

Report of the EuroMAB Conference 2017, *Building a sustainable future together*, Dordogne Basin Biosphere Reserve, Sarlat-la-Canéda, (France), 4–7 April 2017

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Abstract

The EuroMAB Network includes all European and North-American member states which participate in UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme and its World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR). EuroMAB is the largest and oldest of the nine regional and inter-regional MAB Networks. It is made up of 36 countries, including Canada and the USA, and includes 302 biosphere reserves (BRs). Bringing together almost half of the total WNBR sites, 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 nearly every two years. 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), Lundsbrunn, Sweden (2011), Brockeville, Canada (2013), and Haapsalu, Estonia (2015). EuroMAB meetings are dedicated to bringing together BR managers, coordinators, scientists and representatives of UNESCO's MAB Secretariat, MAB National Committees and partner institutions/associations.



EuroMAB 2017 gathered more than 220 delegates from 41 countries at Sarlat-la-Canéda, France, inside the beautiful Dordogne Basin BR, the largest BR in France and one of the rare BRs within the WNBR that incorporate a whole catchment basin.

The aim of the meeting was in keeping with the 4th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves held in Lima (Peru) in March 2016, which led to the adoption of the *Lima Action Plan (LAP) 2016–2025*. The LAP is a new ten-year action plan for the MAB Programme, with nearly 60 concrete actions for strengthening the WNBR and its individual BRs over the next ten years, and aims to promote synergies between BRs and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations' *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, adopted in Paris in 2015.

Under the motto *Building a Sustainable Future Together*, conference participants discussed how BRs can contribute to SDGs, to multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), and to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change 2015. In addition, participants worked on identifying which new types of partnerships are necessary for an ecological transition, how to

set them up and how to maintain and promote them in the long run.

EuroMAB 2017 started with a public conference attracting more than 340 representatives of the BRs of the EuroMAB network, sustainable development stakeholders, experts, researchers, representatives of National Committees, UNESCO, the French government and French public organizations. In his opening address Christophe Aubel (Director of the French Agency for Biodiversity), highlighted the challenges of biodiversity conservation and its inalienability in securing a sustainable future.

To facilitate collective approaches and collaborative projects, 16 participative workshops were organized to address more than two-thirds of the 17 SDGs (Table 1).

Many participants used the poster exhibition and side events to present their BRs and scientific work and other projects carried out in their BRs (e.g. L. Gohan, Israel Institute of Technology: *How does the planning process impact Biosphere Reserve implementation?*; G. Köck, Austrian Academy of Sciences: *MAB Research in Austria*; A. Bell, UK, and G. Clarke, Canada: *International Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities*). Philippe Pypaert (UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, Venice) announced the 2017 MAB Youth Forum which will be held from 18–22 September 2017 in the Po Delta BR in Rosolina Mare (Italy). The Forum targets young adults, aged between 18 and 35, who live or work in BRs, or who study or conduct research in the areas. It will offer a unique opportunity for participants to meet, debate and share their vision and commitment to sustainable development.

The EuroMAB meeting also became the scene of an *unforeseen* example of local participation when groups of supporters as well as opponents of a new bypass road construction for the village of Beynac used it to present, in peaceful actions, their arguments and concerns to the conference participants.

Table 1 – Workshops at the EuroMAB Conference 2017.

Workshop title	Chairs and presenters	SDGs addressed ¹
Communication and branding – developing the MAB Global Communication Strategy	Eve Ferguson (Canada), Jeff Melnyk (UK), Laurie Bennett (UK)	8, 12
Partnerships between BRs and universities	Maureen Reed (Canada), Catherien Cibien (France), Alice Roth (France), Heinrich Mayer (Austria)	4, 17
Support desk	Vanja Debevec (Slovenia), Petr Čupa (Czech Republic), Raphaël Mathevet (France), Marja Spierenburg (Netherlands)	17
Governance	Mireille Jardin (France), Olaf Ostermann (Germany)	17
Networking river and watershed BRs – building a continental freshwater ecosystems MAB network	Guy Pustelnik (France), Eva Jelínková (Czech Republic)	6, 17
BRs and scientific partnerships	Anna Echassoux (France), Martin Price (UK), Maureen Reed (Canada), Phyllis Green (USA), Andrew Bell (UK), Pamela Shaw (USA)	17
Urban areas – an opportunity for BRs to work for (and with?) people where they live	Leslie Moore (Ireland), Rich Howorth (UK), Marco Valle (Italy), Niamh Ni Cholmain (Ireland)	11, 13
EuroMAB partnerships around the Mediterranean	Ken Reyna (France), Gordana Beltram (Slovenia)	17
Transboundary BRs	Mireille Jardin (France), Álvaro de Torres Suárez (Spain)	17
Nord MAB – Training workshops in communication for BRs within the NordMAB network	Kari Evensen Natland (Norway), Johanna MacTaggart (Sweden), Jeff Melnyk (UK)	6, 17
Ecosystem services, stakeholders and territories	Cécile Barnaud (France), Juana Barber Rosado (Spain)	1, 3, 6, 10, 12, 15
Connection with nature, human well-being	Anne-Caroline Prévot (France), Christian Diry (Austria)	3, 15
Indigenous people	Larry McDermott (Canada), Rebecca Hurwitz (Canada)	10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17
BRs and climate change	Jean-Philippe Messier (Canada), Barbara Engels (Germany), Andrew Bell (UK)	7, 13
Partnerships between BRs and the economic sector	Johanna MacTaggart (Sweden), Carlo Ossola (Switzerland), Catherine Cibien (France), Annette Schmidt (Switzerland), Colin Campbell (UK), Laure Bou (France), Juliette Cerceau (France)	8, 12, 17
International Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities	Andy Bell (UK), Gary Clarke (Canada)	11, 12, 15

¹ Numbers according to the official UN numberings of SDGs – <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals>

A traditional element of all EuroMAB meetings from the beginning, the popular so-called *ethnic evening* provided the opportunity for the BRs to bring, present and share their culinary, musical or festive specialties. Study trips within Dordogne Basin BR as well as pre/post-conference tours to four other French BRs completed the conference.

On the last day of the conference, a group of workshop rapporteurs presented a first summary of the main issues addressed in the workshops. The EuroMAB 2017 reflected the readiness of BRs from Europe, Canada and USA to contribute actions and efforts to promote the SDGs and implement the LAP. There was a clear shift in the MAB programme presentations, with an emphasis on the growing importance and momentum of sustainable development and participatory site management. Research – as one of the three key functions of the programme – also received a lot of attention, and in a more inclusive way than before: there was a strong focus on inter- and transdisciplinary research, firmly integrating social sciences as well as local and indigenous knowledge, and on the practical application of research outcomes.

Proposals for partnerships between BRs related to effective management of BRs and included local communities, business partners and international organizations. Governance was addressed in many discussions and a wide range of successful models were presented

as well. More detailed research on that topic can be expected in the future.

Discussion also covered several projects with distinguished results in education, public awareness and scientific research. It could be demonstrated that outcomes of these activities have helped to strengthen efforts in addressing the issues related to ecosystem services and to climate change. A Memorandum of Understanding for cooperation between BRs focusing on continental freshwater ecosystems within the MAB network was prepared, as well as cooperation between sites containing cities.

There was strong emphasis on establishing effective communication between BRs and participants of workshops proposed ways to ensure continuity in the exchange of ideas, best practices and progress through joint actions. The EuroMAB network will share positive outcomes of recent work with other networks. Communication tools that were developed and tested in BRs will be shared within the Asian and AfriMAB networks.

The support desk workshop was organized by the members of the International Advisory Committee (IAC) for BRs. Participants addressed several issues related to nomination and periodic review processes. A revision of the forms was proposed as well as the need for Operational Guidelines. The assurance of proper forms of support that will be available in the future – in cooperation with members of IAC – and

the proposed mentoring programme for BRs were considered very useful.

To conclude, the EuroMAB 2017 conference was another excellent networking opportunity for European and North-American BRs, MAB National Committees and scientists. Furthermore, it was a perfect venue for sharing experiences, views and ideas, as well as a great occasion to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable development around the world. Special thanks are due to the Organizing Committee: Catherine Cibien (Secretary General, MAB France), Didier Babin (Chair, MAB France), Meriem Bouamrane (UNESCO-MAB Secretariat), Germinal Peiro (Chair (Chair Dordogne Basin BR, EPIDOR), Guy Pustelnik (Coordinator Dordogne Basin BR, EPIDOR) and his team, plus a large group of local volunteers. The EuroMAB community is looking forward to the next EuroMAB conference, hosted in 2019 by the Republic of Ireland in Dublin Bay BR.

More information about the EuroMAB network as well as the official Conference Report can be found at <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/ecological-sciences/man-and-biosphere-programme/networks/euromab/>

Detailed information about the 2017 MAB Youth Forum and the application form are available at <https://www.MYForum2017.com/>

Authors

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