

Report of the EuroMAB Conference 2013, *Engaging our Communities*, Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve, Brockville (Ontario, Canada), 15–19 October 2013

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Abstract

The EuroMAB Network includes all European and North-American member states which participate in the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme and in UNESCO's (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR). EuroMAB is the largest and oldest of the Regional MAB Networks and is made up of 52 countries, including Canada and the USA, and 289 biosphere reserves (BRs). Bringing together almost half of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, the EuroMAB Network is a platform for sharing knowledge, know-how and experience of sustainable development, as well as a collective tool for supporting sustainable development practices among BR coordinators, scientists and MAB National Committees. Since the first meeting in 1986 in České Budějovice, Czech Republic, the MAB National Committees and BR coordinators of EuroMAB have met almost every two years. Previous EuroMAB conferences have been held in Minsk, Belarus (1997), Cambridge, UK (2000), Rome, Italy (2002), Hernstein, Austria (2005), Antalya, Turkey (2007), Stará Lesná, Slovakia (2009), and Lundsbrunn, Sweden (2011). EuroMAB meetings are dedicated to bringing together BR coordinators, BR experts, MAB National Committees and partner institutions.

EuroMAB Conference 2013

EuroMAB 2013 gathered more than 190 delegates from 27 European and North-American countries. At Brockville, Ontario, Canada, inside the spectacular Frontenac Arch BR, delegates spent four days working together to forge links with each other, build capacity and understanding between nations and biosphere reserves, develop strategies for effectively promoting the BR network and the MAB Programme, resolve some of the most pressing issues for BR management and share experiences with colleagues. Guided tours within Frontenac Arch BR completed the conference.

EuroMAB 2013 was organized around several key issues, goals, and priorities: building the capacity of BRs to be more self-sufficient, promoting the network of BRs and addressing the new strategic direction of the MAB Programme 2014–2021. The conference motto *Engaging our Communities* put particular emphasis on interacting with local populations, in addition to partners from first nations, academia, businesses, non-profit organizations and government.

Based on the positive experience of past EuroMAB meetings, nine participatory themed workshops (see Table 1) were held to provide details on MAB's future strategy. Some themes were kept on from existing EuroMAB thematic groups, while new ones were put in place in response to current and emerging needs.

Two plenary sessions (The Benefits of Partnership and Social Learning; Rural Sustainability) acted as triggers for intense and fruitful discussions among participants and as a source of inspiration for the ensuing workshops and discussion groups.

After extensive discussions, workshops and plenary working meetings, the EuroMAB 2013 Conference identified core themes and recommendations to be considered in the future MAB strategy. This future strategy should confirm the role of BRs as learning platforms for sustainable development, both within

Table 1 – List of themed workshops at EuroMAB 2013

Social Enterprise Development in BRs: Exploring a Framework for Sustainable Development Based on Social Enterprise
Trans-boundary BRs: Towards More Effective Management of Shared Ecosystems and Sustainable Development of Bordering Territories
BRs and EuroMAB Communications and Marketing
Tools to Build Collaboration: A Review of Innovative Tools from BRs Used to Engage Communities
Collaborating with Indigenous Peoples: A Dialogue to Rethink our Approach and to Learn from Existing Success and Challenges
Facilitating Collaboration and Consensus in Land Management Decisions: Facilitation Skills Training Workshop
Sustainable Mining: How to Engage the Private Sector
Strengthening the BR Network Management Framework: Updated Tools and World Network Management Strategy
Ecosystem Services: Understanding the Concept and its Application in Landscape Management and Sustainable Development

UNESCO and the broader UN system. This strategy will bring a crucial contribution in the world's sustainability agenda. Workshop reports provided recommendations for three spheres: local level, EuroMAB Network and international level.

EuroMAB 2013 collectively identified six core themes for further consideration:

- Enhanced communication between BRs to improve information sharing, mentoring and dialogue;
- more effective communication strategies and expertise to engage wider communities;
- branding and participation;
- collaborative relationships of support among BRs at local, national, regional and international level;
- sustainability of non-renewable resource extraction activities such as mining;
- BRs as local organizations connected to an international network.

The outcome of the conference will be shared with stakeholders and policy-makers dealing with biodiversity conservation and sustainable development issues.

The EUROMAB 2013 conference report is available in English and French online at:

http://www.unesco.org/science/doc/euroMAB/2013_EuroMAB-Report_ENG.PDF

http://www.unesco.org/science/doc/euroMAB/2013_EuroMAB-Report_FR.PDF

This report provides a summary of the key presentations and messages, workshop results, plenary discussions and recommendations for more effective BR management and promotion at local, national and international level.

Read more about the EuroMAB programme on <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/ecological-sciences/man-and-biosphere-programme/networks/euromab/>

To conclude, the EuroMAB 2013 conference was another excellent networking opportunity for European and North-American biosphere reserves, MAB National Committees and scientists as well as a perfect occasion to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable development around the world.

Special thanks are due to the Organizing Committee: Jean-Philippe L. Messier (Chair, Canadian Biosphere Reserve Association), Dominique Potvin (Canadian Commission for UNESCO), Meriem Bouamrane (UNESCO-MAB Secretariat), Stan Boychuk, (Chair, Canadian MAB Committee), Gary Clarke (Conference Chair) and the large group of local volunteers. The EuroMAB community is looking forward to the next EuroMAB conference, hosted in 2015 by the Republic of Estonia.

Author

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is Secretary-General of the Austrian MAB National Committee, Vice-Chair of the UNESCO MAB Programme, and the Austrian delegate to the European Alliance of Global Change Research Committees, member of the Scientific Board of Hohe Tauern National Park, as well as one of the Austrian delegates to the International Scientific Committee for Alpine Research. In 2009 he became co-editor of *eco.mont*.