The 3rd World Congress of Biosphere Reserves

The World Congress of Biosphere Reserves hosted in Madrid, Spain, from 4 to 8 February 2008 is only the third of its kind. Entitled 'Biosphere Futures, UNESCO Biosphere Reserves for Sustainable Development', it follows two massively influential conferences in 1984 in Minsk, Belarus and 1995 in Seville, Spain.

One of the major tasks of the World Congress is to stress the progress made since 1995 in biosphere reserves with respect to biodiversity conservation, sustainable development, human migration, economic sustainability, and the role that biosphere reserves can play as learning laboratories.

The following main themes are considered: Evaluation of the 'Millennium Ecosystem Assessment' with regard to the zonation of biosphere reserves; exchange of experiences with regard to the theme 'learning laboratories' and possibilities of initiating political and public relations to that effect; improvement of regional networking. In the 'Madrid Action Plan (2008–2012) the congress will eventually define the role of biosphere reserves in the 21st century.

Details about the World Congress are available at http://www.unesco.org/mab/madrid/congress2008.shtml

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Can Gio Mangrove

Vietnam

As the name already indicates, mangrove forests are the most important vegetation in this Vietnamese biosphere reserve. The territory, which covers 757 km² of salt water and brackish water mangroves, spans the area from the coast of the South China Sea to Ho Chi Minh City. The mangrove area is known as the 'green lung' of this huge industrial metropolis; it boasts a high biodiversity with over 200 species of plants.

The destruction caused by the wars of the last century had a drastic effect on the ecosystems in Vietnam; Can Gio was no exception. Rehabilitation and reforestation of the mangroves were already underway in the early seventies. Can Gio is one of the largest rehabilitated mangrove regions in the world today due to the commitment of the local population. The impact gradient from the city to the sea is of special interest to scientific nature conservation.

A major challenge for the biosphere reserve these days is to combine the reforestation programme with the fishing industry and aquaculture in a sustainable manner. Some of the 58,000 inhabitants use their land for aquaculture and salt production, other families with no land must earn their living by catching crabs and collecting firewood. The biosphere reserve intends to examine and solve the conflicts between the residents on the one hand and between the economical use and nature conservation on the other. The protection of spawning areas and the development of tourism should also be considered. Success stories along the way make Can Gio a model region for sustainable economic activities.

Further information: http://www.unesco.org/mabdb/br/brdir/directory/biores.asp?mode=all&Code=VIE+01

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