
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Miguel Clüsener-Godt is a trained Ecologist. He joined UNESCO's Division of Ecological and Earth Sciences in 1990 and is working for the Man and the Biosphere programme. He is responsible for South-South Cooperation, the Ibero-American region and coastal zones and small islands and together with the partners from the Spanish Ministry of Environment, he is the Principal Organiser of the 3rd World Biosphere Reserve Congress, Madrid, Spain, 4–9 February 2008.

The special issue of the *International Journal of Environment and Sustainable Development* is entirely dedicated to biosphere reserves – they are *special places for people and nature* – where human, cultural and ecological development is driven by sustainable development and whose ultimate objective is to achieve a balance between conserving biological diversity, promoting human development while maintaining associated cultural values. The seven case studies presented in this special issue represent the major biogeographical regions of the world. They are members of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) – a network that functions within the framework of the Man and the Biosphere Programme of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO-MAB). In 2008 the network included 531 officially designated biosphere reserves in 105 countries worldwide.

The choice of biosphere reserve case studies are of particular significance as they present the needs, ambitions and achievements of the biosphere reserves from a site (Mount Kenya, Jiuzhaigou and Issyk-Kul Biosphere Reserves), island (La Palma Biosphere Reserve), country (Canadian network of biosphere reserves), transboundary (Pfälzeward-Vosges du Nord Transboundary Biosphere Reserve) and interregional perspective (the REDBIOS network). These case studies document the challenges, and achievements, faced by the biosphere reserves in implementing the Seville Strategy and their efforts to ensure a unique vision of sustainable development in the 21st century. They are in fact real success stories that will undoubtedly encourage and inspire other biosphere reserves in the WNBR.

Furthermore, the Special Issue will also become an important document for the implementation of the Madrid Action Plan, which emanated from the 3rd World Biosphere Reserve Congress, held from 4 to 9 February 2008 in Madrid, Spain.

It was during the 19th session of the International Coordinating Council of the MAB Programme (MAB-ICC) that the Spanish Minister for Environment,

Ms. Cristina Narbona Ruiz, announced Spain's offer to host the 3rd World Biosphere Reserves Congress entitled 'Biosphere Futures, UNESCO Biosphere Reserves for Sustainable Development'. The Minister also announced that the 20th Session of the MAB-ICC will be hosted on the same occasion. This announcement was made in the presence of the UNESCO Director-General, Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura and the President of the UNESCO General Conference, H.E. Mr. Musa Bin Jaafar Bin Hassan. This generous offer reiterates Spain's commitment to the biosphere reserve concept – in the country where the Seville Strategy and the Statutory Framework of Biosphere Reserves was born.

The special issue is, therefore, timely and highly relevant to the future objectives of the WNBR. One of the major tasks of the Congress is to recall 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. It will also be an occasion to look forward into the future and I'm confident that the success stories contained in this special issue will serve as an example to other biosphere reserves of the accomplishments that can be obtained through careful planning and astute management.

During the first meeting of the Organising Committee in UNESCO Headquarters on 12 January 2007, it was agreed that the Congress would discuss five main themes, as identified at the 19th session of the MAB-ICC in October 2006:

- 1 What are the experiences and tools developed in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment that could improve management and governance of Biosphere Reserves and increase the capacity to deal with change and uncertainty? How can BR contribute to improve management and valuation of ecosystem services?
- 2 What are the implications for each of the biosphere reserve zones contributing to conservation and development taking into consideration constraints and opportunities inherent of each zone?
- 3 How BRs can be a learning platform for interactions between science, policy and practice in order to generate usable knowledge for sustainable development?
- 4 How can the MAB + BR Regional Networks be strengthened to become the main drivers of MAB and BR agendas?
- 5 What are the policy and political initiatives needed to articulate and confirm the niche of BRs as learning laboratories for sustainable development?

The discussions eventually guided to the 'Madrid Action Plan' (2008–2013), which will define the role of biosphere reserves in the 21st century both for the preservation of natural and cultural resources as well as supporting sustainable development which understands that humans are an integral part of the biosphere.

Finally, I wish to warmly thank all the contributing authors who have not only compiled the excellent reports, but who, for the most part are directly involved in the development and implementation of activities in the biosphere reserves and are, therefore, responsible for their overall success. I also recognise their dedication to serve their communities for which, we, at MAB are extremely grateful. A special mention must go to the people of the biosphere reserves who ultimately are both the direct actors and benefactors of the biosphere reserve concept – after all, they ensure that sustainable development is at the heart of the biosphere reserve vision.



The conference logo clearly illustrates the scope of biosphere reserves, which are found on every continent. We see people taking care of a newly planted tree. The choice of colours was inspired by the famous Spanish artist, Joan Miró and is a tribute to the generous hosts of this important event.