



MINISTRY OF
AGRICULTURE

DEPARTMENT OF NATURE CONSERVATION

Mr. Han Qunli
Director, Division of Ecological and Ecological Sciences
Secretary, Man and Biosphere (MAB) Programme

UNESCO MAB Secretariat

1, rue Miollis,
Paris 75732 Cedex 15
France

Subject: Follow-up progress report of the Hungarian biosphere reserves

Dear Mr. Qunli,

Thank you for the continued support of the MAB Secretariat and in particular, for the consultation visit of Ms. Meriem Bouamrane.

We would like to inform you about the following progress.

As you know, the International Co-ordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme on its 27th session (Jönköping, Sweden, 10 – 13. June 2014.) published the decision, about the periodic review report of Hungary (submitted in 2013), as well as the formal notice of the Secretariat (Ref.: SC/EES/MB/5864/515). The report provided information on a multiple zonation system developed for the so called “first generation” biosphere reserves on the basis of the Seville Strategy and the Madrid Action Plan and in parallel with the Hungarian national legislation on zonation systems.

Considering the decision of the MAB ICC, and the recommendations of the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves (May 2014.), from the five biosphere reserves of Hungary (designated before the completion of the Seville Strategy), three didn't meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

These were the “Aggtelek” Biosphere Reserve, the “Kiskunság” Biosphere Reserve and the “Pilis” Biosphere Reserve. In the case of these reserves an amendment of the periodic review was required.

Besides that, the MAB ICC expressed general recommendations concerning the other Hungarian biosphere reserves.

In 2014 the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture (responsible for the coordination of the MAB Programme in Hungary), in collaboration with the MAB National Committee, and the management of certain biosphere reserves started the modification of the periodic report.

In order to fulfil the criteria of the Statutory Framework, and recommendations of the MAB ICC, a number of consultations were held during 2014 and 2015. The preparatory work was also supported by recommendations and greatly appreciated personal assistance of the MAB

Secretariat. The process was supervised by the MAB National Committee, which discussed the compiled and completed documents, and finally approved the report on its last meeting (15th September 2015.)

General progress

The zonation (established in 2012) **in every biosphere reserve was reviewed** in 2014-15, following the recommendations of the International Co-ordinating Council (ICC) of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme (Jönköping, 2014.). In some cases, modifications were made to the zone system in accordance with the proposals (see below).

Special emphasis was placed for joining clusters, ensuring connectivity between zones, and on providing the appropriate size of the transition area where it was possible.

Management plans for five Hungarian biosphere reserves (Aggtelek, Lake Fertő, Pilis, Kiskunság, Hortobágy) have been compiled, taking into account relevant UNESCO documents relevant to this subject, as well as the recommendations of the MAB Secretariat.

Because of the ongoing enlargement process no management plan has not been prepared for the whole area of the Mura–Drava–Danube Biosphere Reserve yet. However, with the management and leadership of WWF Croatia and WWF Hungary, a new project is under preparation aiming to promote better communication and common activities within the biosphere reserve. As part of this project the preparation of a joint management is foreseen.

The involvement of local communities in management and conservation activities was reviewed. Based on this, meetings began again with local governments and other stakeholders in 2015 aiming closer cooperation.

“Aggtelek” Biosphere Reserve

The **zonation** process was implemented according to the recommendations of the UNESCO. The buffer zone and the core zone were modified slightly in order to fulfil the three functions. It must be emphasized that the “Aggtelek” Biosphere Reserve is situated on the state border, and it is directly connected to the “Slovak Karst” Biosphere Reserve located on the other side of the border. In ecological terms the two reserves can be regarded as if it was one, and the three functions/zones are in place following this special situation (i.e. the core zone on the Hungarian side continues in the core zone of the other biosphere reserve on the Slovak side). The description of this situation was clarified, providing a detailed review of the transboundary position and connection of the “Aggtelek” and “Slovak Karst” Biosphere Reserves.

As a considerable improvement the World Heritage Management Plan was finalized recently, supporting the effective and suitable management of the biosphere reserve. The **local stakeholders** were involved closely in the harmonization process, of course.

Regular tourism and educational programmes, and other events ensure the better recognition of the values of the biosphere reserve, as well as of the management structure and system and the idea of the sustainable development. The management of the biosphere reserve provides regular help to and ensures the direct participation of the local people, farmers and other stakeholders.

Besides the World Heritage Management Plan a specific **BR management plan** was elaborated for the biosphere reserve in 2015.

“Lake Fertő” Biosphere Reserve

The Council is considered, that the site meets the criteria of the Statutory Framework, and at the same time it recommended further develop in engaging communities and in involving more stakeholders in the process.

We inform you, that in the frame of New Hungarian Rural Development Programme zonal agri-environmental schemes were launched targeting so called “High Nature Value Areas” (HNV), designated to promote in environmentally friendly farming practices as an important condition of the sustainable agricultural use of wildlife, landscape and historical values. The updated proposal for the “Fertő” HNV site, accepted by the authorities was prepared in coherence with the concept of the “Fertő” BR. The programme is expected to be enlarged in the autumn of 2015, and will offer specific support for agricultural land users. There is a plan for a “road show” to introduce and promote this opportunity is planned with the **involvement** of local farmers.

As you know Austria and Hungary have excellent collaboration work at every level.

The possibility of establishing a Hungarian-Austrian **transboundary biosphere reserve** initiatives were considered from several aspects. Recently there is a very good cooperation between the two biosphere reserves without a formal “transboundary” status. Both areas are national park, UNESCO World Heritage site and Ramsar site as well, so due to the different international labels, we do not plan to merge the two areas into one unit as a transboundary biosphere reserve.

After a preparation period, a specific **management plan** was elaborated in 2015 for the biosphere reserve.

“Hortobágy” Biosphere Reserve

Hungary welcomed the decision, that the biosphere reserve meets the criteria of the Statutory Framework.

The **participatory approach** is very well developed in the area of the biosphere reserve. Since the lease contract with land users is based on land management prescriptions, it is pivotal to maintain a constant contact with them, including on-the-spot consultations, which provides important feedback from the land users.

Municipalities are key stakeholders within the biosphere reserve, since they have the duty to define long term development strategies and short term actions for concerned settlement. In order to endure that informed decisions are made it is mutually important to share information and knowledge with them. To this end in 2013 the management of the biosphere reserve visited all 32 municipalities to discuss management issues of the transitional zone. These visits were followed by several meetings in 2014 where specific issues of the BR were discussed at various locations.

Tourism is a special field of cooperation that can blaze the trail for other topics too. In this respect the most important initiative was the preparation of the Hortobágy Brand that has to be fully implemented in the future.

After a preparation period, a specific **management plan** was elaborated in 2015 for the biosphere reserve.

“Kiskunság” Biosphere Reserve

In 2014-2015 the **zonation** of the biosphere reserve was revised based on recommendations of the UNESCO MAB ICC and the MAB Secretariat. A new zone system was designated, paying a special attention to connecting patches of the biosphere reserve in order to unite the different clusters into one entity. The new zonation and the new transition zone effects nine municipalities. The management of the biosphere reserve starts consultations with the mayors of the nine municipalities related to the new zonation in the near future.

After a preparation period, the specific **management plan** was finalized in 2015 for the biosphere reserve.

“Pilis” Biosphere Reserve

In line with the Statutory Framework the **zonation system** of the “Pilis” BR was established in 2012. Stakeholders were involved during spatial planning discussions. The different zones of the biosphere reserve were identified and mapped, buffer and transition zones were re-designated to promote sustainable development and preservation of the core area. The revision of the zonation system was started based on the feedback of forestry stakeholders.

Due to the specific local conditions the general “classical”, triple **zonation systems** of biosphere reserves could not be realized completely in the case of the “Pilis” BR. Valuable and almost untouched areas are surrounded by urban areas under intensive use in many cases. The designation of a buffer zone around these core zones would have been possible only by reducing the core zone itself. Therefore on these areas the core zones assigned are not always surrounded by a buffer zone. During the establishment of the zonation system the protection status of the area in question was also taken into account, and core zones were designated only on strictly protected areas.

The discussions with the local stakeholders in the frame of a public consultation has been continuing for two years. In 2015, in accordance with recommendations of UNESCO, negotiations were launched to convince local governments to have the administrative area of their settlements included in the reserve. This process could result the expansion of the transition zone, hopefully also for the benefit of the municipalities concerned. This step-by-step process of building mutually “win-win” partnership with municipalities and engaging stakeholders is expected to yield results on a longer term.

Regarding tourism, and **tourism management** in the area of the Pilis Biosphere Reserve (PBR) it is important to underline that this area is one of the most important and popular tourist destinations of Hungary. The estimated number of foreign and national visitors is around two million per year. Since 2010 numerous projects have been implemented to improve conditions of tourism (especially hiking) in the PBR: lookout towers, different kind of accommodation facilities, forest schools and ecotourism centres, nature trails, forest excursion destinations and resting places have been built. The most popular tourism destinations (Visegrad Castle, Esztergom, Szentendre) are available on public roads, significant harmful effects are not detectable in the BR caused by that.

In the area of the PBR around 400 caves can be found, but only a few are open to the public. The visiting options are well-regulated and controlled. The preservation of caves and their proper display are equally important tasks. Conservation of the caves and their fauna can be guaranteed primarily with the regulation of visiting and by providing opportunities for guided visits.

The effects of the high rate of tourism is managed by the guidance of visitors to the less sensitive areas, by offering designated facilities (designated climbing rock walls, a number of designated hiking trails, bike paths, designated lookout points etc.). The number of visitors is measured regularly, in order to intervene, if it is necessary.

There are plans to improve interactive tools, such as mobile phone applications.

After a preparation period, a specific **management plan** was compiled in 2015 for the biosphere reserve.

“Mura–Drava–Danube” Biosphere Reserve

The zonation system on the Hungarian part of the biosphere reserve has been overviewed and reported to UNESCO in 2013. The reviewed “core” zone overlaps with the strictly protected areas on the floodplain of Duna-Drava National Park, which are dedicated to nature protec-

tion, exclusively. The “buffer zone” also enjoys protected area/Natura 2000 status, but it is not under strict protection, consequently economic activities are allowed regarding regulations of permitting authorities. The “transition zone” consists mostly of non-protected areas dominated by settlements, agricultural and industrial lands, where there is no regular nature conservation control.

Stakeholder involvement is rather difficult, regarding the fact that more than 70 municipalities are affected by the biosphere reserve and there are several other bodies, like forestry companies, game and fishing associations, water managers, NGOs etc. In cooperation of the WWF Hungary, there is a strategy under development about the involvement of more stakeholders. Under the management and leadership of WWF Croatia and WWF Hungary, a new project is under preparation with a role of promoting better communication and common activities within the biosphere reserve. As a part of this project the preparation of joint management is envisaged. Communication is based on current issues. For example a local angling association is involved in a transboundary LIFE+ project (LIFE Old-Drava), of which WWF Hungary is also a project partner. The management of the biosphere reserve is also in close cooperation with the Water Management Directorates, and has been asked to overview some water management plans from the nature conservation viewpoint.

We hereby submit the progress reports of the Aggtelek, Kiskunság and Pilis biosphere reserves and the management plans of the Aggtelek, Lake Fertő, Hortobágy, Kiskunság and Pilis biosphere reserves and hope that they meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework. We look forward to any comments or proposals to amend these documents, should it be necessary.

Budapest, 29/09/2015

Yours sincerely:


Rozália Érdiné dr. Szekeres
Chair of MAB National Committee
Head of Nature Conservation Department

