reserves (WCPA) of IUCN.

