



National Report
on Activities of the Slovak MAB Committee and
Implementation of the Lima Action Plan
in the Slovak Republic

June 2019

Compiled by Vladimira Fabriciusova, Zuzana Guziova and Lucia Minova

Introduction

Slovak Committee for the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme

Slovak Committee for the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme is an advisory body to the Slovak UNESCO Commission. Slovak UNESCO Commission is integrated in the Ministry of the Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic and chaired by the Minister.

In 2016, the Slovak UNESCO Commission was restructured, the Slovak MAB Committee underwent the similar process. In restructuring, the main effort was made to ensure representation of different stakeholders groups, including the local and national level authorities in the Committee. Currently, there are representatives of the Ministry of the Environment, State Nature Conservancy, scientific and academic sector in the Committee. Biosphere Reserve managers and representatives of the BR coordination boards are represented *ex-offo* in the Committee. The administrative and representation activities of the Committee are funded by the Ministry of the Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic and by the Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic.

Biosphere Reserves in Slovakia

In Slovakia, Biosphere Reserves are referred in the national Nature and Landscape Conservation Act as areas of international importance and coordinated through regional offices of the State Nature Conservancy.

There are four biosphere reserves in Slovakia – Slovak Karst (1977), Polana (1990), Tatry (1992) and East Carpathians (1992,1998), of which Tatry and East Carpathians are transboundary reserves. Coordination Boards or similar stakeholder engagement mechanisms are in place in each of the Biosphere Reserve, and give opportunity to different stakeholders to have their say on management of the area. These are flexible structures that are opened to possible participation of other stakeholders not yet represented in the respective Boards.

Implementation of Lima Action Plan in Slovakia

Slovak MAB Committee welcomed adoption of the MAB Strategy and the Lima Action Plan in 2015 and 2016, respectively. Both documents were translated into Slovak and brought to the attention of a broad range of stakeholders at national, regional and local levels.

Slovak MAB Committee has made an analyses of the actions included in the Lima Action Plan and translated them into National Action Plan for the LAP implementation. National Action Plan is informal and open document.

Overall, the implementation of the Lima Action Plan in the country has progressed and has positive influence on the implementation of the mission of the MAB Strategy. Major challenges stay in insufficient integration of biosphere reserves to development agendas at all levels caused by lack of awareness of biosphere reserve concept among decision makers and politicians whose positions are subject to frequent changes.

Below is a short description of status of implementation of individual LAP actions according to individual strategic action areas.

I. STRATEGIC ACTION AREA A. THE WORLD NETWORK OF BIOSPHERE RESERVES CONSISTING OF EFFECTIVELY FUNCTIONING MODELS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In Slovakia, at sub-national or local level, in all individual biosphere reserves number of initiatives and activities contributing to Sustainable Development Goals and the implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements to which Slovakia is a Party, including to Aichi Targets, have been ongoing on daily basis. These are implemented by both public and private sector organizations, or in partnership in some cases. Some lessons are replicable and can be scaled up.

In order to use potential of biosphere reserves more effectively, SK MAB prepared operative document and consulted it with the State Nature Conservancy and Ministry of the Environment. The document will be submitted for consideration by the Government. The document requires that biosphere reserves as internationally significant areas are more strongly recognised at the national level for its contribution to the SDG and implementing of MEAs and are well integrated in national, regional and local strategies and programmes. Document also suggest changes in the status of BR Coordination Boards. Responsibilities of individual ministries relevant to improving of biosphere reserves performance are defined in the document

BRs are integrated into the national Nature and Landscape Conservation Act as areas of international importance and coordinated through regional offices of the State Nature Conservancy. They are also addressed in draft Nature Conservation Strategy and integrated into certain subnational development strategies as well.

Although BRs are not yet explicitly integrated into national climate change strategies, all four Slovak BRs are used to certain extent as sites and as observatories for ecosystem-based climate change. In Tatra BR, there is a long term research of impact of various forest management methods on carbon sequestration. In the East Carpathians biosphere reserve, there is a climate station included into the co-operative programme for monitoring and evaluation of the long-range transmission of air pollutants in Europe known as EMEP, that is a scientifically based and policy driven programme under the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP) for international co-operation to solve transboundary air pollution problems.

Sustainable development initiatives are established and implemented in all 4 Slovak BRs. Such initiatives are obligatory inclusive and environmentally integrative.

Multistakeholder Coordination Boards and stakeholders' meetings are examples of local alliances that exist in all four Slovak BRs and address biodiversity conservation and regional development for the benefit of local communities. They meet regularly. In addition, there are also other ad-hoc, temporary alliances existing, for instance, on project basis.

Research and effort to ensure the long-term conservation of the socio-ecological systems is implemented in all Slovak BRs. Measures and incentives are available for this purpose, although these need to be strengthened and/or complemented in future period. Pilot initiatives are implemented for assessing selected ecosystem functions. Restoration and appropriate management of degraded ecosystems are a part of the nature conservation effort.

Recently, all Slovak BRs passed successfully period review processes. Periodic review facilitated new processes for improving governance and performance of individual biosphere reserves. Introduction of national periodic reviews at 5 year interval is considered. Extension of a national BR network is not considered for the time being.

National guidelines for BRs will be developed, and will take due regard of international technical guidelines that have been currently developing. Slovakia nominated two experts that participate at developing International Technical operational guidelines for Biosphere Reserves.

All Slovak BRs have long term, well established and functional partnerships with universities and research institutions (e.g. Slovak Academy of Sciences, Comenius University, Matej Bell University, Technical University, Constantine the Philosopher University, Masaryk University), including with UNESCO Chair on Sustainable Development and Ecological Awareness in the city of Banska Stiavnica.

In all Slovak BRs, research activities are intensively undertaken and research outputs are generated. These are substantially contributing to increasing knowledge of the BRs. However, in the future, research objectives need to be formulated more specifically in order to support adaptive management of BRs. Bibliographies are available from all the Slovak BRs.

Adaptive management is applied in all four biosphere reserves. There is an intensive communication among Slovak BRs concerning good management practices for meadow and forest management, environmental education, involvement of stakeholders, etc. Unsustainable practices are also identified, some were locally addressed, mostly with support of project based initiatives.

Broad collaborative research projects are implemented only occasionally, sometimes they are hindered by lack of funding for collaborative projects. Smaller collaborative projects are implemented in all BRs.

Slovak MAB Committee and individual BRs are mostly funded from government. Slovak MAB Committee receives substantial part of funds for its activities from the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. Coordination offices of Biosphere Reserves are integrated in the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic and have everyday administration covered from its budget. Projects are funded subject to successful submission of application to various funding schemes. Overall funding is not considered adequate and sustainable yet. There is an effort to explore improving national funding opportunities in the context of overall strengthening of position of internationally significant areas in Slovakia.

Approaches to business planning for biosphere reserves in Slovakia and application of product and service labels have been explored by the working group established by the Slovak MAB Committee and supported by experts from Economic University in Banska Bystrica. The most important challenge in business planning is the fact that BRs are not homogenous management and administrative units. BR specific brand has been applied in the Polana BR.

In Slovakia, there are strategic measures in place targeting provision of ecosystem services. There are also certain support/incentive schemes that facilitate the provision of ecosystem services from BRs. They are not BRs specific, some of them relate generally to biodiversity protection in designated protected areas, or to soil protection, improvement retention capacity of the area, etc. At the level of individual BRs, project based actions supporting provision of ecosystem services are also implemented.

Conservation/promotion programmes and initiatives targeting species of economic importance or cultural value are implemented in all Slovak BRs.

II. STRATEGIC ACTION AREA B. INCLUSIVE, DYNAMIC AND RESULT-ORIENTED COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING WITHIN THE MAB PROGRAMME AND THE WORLD NETWORK OF BIOSPHERE RESERVES

Several project-based or ad hoc education, capacity building and training programmes were implemented locally or as a part of university curricula. Possibilities for BR specific training programmes are currently discussed with universities. In 2019, Polana BR started project aimed at developing capacities for carrying out campaigns for strengthening of regional identity.

Slovakia participated in 2019 EUROMAB meeting. Bilateral cooperation progressed rapidly in recent period. SK MAB visited two German biosphere reserves in late 2018, and very much appreciated assistance from the German MAB Committee in preparation and holding the visit. Contacts with the biosphere reserves in the Czech Republic were also initiated.

Slovak Karst Biosphere Reserve has a close cooperation with Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve in Hungary, both BRs include karst ecosystems. Slovak Karst Biosphere Reserve has joined CAVE MAB recently.

Slovakia shares 2 biosphere reserves with neighbouring countries with formal status of transboundary BR. Transboundary Tatry Biosphere Reserve is shared with Poland since 1992. Transboundary East Carpathians Biosphere Reserve is shared with Poland (1992) and since 1998, with Ukraine, being then the 1st tri-lateral BR in the world. Additional transboundary BR is not foreseen in the near future.

Scientists working in biosphere reserves participate in international scientist networks, such as ATINER, ILTER, MRI.

III. STRATEGIC ACTION AREA C. EFFECTIVE EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS AND SUFFICIENT AND SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR THE MAB PROGRAMME AND THE WORLD NETWORK OF BIOSPHERE RESERVES

In Slovakia, at the national level partnership with other UNESCO programmes is established and maintained via the Slovak Commission for UNESCO and via its Advisory Board, where all UNESCO and activities are represented by responsible officials and experts. Ministry of the Environment and the State Nature Conservancy makes effort to interlink MAB activities with activities and initiatives of relevant MEAs.

In Slovakia, basic funding for biosphere reserves is provided by the Government/Ministry of the Environment through the State Nature Conservancy. Major source of external funding of projects in all four biosphere reserves are various funding schemes of the European Union, State Environment Fund and research grants. However, due to limited funding allocations, projects are not often successful in receiving funding.

Cooperation with private sector exists in all 4 biosphere reserves in Slovakia, however, private sector is yet only marginal funding source and does not influence proportion of public funding in BR budgets.

Entrepreneurs and social enterprises are participating in BRs activities and, at certain extent, are involved in its management through participation in the Coordination Boards.

Stronger recognition of BRs nationally is expected in the near future in the context of overall promotion of internationally significant areas in the country by the government.

Joint promotion and marketing of BR products and services among BRs has not been established yet in Slovakia. Concept of on line shop for BR products has been in preparation.

IV. STRATEGIC ACTION AREA D. COMPREHENSIVE, MODERN, OPEN, AND TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION, INFORMATION AND DATA SHARING

Open access policy is supported by the Slovak MAB and Slovak BR. It is supported by elements of general open access policy in the country. MAB documents, data, information and other materials are being gradually made public, ad interim, on a web page of the Polana Biosphere Reserve (www.chkopolana.eu). It is foreseen that webpage will be further improved in the future, including presentation of more documents in English.

Slovak MAB Committee recently developed its communication strategy. Biosphere reserves implement various communication activities, All four Slovak biosphere reserves are present on social networks. All four biosphere reserves participated in ProudToShare campaign and provided information on their contribution to implementing SDG. Traditional communication event, "Biosphere Reserve Open Day", was organised in September 2018 in the Tatry BR and in the Polana BR.

Review of publications and projects in Biosphere Reserves was published on www.chkopolana.eu. It contains 771 publications and 27 projects relevant to Polana BR, 264 publications and 39 projects relevant to Slovak Karst BR, 115 publications and 20 projects relevant to East Carpathians BR and 101 publications and 22 projects relevant to Tatry BR.

V. STRATEGIC ACTION AREA E. EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE OF AND WITHIN THE MAB PROGRAMME AND THE WORLD NETWORK OF BIOSPHERE RESERVES

Slovakia regularly participates at the meetings of the ICC MAB, currently as the ICC member. Slovakia, through its experts, contributes to developing technical guidelines for the Biosphere Reserves. The country makes all effort to report regularly on its activities within a framework of MAB programme. In July 2018, Slovakia participated in on-line evaluation of the LAP organised prior to the 30th meeting of the ICC MAB.

Slovak MAB Committee was restructured in 2016 and representation of various groups in the Committee was further improved in recent period. Currently, there are representatives of the Ministry of the Environment, State Nature Conservancy, scientific and academic sector in the Committee. Biosphere Reserve managers and representatives of the BR coordination boards are represented *ex-offo* in the Committee. Overall, fairly well-balanced membership reflecting the transdisciplinary nature of MAB has been achieved.

Two biosphere reserves has slightly increase staff in recent period. One person within Polana biosphere reserve was appointed for administrative support to SK MAB.

All four biosphere reserves have actions plans that are implemented subject to available capacities.