

The path towards setting up the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Salzburger Lungau & Kärntner Nockberge

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Abstract

In March 2004 the Regionalverbund (regional association) of the Lungau region (Salzburg Province) initiated a meeting with representatives from agriculture, tourism, business as well as with mayors, chaired by the *Gemeindeentwicklung* Salzburg (municipal development service), where the idea of establishing a biosphere reserve (BR) was quite well received.

Geographer Birgit Reutz-Hornsteiner reported on Großes Walsertal BR (Vorarlberg), at that time the only BR in Austria to fulfill the criteria of the new Seville Strategy. As the meeting ended, all chamber representatives expressed their support for continuing work on the BR proposal apace.

In a next step, a working group was established. It contacted the Austrian National MAB Committee and also sought the view of conservation authorities. Anita Moser (municipal development service) prepared the presentation to the MAB Committee.

Profile

Protected area

UNESCO BR Salzburger Lungau & Kärntner Nockberge

Mountain range

Alps

Country

Austria

Timeline

In April 2004 the Lungau municipality of Ramingstein, the Austrian Alpine Forum, the bioregion Murau (Styria) and many interested individuals jointly organized a special conference on *A Lungau – Murau Biosphere Reserve as a development impulse for the region*. Many renowned experts supported the idea.

After the conference, the Lungau Women's Network set up a working group of women and men to develop the proposal of a BR in Lungau further and to maintain contact with the Murau region in the neighbouring province of Styria.

What happened next:

- working group established in May 2004;
- compilation of preliminary results and preparatory work towards a BR proposal;
- excursion to the BRs Großes Walsertal (Vorarlberg, Austria) and Entlebuch (Switzerland);
- preparation of status quo report on the Lungau region;
- cooperation with the *Gemeindeentwicklung* (municipal development service of Salzburg province administration);
- ongoing contact with the Murau bioregion (Styria);
- preparatory talks with Chamber of Commerce, Chamber of Agriculture and *Ferienregion* (Holiday Region) Lungau;
- September 2004: BR concept presented to all mayors in the Lungau region;
- participation in the meeting of the bioregions in St. Blasen near Murau;
- October 2004: presentation of the *Lebensraum Lungau – unsere Biosphäre* project (Living and Working in Lungau – our Biosphere) at a meeting of the regional association of the Lungau region. The project envisaged a broad debate of the BR theme in



Figure 1 – The photograph was taken on 1 August 2012 during a walk through the protected area of Rosanin, from the Sauereggnock (2240 m), looking NNE towards the peaks of Ochsenriegel and Schülbernock and the Schönfeld area (partly hidden behind Mt Stubennock). © SLK, W. Bedek

- the general public as a vital prerequisite to any decision to set up a BR;
- preparation of arguments for a bioregion as a development perspective;
- meeting of the bioregions in Schlierbach (Upper Austria);
- joint submission of a Biosphere Region Lungau-Murau-Nockberge in the cross-border project *Murquell Lebensraum* with the Nockberge region (Carinthia) and the Alpenforum International (Dr. Meerkamp van Empden) to the CIPRA competition;
- 1 August 2005: MAB Committee Workshop in Vienna dedicated to preparing a catalogue of criteria for BRs in Austria.

The municipal development service *Gemeindeentwicklung Salzburg* prepared a presentation, which included the key data and the proposed next steps. This presentation was then debated with representatives of the

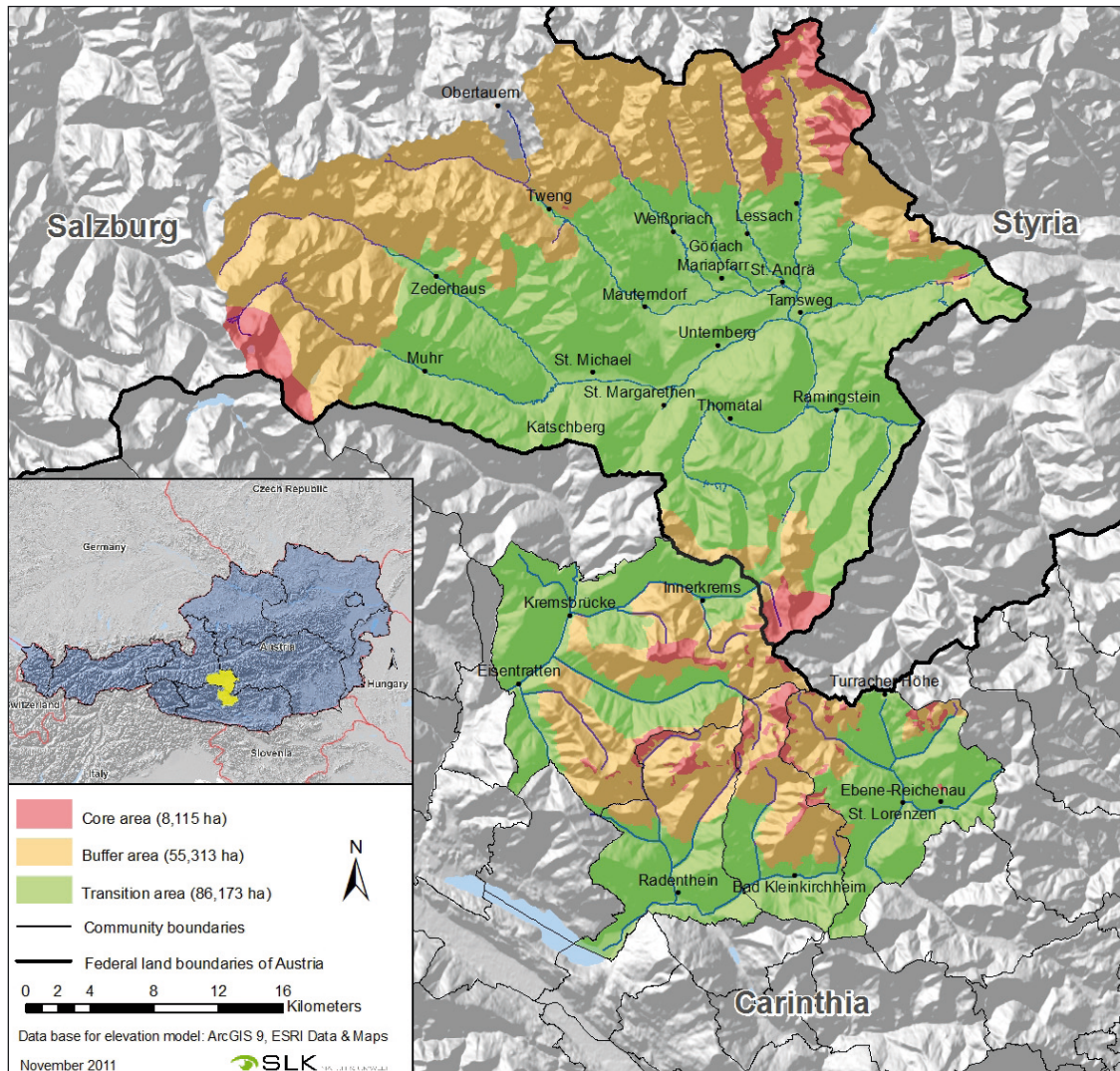


Figure 2 – UNESCO BR Salzburger Lungau & Kärntner Nockberge.

chambers, the Lungau Regional Association and the working group. On 19 October 2005, it was presented to the MAB Committee in Vienna (chair Georg Grabherr), which endorsed the efforts in Lungau in principle. The committee suggested further serious reflection on the core zone and ensuring the support of Salzburg province.

On 24 April 2006, the RegioMarket Project *Lebensraum Lungau* (Lungau Lifeworld) was kicked off with a workshop in Tamsweg. Three product groups evolved out of the workshop:

- *Alternative energy and economy* – spokesperson H. Spreitzer, Director, Chamber of Commerce.
- *Agriculture and food* – spokesperson E. Löcker.
- *Services and tourism* – regional consultant M. Roskopf.

Within the RegioMarket project, many participants from the Lungau visited Großes Walsertal BR in Vorarlberg. It is the first Austrian BR to be recognized as meeting the Seville criteria. The visitors gathered important inputs for a roadmap towards a Lungau BR.

Not much progress was made between 2007 and 2009. In 2009 the new management team of the Lungau Regional Association took a fresh look at the concept

and held the first public debate in May on a Lungau BR. At that time there was no majority in favour of a BR in the district of Murau, on the Styrian side. In the Lungau (Salzburg), the Regional Association launched a broad information campaign in cooperation with a regional newspaper. Numerous events addressed as many target groups as possible and a committee of individuals was formed that met many specific interests.

By 2011 negotiations with the province of Salzburg and with affected land owners took place, who were prepared to provide the missing conservation areas on the basis of conservation agreements. When these were completed, the fully prepared submission was handed in to the MAB committee at the end of 2011. At the last moment, the Carinthian Nockberge region had rejoined the BR Lungau as the project gathered momentum and what few had thought possible became a reality: a cross-border application for Salzburger Lungau & Kärntner Nockberge BR to the MAB committee. On 11 July 2012, UNESCO granted the designation Biosphere Reserve.

In autumn 2012 a regional *agenda process* for the Lungau district is due to start. Over the following ap-

prox. 20 months, it serves to implement and present the opportunities of the UNESCO designation for the region in numerous workshops and through other activities across the entire BR area. There will be a mix of regional activities and actions at municipal level as well as those targeted at specific groups. The BR management is already in place and will coordinate, initiate and direct all these processes in the region and will draw up a management plan for Lungau BR. This will serve as a guideline for identifying priority projects and ideas because they are particularly dear to the Lungau population. The aim is for a kind of manual to emerge that encapsulates a vision of what direction future developments in the Lungau should and will take in the coming years and decades. The widest possible involvement of the people in the region is a prerequisite and informs this approach.

The initial goal of obtaining the BR designation in 2012 has been reached. The next step is the successful implementation of the BR concept within the BR area. The BR management aims to motivate as many people as possible to get involved in shaping the Lungau and Nockberge regions and to benefit from the opportunities the BR designation opens up. Internationally, the aim is to make the BR one of the most successful and active BRs in the world. To this end, a marketing offensive will promote the unique status of the area that the BR designation confers.

Characteristic features

For many millennia the Lungau-Nockberge region has been settled by humans. The patchwork structure and scenic beauty of the area are its main attractions for visitors from all over the world. This national and international interest in the cultural and scenic characteristics is a key economic asset for the region. There is a global and rising demand for ecologically sustainable leisure options and for experiencing unspoiled nature. The region is predestined to meet such demand as a model area for sustainable tourism coupled with maintaining regional characteristics. These characteristics include

- the long tradition of land cultivation in the Niedere Tauern and the Nockberge mountains;
- traditional cultivation methods in agriculture and forestry in the valleys;
- high-mountain pastures as a special feature;
- high potential demand for the many typical products of the region;
- a highly varied patchwork of pristine nature and cultural landscapes shaped by humans;
- a patchwork of small agricultural areas;
- a wealth of landscape elements;
- a high potential for recreation and leisure options.

The BR provides an opportunity to boost intra-regional economic cycles, thus securing the economic independence of the region. On the basis of this independence, projects and developments at regional level

can be pursued more efficiently and be better adapted to the location.

Habitats in the new BR

The BR Salzburger Lungau & Kärntner Nockberge is a typical example of inner-Alpine landscapes and lifeworlds. The richly varied patchwork landscape and the great altitudinal range from ca. 600 m to just above 3000 m means that the Lungau-Nockberge region has a share in most of the major and typical ecosystems of the Central Alps.

Of particular interest is the multitude of habitats created by human land use across the elevations, which would disappear if such traditional use was abandoned. Characteristic mountain grassland is mown

Infobox

Biosphere Reserve Lungau & Kärntner Nockberge

Established: July 2012

Location: 46° 58' 09" N, 13° 43' 32" E (central point)

Size: 1 520 km², largest BR in Austria, as big as the other six BRs put together!

Core area(s): Salzburg 56.91 km²; Carinthia 25.01 km²; BR total: 81.92 km² or 5.52% of the total area. Core zones in Salzburg are made up of parts of Hohe Tauern National Park; parts of Natura 2000 areas and protected landscapes with added contractual protection. Core zones in Carinthia are made up of parts of the Natura 2000 area in the core zone of the existing Nockberge National Park, with added contractual protection.

Buffer zone(s): Salzburg 382 km²; Carinthia 170.35 km²; BR total: 552.35 km² or 36.96% of the total area

Transition area(s): Salzburg 572.04 km²; Carinthia 289.69 km²; BR total 859.93 km² or 57.52% of the total area

Altitudinal range:

Salzburg: 945 m (Ramingstein) to 3076 m (Großer Hafner)

Carinthia: 558 m (Millstätter See) to 2440 m (Rosennock)

Climate: alpine, continental

Temperature: summer avg. 15°C, dry coldness in winter, down to minus 25°C.

The Lungau district is a sunny high valley but also Austria's coldspot.

Precipitation: 600–1 100 mm per annum

Main rivers: Taurach, Mur

Population: approx. 34 000 (in 19 municipalities); approx. 21 000 in Salzburg, 13 000 in Carinthia

Land use: agriculture, forestry, mountain animal husbandry, tourism (skiing, hiking, cycling)

Geology: limestone, dolomite, slate, quartzite and gneiss

Vegetation: meadows, arable fields, pastures, moors, deciduous forest (up to approx. 1 400 m), coniferous forest up to the tree line at 1 950 m. Mountain pastures. Dwarf shrubs and lichen at high altitudes.

Flora: 700 species of lichen, 1 400 higher native plants

Birds: 125 species of breeding birds

Authorities in charge:

Regionalverband Lungau, Mauterndorf, Salzburg

Biosphärenpark-Komitee, Ebene Reichenau, Carinthia

Salzburg: www.biosphaerenpark.eu

Carinthia: www.nationalparknockberge.at

once or twice and complemented by meagre mountain pastures. These landscape elements are situated at or just below the climatic tree line and thus always endangered by shrub encroachment. Alpine meadows and scrub heath at and above the tree line are very important to the farmers who use it as high mountain pastures that relieve the lower mountain pastures.

The moist meadows, so common in the valleys, are mostly used in an extensive fashion, because mowing on wet ground is very time-consuming, with low yields. Heavy machinery cannot be used on moist meadows anyway, so manual cultivation is the only possible way here. Such extensive grassland cultivation results in particularly high species diversity as the more competitive species are regularly taken out by mowing, giving light-loving species the opportunity to flower. Unlike common practice in more favoured locations, mountain pastures are normally not fertilized except by the manure produced *in situ*.

The Überlingmoor in the BR is one of the largest contiguous bog complexes in Austria. The Andertal raised bog in St. Lorenzen is a Ramsar and Natura 2000 wetland of international significance. There is a remarkable range of bogs on the south-east facing slopes of Mt Preber, where you can find very rare plants, such as spoonleaf sundew, felwort, small cranberry, marsh club moss, dwarf birch, various rare types of mosses and sedges as well as rosemary heath.

Great opportunity for adding value in tourism

The region is popular as a tourist destination and as such holds out great potential for producers and direct marketing. Quality products from the region have been gaining in status for quite some time, opening up synergies between agriculture and tourism. Such synergies would also further the geographic linkage within the area, as not all municipalities within the BR function under identical conditions. Linking the different zones of the BR is a cross-border task involving two federal provinces. It will allow putting small-scale and decentralized regional development concepts, tailored to the local peculiarities and needs, in a transregional context.

Establishing intraregional economic and marketing cycles will allow adding more value in the region. Local products and services could make the region largely independent. One possibility would be marketing co-operatives like those successfully operating in Wienerwald BR.

Cooperation between federal provinces

In both federal provinces, functioning and well-established structures already exist to take on the management tasks. In Salzburg the BR management will be integrated into the Regional Association, with the appropriate qualified staff to meet requirements. The Regional Association represents all municipalities and,

in addition, the BR management will include representation of interests at regional level in order to ensure the broadest possible participation. In Carinthia all interests are currently represented by the National Park Board and National Park Committee, respectively. They are authorized to decide on all important developments within the National Park. Both structures have jointly pursued the development of the BR. In the BR, both bodies are joined in a BR Committee. Cooperation should continue in the successful tried and tested manner. The committee was constituted as soon as the BR designation was granted.

Both parts of the BR have been established according to the rules and structures of the relevant federal province. By the Austrian federal constitution, they thus have been initially established independently. All preparatory work required close cooperation and so does the day-to-day management. In the medium term, such BR steering across provincial borders should be taken over by a body set up as an association. The relevant statutes and procedures have yet to be drawn up. Initially, a working group will prepare and work on the joint issues and projects. Joint priority tasks will include

- a joint target document for long-term cooperation;
- a joint management plan to define the activities of the BR;
- joint research and education projects;
- municipal projects as needed and feasible;
- developing close cooperation with other Austrian BRs.

In addition, the two BR regions continuously share information as envisaged in agreement 15a, drawn up in 1978. In that joint target document, which came into force on 10 June 1978, an agreement was drawn up between the federal provinces of Carinthia, Salzburg and Styria on cooperating on issues of spatial planning in the Lungau – Murau – Nockberge area. The Lungau – Murau – Nockberge area in its current economic and social structure and its mountainous landscape presents rather similar conditions throughout for spatial planning, which should enable public resources to be used most efficiently and economically.

Author

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Studied management in Graz, spent two years of his course abroad in Spain and Finland; MSc in PR and integrated communication from Krems IMC University of Applied Sciences.

Born 1968 in Lessach / Lungau, married since 2010; one son, 20 months old.