

EuroMAB Conference 2022: “Tying cultures. Crossborder cooperation between societies and generations”, Salzburger Lungau und Kärntner Nockberge Biosphere Reserve, Bad Kleinkirchheim, 12–16 September 2022

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Abstract

From September 12 to 16, 2022, the 13th EuroMAB meeting took place in Bad Kleinkirchheim in the Carinthian part of the Salzburg Lungau and Carinthian Nockberge Biosphere Park in Austria. This conference of the UNESCO-EuroMAB regional network, originally planned for 2021 but postponed due to the covid pandemic, was attended by about 150 delegates from 27 countries.



Figure 1 – Conference participants enjoying the on top of the mountain social evening. © Nockberge Management

development and biodiversity conservation between BR managers, scientists, national MAB Committees, UNESCO representatives and partner organizations. EuroMAB conferences have so far taken place in České Budějovice (Czech Republic, 1986), Minsk (Belarus, 1997), Cambridge (Great Britain, 2000), Rome (Italy, 2002), Hernstein (Austria, 2005), Antalya (Turkey, 2007), Stará Lesná (Slovakia, 2009), Lundsbrunn (Sweden, 2011), Brockville (Canada, 2013), Haapsalu (Estonia, 2015), Sarlat-la-Canéda (France, 2017), and Dublin (Ireland, 2019). The EuroMAB conferences are an excellent networking opportunity for European and North American BR managers, as well as for representatives of MAB National Committees and UNESCO Commissions – i. e. for all people involved in the concept and concerns of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. At the same time, the conferences present a perfect opportunity to advocate for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development around the world.

Introduction

The conference of the UNESCO-EuroMAB regional network, which usually takes place every two years, was held 12–16 September 2022 in Bad Kleinkirchheim, in the Carinthian part of the Salzburger Lungau und Kärntner Nockberge Biosphere Reserve (BR) in Austria (see Figure 1). Austria is thus the first country to host two EuroMAB meetings (the first was held in 2005, in the Wienerwald BR; ÖUK 2005).

The EuroMAB network includes all countries in Europe and North America that participate in the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme and its World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR). EuroMAB is the largest and oldest of the eight regional and seven thematic MAB networks. Currently comprising 308 BRs in 41 countries, it represents almost half of the BRs in the WNBR. The WNBR itself currently consists of 738 model regions (including 22 transboundary sites) in 134 countries.

EuroMAB is a platform for sharing knowledge, know-how and experience in the field of sustainable

The meeting

The EuroMAB 2022 Conference, originally planned for 2021 but postponed due to the Covid pandemic, gathered together around 150 delegates from 27 countries.

Under the theme *Tying cultures. Crossborder cooperation between societies and generations*, the topics discussed by conference participants in a plenary session and 14 workshops included how cooperation and communication in and between BRs, various stakeholders and institutions can be improved across national, generational and societal borders.

EuroMAB 2022 started with a public plenary session with two keynote speeches and a round table on the conference theme. The first keynote speaker, Valentin Inzko, a native Carinthian Slovene and former High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, explained that the location of the Nockberge mountains in southern Austria, close to the border with Slovenia and the Italian region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, has enabled a vibrant cultural exchange between the ethnic groups

Table 1 – Workshops at the EuroMAB Conference 2022.

Workshop title and main subjects of discussion	Chair/ Co-Chair(s)
Cooperation between Biosphere Reserves across national and regional borders	Barbara Engels (Germany), Michael Jungmeier (Austria)
Large carnivores in Biosphere Reserves – challenges and conflicts: How to deal with challenges and conflicts; methods for herd protection.	Anatolie Risina (Moldova), Stefan Lütke (Germany)
Neobiota in Biosphere Reserves: How to deal with the challenges; methods for prevention/ removal/ coexistence	Angelika Abderhalden (Switzerland), Harald Brenner (Austria)
Status of Mountain Biosphere Reserves: Challenges; partnerships; research strategy.	Pam Shaw (Canada)
Sustainable agriculture and food in Biosphere Reserves: (Re-)use of traditional knowledge for agricultural production and food preparation; agrobiodiversity; Biosphere Reserves and new EU Strategies (Farm to Fork Strategy; EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030); biocultural heritage.	Anna Agostini (Italy), Catherine Cibien (France)
Renewable energies in Biosphere Reserves: Challenges and opportunities; possible conflicts with nature conservation.	Kari Natland (Norway), Ed Forrest (Ireland)
Urban sprawl/settlement development, land use and demographic changes in Biosphere Reserves	Katharina Gugerell (Austria), Alicia May Donnellan Barraclough (Norway)
Mobility in Biosphere Reserves: Challenges, solutions (examples of good practice), and the role of Biosphere Reserve management.	Andy Bell (England), Annette Schmid (Switzerland)
Biosphere Reserves products and services: Branding/labelling; role of entrepreneurs.	Eve Ferguson (Canada), Ryo Kohsaka (Japan)
Promoting research in Biosphere Reserves: Partnerships between Biosphere Reserves and universities; how to promote the benefits of research for both Biosphere Reserves and universities.	Petr Cupa (Czech Republic), Erik Aschenbrand (Germany)
Biosphere Reserves as living laboratories for combatting climate change	Gaëlle Tavernier (Luxemburg), Johannes Prüter (Germany)
Responsible tourism in Biosphere Reserves: Codes of practice; visitor management and monitoring; how to measure whether people visit an area because it is a Biosphere Reserves; role of ecotourism; role of Biosphere Reserves as a resource for human health and wellbeing.	Simone Beck (Luxemburg), Kelly L. Ceriale (USA)
Female beekeepers in Biosphere Reserves	Ivana Kovačević (Slovenia)

and regions over many centuries. The parties involved continue to expand and deepen these exchanges.

The second keynote speaker, Gordana Beltram, from the Slovenian Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, used the example of the five-country, transboundary Mura-Drava-Danube BR (TBR MDD), recognized by UNESCO in 2021 and connecting Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia and Serbia (Köck et al. 2022), to show how intensive cooperation in the nature conservation sector across state borders can also overcome decades of political disputes. Drawing on their extensive experience of cross-border cultural relations, the two keynotes showed that the Nockberge region offers the perfect setting for the conference theme, namely the discussion of challenges and opportunities of cross-border cooperation between societies and generations.

The plenary event also marked the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Austrian MAB National Committee in a round table discussion on the Committee's past and future work. The Austrian MAB Committee was established in 1972, just one year after the founding of UNESCO's MAB Programme, on the basis of a contract with the Austrian Ministry of Science and Research at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW). Austria was thus among the first nations to participate in the MAB Programme (Köck & Grabherr 2014; Köck 2022).

The plenary event was closed by a further round table discussion on *Cross-border cooperation: challenges and best practice examples*, with representatives of the Triglav National Park (Slovenia), the Julian Alps Biosphere Reserve (Italy), the UNESCO Karawanken/Karavanke Geopark (transboundary between Austria and Slove-

nia), and the Nockberge region (Austria). This session also included the presentation of the international cooperation project *Transdisciplinary Education Collaboration for Transformations in Sustainability* (TRANSECTS).

A key element of EuroMAB conferences are of course their workshops, in which current important topics for BRs are discussed. A total of 14 workshops were held (see Table 1). With the support of the EuroMAB Steering Committee¹, the organizers' aims were dual: to follow up on open questions from the previous EuroMAB meeting in Dublin, and to select current topics that are both important for the Nockberge region and concern other BRs in the EuroMAB group.

Participants were particularly keen on the new workshop concept devised by the organizers, which encouraged them to leave the conference rooms and interact directly with the region and its inhabitants. For example, the workshop *Status of Mountain Biosphere Reserves* (Figure 2) was held in a farmer's bath house, the *Karlbäd*. The *Karlbäd*, an old mountain hut which dates back to the second half of the 17th century, is considered the last of its kind in the eastern Alps, is located at 1,693 m asl and has no electricity. The seven presentations therefore had to be made orally and with hand-outs. The discussions with representatives of the region and the excursions to see the best-practice examples encouraged lively discussion and were received with great enthusiasm by the 28 workshop participants.

¹ EuroMAB Steering Committee Members 2019–2022: Günter Köck (Austria), Catherine Cibien (France), Leslie Moore (Ireland), Anatolie Risina (Moldova), Szymon Ziobrowski (Poland), Meriem Bouamrane (UNESCO / MAB, France).



Figure 2 – Participants of the workshop Status of Mountain Biosphere Reserves. © Nockberge Management

During the last day of the conference, the workshop moderators presented a brief summary of the workshop outcomes. *BRs as living laboratories for combating climate change* is certainly worth mentioning in this context. Indeed, the 20 workshop participants summarized the results in a catchy slogan: „*Act local, shout loud!*“. Another slogan, „*We cannot manage what we cannot measure!*“ describing a key finding of the *Responsible tourism in Biosphere Reserves* workshop, emphasizes the urgent need to monitor visitor use in order to reduce the negative social and environmental impacts of tourism on a host community. To summarize the results of another workshop, *Cooperation between Biosphere Reserves across national and regional borders*, the moderators used an African proverb: „*If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.*“ Other workshops made very precise recommendations for future actions in their summaries. For example, the participants of *Renewable energies in Biosphere Reserves* recommended that the EuroMAB group should adopt a position stating that the core and buffer zones should not be considered appropriate areas for the development of renewable-energy projects. The transition area, however, could be considered favourable if the community showed support.

The workshops generated excellent ideas, approaches to solutions and future actions, but also identified future challenges. The reports of the workshop chairs, most of which include the presentations given in the workshops, can be downloaded from the conference homepage (<http://www.euromab2022.at>). The organizers are also preparing a comprehensive conference report, which will be published on the EuroMAB homepage (<http://www.euromab2022.at>) in the near future. The same website will continue to publish relevant topics until the next EuroMAB conference, scheduled for 2024.

A traditional highlight of all EuroMAB conferences, the popular so-called *Ethnic Evening*, provided the opportunity for delegates from the various BRs to bring, present and share their culinary, musical or festive specialities. In 2022, this evening turned out to be a very special occasion of friendship and *joie de vivre*, doubtless because participants were finally able to meet in person again after three years, following the Covid pandemic.

It was also important for the organizing team to give young people a voice, a key concern of the



Figure 3 – Conference participants sign the youth programme's Call4Action © Nockberge Management

UNESCO-MAB Programme. For the first time at a EuroMAB conference, a separate Youth Programme was therefore organized. Nine young adults from eight countries were able to participate in this international conference without any costs and to contribute with their creative ideas regarding BRs. The aim of this particular event was for more experienced colleagues and young people together to develop ideas, visions and possibilities for how young people can be meaningfully involved and engaged in the development of BRs. The last day of the conference gave these younger participants the possibility to present their concrete ideas and results to the plenary. They also presented a *Call 4 Action* to UNESCO, for the active and meaningful involvement of teenagers and young adults in BRs, including in decision-making processes. In order to highlight the dedication of this young generation, we quote from their *Call 4 Action* (Figure 3):

“We call on the attendants of EuroMAB Conference, delegations from Biosphere Reserves, National Committees and UNESCO representatives to ensure the genuine and meaningful participation of young people in the governance and management of Biosphere Reserves and MAB programme, through the appointment of young representatives who can take part in decision-making processes at a local, national, and international level; by electing young members in BR coordinating bodies and councils, MAB National Committees and Regional Network Steering Committees.”

“Moreover, we call on the EuroMAB Steering Committee to create a seat for a youth representative, who will represent the EuroMAB Youth Network in discussions, coordination, and preparation of the next EuroMAB Conference. We recommend this be an extra seat given to the next hosting country. This will ensure true and meaningful participation of young members of the MAB Programme and in the activities of the Regional Network and beyond.”

In order to support the message of this *Call 4 Action* and as a sign of appreciation for the work of the youth group, the Call was signed by all conference attendees. The Call is part of the 44-page report on the youth programme, which can also be downloaded from the conference homepage (Schäfer et al. 2022).

A large poster exhibition, which could be visited throughout the conference, offered representatives

the opportunity to present their BRs and to share their scientific work and other projects.

It was important to the organizers to include people and businesses from the surrounding region as well as BRs from neighbouring countries, with whom the Nockberge Management has been cooperating closely for many years. For example, a group of about 30 representatives from the Triglav National Park and the Julian Alps BR (Slovenia) participated in the opening plenary event.

To round off the EuroMAB meeting, a post-conference tour led a group of participants from Canada, Japan, Switzerland and Austria to the Julian Alps, where Slovenian and Italian BRs cooperate closely across their state borders. Among other places, the group visited the Slovenian Soča Valley and the National Park Centre in Trenta (Slovenia) as well as the Italian village of Venzona. The visits generated a lively exchange of views with colleagues from both BRs.

In closing the conference, Meriem Bouamrane, the representative of the MAB Secretariat in Paris (France), expressed her sincere gratitude on behalf of all conference participants to the people and institutions without whom the conference would not have been possible: the Nockberge Management team coordinated by Heinz Mayer and Marlies Mayer; a core group of the Austrian MAB National Committee consisting of Günter Köck, Marianne Penker, Arne Arnberger, Therese Walder-Wintersteiner (Youth Affairs Coordinator of the Austrian Commission for UNESCO) and Jörg Böckelmann; the hosts of the external workshop events, and a large group of local volunteers.

The organizing committee is indebted to the Carinthian Provincial Government for funding the EuroMAB conference and the social evening *on top of the mountain* (Figure 1); to the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research for covering the costs of the conference dinner at Landskron Castle, and to the Austrian Commission for UNESCO for funding the youth programme. Many thanks are also due to Kati Heinrich from the Institute for Interdisciplinary Mountain Research (IGF) in Innsbruck (Austria) for setting up and maintaining the conference homepage, and to Lisa Wolf (E.C.O. Klagenfurt) for her professional moderation of the plenary events.

The next EuroMAB conference will be held in Germany in 2024. The newly formed EuroMAB Steering Committee² will provide expertise in the strategic planning of the conference.

Conclusion

In summary, this year's EuroMAB conference was a great success. The efforts to organize an environ-



Figure 4 – Workshop participants are „Crazy about Tomorrow“. © Nockberge Management

mentally friendly and resource-saving event with short walking distances were successful, as were the measures taken to make the conference affordable for practically all people interested in participating.

Both the participants and the moderators of the workshops were very positive about the new workshop format devised by the organizers. The feedback from local stakeholders also showed that by holding the workshops in various locations in the region, local people showed greater interest in the conference and became more aware of the international significance of their region. Furthermore, residents could see not only the immediate local benefits of such an event, but also its much wider promotional effect. In consequence, this workshop format can be recommended wholeheartedly for future EuroMAB conferences.

The organizers' concern to give young people a voice was also realized. The successful youth programme demonstrated the importance of meaningful participation by young people in the decision-making processes of BRs, and of inter-generational collaboration for learning from each other mutually. The results of the youth workshop were remarkable and extremely helpful: they will inform future work of the MAB programme and its BRs. Nevertheless, it would probably be preferable not to separate young people out in a special youth programme, but to integrate them directly into all conference events.

Finally, the extremely positive spirit at this conference showed that nothing can better face-to-face meetings, whatever the sophisticated online conference tools we may have at our disposal.

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² EuroMAB Steering Committee Members 2022–2024: Günter Köck (Austria), Katrine Dietrich (Denmark), Barbara Engels (Germany), Leslie Moore (Ireland), Anatolie Risina (Moldova), Meriem Bouamrane (UNESCO/MAB, France).

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