



HOW CAN BIOSPHERE RESERVES CONTRIBUTE TO THE GREEN DEAL?

Webinar • 14 January 2021 • 14:00 – 15:45



Euromontana held its second webinar on Smart Mountains on 14 January 2021. The event “[Smart mountains: how can biosphere reserves contribute to the Green Deal?](#)” is the result of collaboration between:

- [UNESCO’s Man and Biosphere \(MAB\) Programme](#),
- [Euromontana](#), the European association of mountain areas, which has been working for 25 years for sustainable development in mountain areas by facilitating the exchange of information and experiences between these territories and by bringing their voice to the European institutions,
- [Perth College](#), University of the Highlands and Islands, and its Centre for Mountain Studies which undertakes research and projects to improve the state of knowledge about mountains.
- [Chefs4thePlanet](#), the global network of information and solutions for a sustainable gastronomy that brings together the actors who daily work to promote healthy and responsible sustainable cuisine (chefs, producers, influencers etc.).

This webinar, attended by more than 85 participants, gave the floor to European decision-makers, UNESCO representatives, biosphere reserve stakeholders and chefs to collectively reflect on the links between people, nature, biodiversity and food in mountain biosphere reserves.

Martin Price, Professor at Perth College, University of the Highlands and Islands, and member of Euromontana's Senate, opened the webinar by noting the common interests of the MAB Programme and Euromontana with regard to sustainable development and partnership working. He noted that, of the 254 biosphere reserves in Europe, 121 are located in mountain areas. Prof. Price also pointed out that Euromontana will organise its [XII European Mountain Conference on "Smart Mountains"](#) in the Natural Park and Biosphere Reserve of Sila (Italy) on 21-23 September 2021 and cordially invited all participants to attend this event.



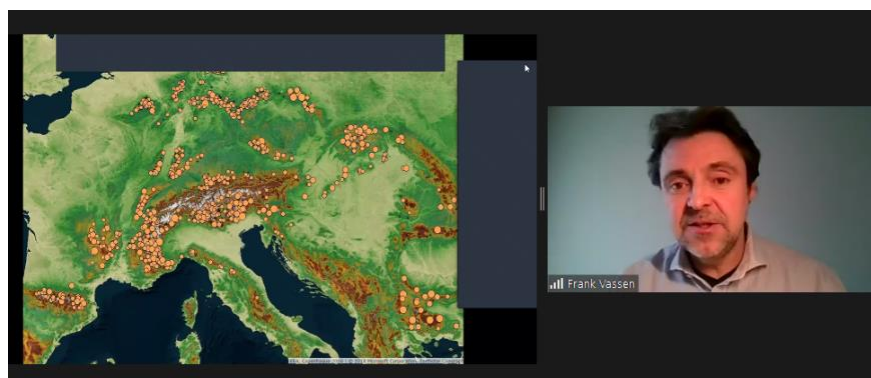
Biosphere Reserves and the Green Deal

Last year, the European Commission published two major strategies in the framework of the Green Deal, its [Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#) and its ['Farm to Fork' Strategy](#). According to Frank Vassen, Desk Officer for the Birds and Habitats Directives at the European Commission's DG Environment, European biosphere reserves have a role to play in the implementation of these two new strategies.



The Biodiversity Strategy, for example, sets the objective of achieving 30% of protected land by 2030, representing 4% more than today¹. To reach this target, more regions will have to be involved and designated as protected areas. This 30% does not only concern Natura 2000 areas but will also include areas protected by national criteria and new designated areas. This is a European Union objective and not per Member State, although each will have to participate in this collective effort to achieve this EU-level ambition. Within the 30% target, the Commission has set a target of 10% of land under strict protection. For the time being, the definition of the term and the identification criteria remain under negotiation with Member States, but the areas under strict protection could, for example, see any extractive activities, including hunting and fishing, banned. Primary and ancient forests will be covered by the 10% target. Whether protected grasslands and pastures, where species and habitats are intrinsically linked to agricultural management, could also be covered is currently debated. According to Mr Vassen, biosphere reserves can contribute to the protected area targets under the Strategy, recognising that their core areas are strictly protected under national legislation while the territories around them (buffer zones, transition areas) could be integrated into the 30% of protected land. This needs to be further discussed.

Mr Vassen also stressed the two-fold risk for mountains in terms of preservation of their ecosystems: on the one hand, the abandonment of a large number of territories and, on the other, intensification in the use of other areas. Therefore, support is still needed so that these regions can keep their countryside alive.



¹ 26% of the EU with 18% as part of Natura 2000 and 8% under national schemes are currently protected

Nature restoration plans, which are part of the Biodiversity Strategy, are also of interest for biosphere reserves according to Frank Vassen. These plans will provide measures to protect and restore species and habitats, both within and beyond Natura 2000 areas. The European objective is to effectively improve the conservation status of at least 30% of the species and habitats currently in poor condition. The Commission is currently working to support Member States in drawing up these plans and in identifying relevant species and habitats as priorities for restoration.

Finally, in its 'From Farm to Fork' Strategy, the European Commission announced its desire to introduce a label for 'sustainable food'. The European Commission intends to propose a regulation in 2024 to support consumers in their choices. In addition, the Commission wishes to explore options for extending the obligation to indicate the origin of certain products by the end of 2022. This greater emphasis on the sustainability of food is a novelty which may, according to Mr Vassen, be of interest to producers located in mountain biosphere reserves.



Learn more on these strategies and their consequences for biospheres reserves in [Frank Vassen's presentation](#)

Reconciling Humans with Nature

Meriem Bouamrane, Head of Section for Ecology and Biodiversity in [UNESCO's MAB programme](#), insisted on the growing awareness of the interconnection between people and their natural environment, especially since the COVID-19 crisis began. The outbreak of the epidemic has, according to Ms. Bouamrane, served as a reminder that people are guardians of biodiversity and that it is crucial to live together in a different way.



While the post-2020 agenda for a global biodiversity framework is still being negotiated at the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UNESCO representative warned: protecting 30% of the land is very commendable, but this should not mean that humans can do whatever they want on the remaining 70%.

She wished to recall that people are part of the living world and interact with nature on a daily basis. "In all ecosystems, including in the mountains, it is possible to reconcile development, nature preservation and the conservation of local cultures," she said before adding that UNESCO's MAB Programme and biosphere reserves can be inspiring in this context, as they are places of reconciliation between these different elements. The MAB Programme, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, strives to link all stakeholders (including teachers, chefs, young people) around a common goal "to change the narrative of humanity that destroys", she said.

"We need to reconcile without putting biodiversity under a glass", stated Ms Bouamrane, especially in biosphere reserves. It is therefore necessary to include "all stakeholders, including chefs such as Laurent Petit. Food plays a crucial role in this holistic vision; it allows us to reconnect with the land, farmers and restaurant owners". All citizens must be part of this approach, Mrs Bouamrane specified, including urban citizens, as seen in the Dublin Bay and Wienerwald Biosphere Reserves. Young people in particular will be central in this transition according to the UNESCO representative, who pointed out that today's young people will be "tomorrow's heroes" because by refusing jobs that damage nature, they are reinventing their role in the living world and also participating in the emergence of new jobs.



Learn more on biosphere reserves with the UNESCO's video "[Biosphere reserves in a nutshell](#)"!

From Farm to Fork in Biosphere Reserves

This webinar was also an opportunity to give the floor to stakeholders from the field in order to understand how biosphere reserves can contribute to the objectives of the Farm to Fork Strategy, by putting local and sustainable products on our plates.



Filippo Lenzerini, from [Punto 3 srl](#), shared his experience of [UPVIVIUM](#), a "zero-kilometre gastronomy competition". The initiative arose from the awareness of the diversity and unique quality of agricultural products in biosphere reserves and the lack of use of these products by local restaurant owners. Since 2017, UPVIVIUM has been bringing together 5 Italian biosphere reserves in a gastronomic competition - including Sila biosphere reserve, which will host the European Mountain Convention in September.

The aim of the competition is to make local products known, to encourage private restaurateurs to use them, and to promote their environmental added value. Participating restaurants compete against each other over a course, which must include regional products, exclude any product from more than 1,000 km away, include only seasonal products, exclude any product from endangered species, and avoid food waste. 37 restaurateurs have taken part in the initiative; local winners from the 5 participating reserves meet in a national final to determine the winner. Cooking schools are also involved in the initiative, allowing future young chefs to be enrolled in a sustainable food initiative. A new edition should take place in the autumn of 2021 - depending on the evolution of sanitary restrictions in the catering sector - with a view to increasing the number of participating restaurants and exporting the concept to other biosphere reserves.



Learn more on UPVIVIUM in [Filippo Lenzerini's presentation](#)

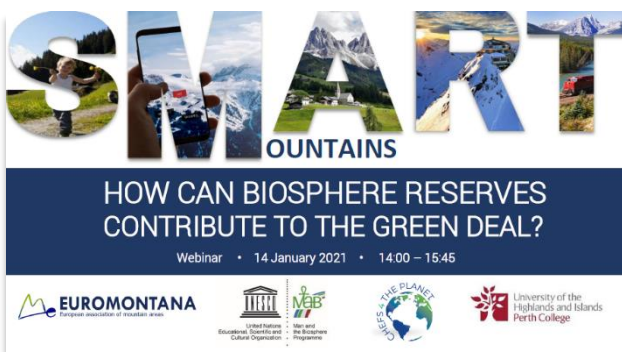
Three-star chef in Annecy-le-Vieux and member of the [Chefs4thePlanet](#) network, Laurent Petit, endorsed the idea that chefs today have a role to play in the transition to sustainable food. Mr Petit illustrated the contribution of mountain biosphere reserves to sustainable food through the example of his award-winning 'cabbage tart', a dish based on seasonal vegetables and local smoked fish.



For Mr Petit, the nature in the region near his restaurant offers the possibility of 'simplicity' in cooking, using the simplest ingredients which he transforms into a complex gastronomic experience. "Gluttony is the key to ensuring that everyone has a clear vision of the natural world around us", explained the Chef. Major actors in the gastronomic world are also contributing to this approach, he added, notably with the Michelin Guide, which increasingly rewards young chefs committed to sustainable approaches. This phenomenon marks a clear transition towards sustainable food systems, according to the Chef, who pointed out that 10 years ago the Michelin Guide did not pay as much attention to the sustainable dimension of menus.

This second webinar was an opportunity for the various mountain stakeholders to reflect on the contribution of biosphere reserves to the Green Deal. More broadly, the exchanges highlighted the assets of mountain areas in the transition towards sustainable and quality food systems. These reflections can feed into the debates for smarter mountains at the European Mountain Convention in September 2021.

All presentations, recordings and pictures from the webinar are also available here [“Smart mountains: how can biosphere reserves contribute to the Green Deal?”](#)



Recordings of the webinar in English and French are available on YouTube!