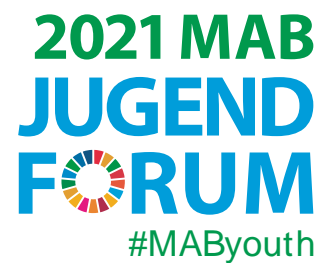


MAB Youth Forum 2021



Organisation:

**Nationale
Naturlandschaften**



Funding:



Federal Agency for
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Federal Ministry
for the Environment, Nature Conservation,
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Duration of project:

09/2020-01/2022

1 Setting

The aim of the youth forums of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere program is to network committed young adults from biosphere reserves, to strengthen their identification with biosphere reserves, to promote their motivation for commitment, to educate them and to give them a voice. Young people living and working in biosphere reserves should be encouraged to actively contribute to the sustainable development of 'their' biosphere reserve and the world network of biosphere reserves.

The first international MAB Youth Forum took place in 2017 in the Po Delta biosphere reserve (Italy). It was attended by young engaged people from over 142 biosphere reserves around the world. Other MAB Youth Forums have since been held around the world with varying scope. In 2019, the first MAB Youth Forum for the German-speaking region took place in the biosphere reserve Rhön. The response to the MAB Youth Forum 2019 was extremely positive, both from the participants and from the sending biosphere reserves. The internal evaluation also showed a fundamental high satisfaction with the project outcome. These experiences and the high importance of the young generation for the future of the biosphere reserves lead to the decision to strive for a repetition and perspective a continuation of the event format.

Thus, a second German-speaking MAB Youth Forum took place in the biosphere reserve Swabian Alb in 2021, with a focus on youth participation. The aim was to further strengthen the participation of young people in biosphere reserves and to give them a voice for their demands. The project was accompanied by an analysis of the current state of youth participation in German biosphere reserves.

2 Project Goals

- The participants should have new experiences and responsibilities as active, self-determined and in their concerns and preferences valued actors of biosphere reserves, by involving them as much as possible in all aspects of the event in terms of content, process, methods and style in decisions and design.
- Through the strengthened self-perception of the participants as effective actors of biosphere reserves, their motivation for (further) engagement should be promoted.
- The young adults' attachment to 'their' biosphere reserves and the sense of community and belonging among them should be promoted in order to strengthen their identification with the biosphere reserves and to achieve a greater multiplier effect for the biosphere reserve idea.
- On the basis of expanded knowledge about UNESCO biosphere reserves, the professional quality of their commitment is to be increased.
- The event's orientation, which is as climate-friendly and sustainable as possible, as well as excursion opportunities to exemplary sustainable businesses, projects and facilities in the host biosphere reserve are intended to highlight concrete possibilities for action for the participants.
- The personal acquaintance and the direct exchange should enable a networking of the young adults from biosphere reserves that goes beyond the event in order to achieve mutual and cross-territorial inspiration, motivation and mutual support afterwards.
- The size of the event and the program should help to attract public attention regionally and nationally for biosphere reserves.

- Concrete project concepts are to emerge from the event, which are to be implemented by participants with financial support to support the biosphere reserves concerned in their work.
- At the end of the project, written perspectives and concrete suggestions for a stronger youth participation in biosphere reserves should be available; these should be based on 1) an analysis of current participation opportunities of young adults in biosphere reserves, 2) on development goals from the perspective of the biosphere reserve administrations, and 3) on demands and strategies from a youth perspective, which will be elaborated by the event participants.

3 Analysis of youth participation in German biosphere reserves

The analysis was conducted nationwide to evaluate the current situation of youth participation in biosphere reserves. Surveys and interviews with relevant biosphere reserve staff were used to identify concrete participation opportunities for the youth and best practice examples. Success factors, challenges and obstacles regarding youth participation in biosphere reserves were identified. Development goals and ideas on the part of biosphere reserves regarding youth participation were recorded.

Selection of the most frequently mentioned challenges for youth participation

- Lack of capacity in administration
- Poor public transport
- Lack of interest/ other interests
- Young people feel they are not taken seriously
- Moving away after school
- Administrative structures
- Biosphere reserve not present in region
- Lack of independence among young people
- Needs of young people not addressed
- Numerous alternative offers
- Lack of knowledge in dealing with youth
- Lack of accessibility to youth
- Too few young people in the region

Selection of the most frequently mentioned benefits for youth participation

- Committed people as caretaker for youth participation
- Networking of the BR in the region
- Trust and personal ties between young people and supervisors
- Committed supervisors
- Long-term supervisors
- Established structures
- Group formation/social interaction
- Positive and intensive nature experience
- Practical activities
- Tangible impact of the engagement
- Direct approach
- Strong awareness of sustainability in the region
- Connectedness with the region

4 MAB Youth Forum 2021 - Event

From the 24th to the 27th 2021 the second MAB Youth Forum in Germany took place in the biosphere reserve Schwäbische Alb. 42 young people from Germany, Austria and Luxembourg participated in the event. The main focus of the event was as mentioned above youth participation. Panel discussions, workshops, excursions, short film video shooting and creating a parti*fest where parts of the program. The parti*fest is a name combination of participation and manifest. It represents the participant's demands and wishes to enhance participation in biosphere reserves. Inspired from the MAB Youth Forum three project ideas for the youth were developed afterwards by participants in the biosphere reserves Mittelalbe, Pfälzerwald-Nordvogesen and Schwäbische Alb with funding.

4.1 Public relation measures

Various products and actions during the project aimed at an adequate public perception of the MAB Youth Forum 2021 and the event's topic in general. Equally, the public relation measures benefitted the efficient recruitment of participants. All products were labeled with the MAB Youth Forum 2021 logo. See examples for public relation measures below.

Invitation postcard



Reusable lunch bags for the participants



4.2 Program

Day 1 – Friday

When?	What?
15.00	Arrival by train or bus in Münsingen
16.00	Arrival at conference venue and check in
16.30	Welcome and exploration rally on the Beutenlay
18.00	Dinner
19.00	Official opening Welcome and introduction, organizational matters, what is MAB and why this forum?
19.30	Introduction to the MAB Youth Forum Program presentation, participation, getting to know each other, our world of biosphere reserves
21.00	Conclusion of the day
21.15	Common end of the first evening at the campfire

Day 2 – Saturday

When?	What?
8.00	Breakfast
9.00	Start in the day
9.15	Panel discussion with youth network representatives on the topic of youth participation - Getting to know different youth networks - Obstacles and success stories of participation
10.15	Break
10.30	Workshops: How does participation succeed? What is needed for lively networks? Workshop-providers: Watt°N, EGEA, youpaN, ConceptIdee
12.30	Lunch
13.30	Excursion: Sheep farm An example of sustainable living and management in the Swabian Alb biosphere reserve: landscape conservation measures on the juniper heath and getting to know the ALBGEMACHT project.
16.30	Break
17.00	Parti*fest (Part 1) - First exchange and collection of ideas on youth participation in biosphere reserves - Recording of concrete suggestions and perspectives
18.30	Dinner
19.30	Conclusion of the day
20.00	Concert of the local band Daily Journey

Day 3 - Sunday

When?	What?
8.00	Breakfast
9.00	Hiking excursion with Rangers to the former military training area Münsingen
12.30	Lunch
13.30	Break
14.00	Parti*fest (Part 2) Pick up and continue working on the results from the previous day
15.30	Creative design of the Parti*fest Creating parti*videos together to present and spread our ideas
17.00	Break
17.15	Small project forge Gather inspiration for your own small projects, develop ideas and receive information on support for small projects following the Youth Forum.
19.00	Dinner
20.00	Conclusion of the day
20.15	Break
20.30	Open Space evening event (by and for participants) or night hike

Day 4 – Monday

When?	What?
8.00	Breakfast
9.00	Start in the day
9.15	Feedback round
9.45	Joint conclusion Review of the last days and outlook
10.15	Break
10.30	Release Parti*fest for more youth participation in biosphere reserves - Presentation of perspectives, suggestions and demands - Guests from politics and the biosphere reserve - Discussion round
12.00	End of the forum & departure to Münsingen train station
12.30	Train connections from Münsingen

4.3 Outcomes

Parti*fest

The Parti*fest presents the wishes and demands of the participants for more youth participation in biosphere reserves:

- Meet at eye level
- More commitment by the biosphere reserve administrations
- Financial and organizational support
- Attractive engagement activities
- Meeting spaces
- Opportunities to take responsibility
- Youth representatives in committees
- Contact persons for youth in biosphere reserve administration
- More education about biosphere reserves
- Strong cooperations between schools and biosphere reserves
- Identification with the biosphere reserves
- Facilitating the start of careers in the conservation sector
- Regional idea workshops
- Better local transport
- More presence of the biosphere reserves in the public

Video clips "Youth participation in biosphere reserves"

The participants produced seven short videos around the topic of participation in biosphere reserves. (https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLwncVAkScbd0a666a_g3atFHXMGIw_TPT)



4.4 Evaluation measures

The participants were asked to fill out an anonymous feedback questionnaire at the end of the event before departure. Additionally a consultation with members of the project working group was conducted.

5 Lessons learned

Analysis youth participation in biosphere reserves

- Youth participation is important for biosphere reserves. The analysis has shown that there are successful projects for youth participation in biosphere reserves. However, their number and scope are still small. Best practice examples, success factors as well as obstacles for youth participation have been identified.

Organisation

- The organization of the Youth Forum required a preparatory phase of about one year with one part-time employee for the overall project coordination, a temporarily employed student assistant and diverse support from the planning team and the employees of the host biosphere region Swabian Alb.
- The involvement of a planning team consisting of five to ten former Forum participants and committed young adults has proven to be extremely enriching for the event conception, organization and implementation.
- Setting up a messenger group (in this case WhatsApp) with voluntary participation greatly simplified group communication during the journey to the event itself.

Participant acquisition

- The participants were mainly informed about the event via the mail distribution lists of youth clubs and universities as well as via former participants, friends and direct contacts to biosphere reserves. No one was recruited via the flyer. This awareness can save paper and ink in the future.
- The reach of the created Instagram channel was not very large. Nevertheless, the channel can be a good option for future information dissemination of MAB youth and forums.

Target Group

- The age range of participants, 18 to 25, proved to be appropriate and is recommended for further MAB Youth Forums.
- The expansion of the target group by the aspect 'near' instead of only 'in' biosphere reserves has positively broadened the circle of participants. Thus, people who work or study near a biosphere reserve, who grew up in a biosphere reserve but now live elsewhere and still have a strong connection to their homeland, could also participate in the forum.
- Nevertheless, efforts should be made again at the next forum to attract people who currently live and work in biosphere reserves to participate in the event.

Online-Forum

- The online forum was again only slightly accepted or not used at all by the participants at the second MAB Youth Forum. In the future, this format can be dispensed with. However, possibilities for thematic reading in advance are desired. The provision of information by mail could be sufficient for this in the future.

Participants

- The commitment during the registration was partly missing. There were many cancellations, some of them at very short notice. This should be considered for future MAB youth forums.
- A group size of 40 to 50 participants, including the planning team, is well suited for the format.
- The participation of participants from biosphere reserves in German-speaking countries was a significant enrichment of the event and should be maintained.

Duration of the event

- The duration of the event, Friday afternoon to Monday noon, has continued to prove its worth.

Conference Venue

- Sufficient accommodation and various meeting rooms in one building facilitate planning and contribute to an uncomplicated process.
- Good catering and attractive accommodations contribute significantly to the well-being of the participants and a positive group atmosphere.
- Good accessibility by public transport to the conference venue is important so that most participants can travel in an environmentally friendly manner by train and bus.

Moderation

- Care should be taken to ensure that the moderation team prepares itself sufficiently in advance for the forum and its content, both in terms of the topic and the methodology, and that it maintains a close exchange with the project coordination team.

Social program

- An attractive social program with campfire evening and band evening can contribute very much to the positive group mood and strengthen the group feeling and networking among each other.

Funding of participant's projects

- Small project funding is a very good way to support the engagement of young adults in biosphere reserves beyond the MAB Youth Forum. However, for the emergence of project ideas, a project workshop during the forum is very important. Independent organization and idea development following the forum did not work so well.

Future MAB Youth and Youth Forums

- Many participants expressed a desire for the event format to be repeated. The very positive feedback underlines this. A repeat cycle of two years is recommended for the event.

6 Future activities

In the future, further work on the topic of youth participation in the national natural landscapes shall be conducted, especially concerning biosphere reserves. The Parti*fest shall be used as a basis for this. A workshop on youth participation for education staff of the national natural landscapes is already planned. The third MAB Youth Forum is planned in 2023 with a focus on networking of youth and administrations of biosphere reserves. As research gap the way how to contact the youth and communicate events for them was identified together with the question how to engage young people longterm in biosphere reserves. The main challenge for youth participation is a lack of capacity in the administration of biosphere reserves. It needs continuous support and activities to keep youth networks and engagement alive.



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