



## WORKSHOP 9 – Connection to nature, human well-being

CHAIRPERSON: Anne-Caroline Prévot (France)      anne-caroline.prevot@mnhn.fr

Co-CHAIR: Christian Diry (Austria)              christian.diry@chello.at

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NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 30

### INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOPS

After a workshop in Estonia in 2015, identify and survey the ecosystems that can be used for well-being in Biosphere Reserves. Share experiences, find new ideas, put up topics and build collaborations.

In Estonia, we found out that BRs are excellent places for well-being. We established a list of landscapes. Some projects emerged: follow up of projects, surveys (see slide).

Theoretical background on connection to nature and social and individual well-being: in modern western way of life, we progressively modified our relation to nature and biodiversity, because our society became more urbanized, more technological, we got a collective idea of what a progress is, and this progress is more and more separated from natural elements and biodiversity dynamics. We can almost say the same for education, with more and more indoor education of nature.

From the theoretical point of view, there are theories from the psychological point of view and from the ecological point of view. In 2002, psychologist Peter Can proposed a hypothesis of environmental generational amnesia, using the following metaphor: imagine a society or generation which has a very tasty food. Everyone eat that food because it is tasty and when you eat it, your health is good. If you don't eat it, you are not sick but you feel sick. You have asthma, stress... Imagine a society where this food doesn't exist neither existed. No one knows that it exists. Everyone has asthma and stress, but without any reference, everyone think to be healthy.

This metaphor helps us to understand that our relation to nature is changing. Nature disappeared and we forgot that we could be in much better health if it were different. Some years later, he said that we are losing our understanding of forgetting what it means to flourish like other species. We can take a lion out of Africa, put in a zoo, had a few flourishing activities, and expect him to flourish.

We are becoming animals in zoos, and losing the mind that it is so. Some researchers in conservation biology are also working on the changing of our relation to nature. Robert Pine, in 1980's, expressed the hypothesis of extinction of nature experience. He said that the some relevant issue in biodiversity crisis is that as biodiversity is decreasing, then the relation between human and biodiversity are decreasing, and human care less and less to biodiversity and preserving nature, it is a vicious circle and a vortex extinction.

This loss of contact with nature and willingness to have contact has consequences on health and wellbeing but also in emotional attitude and behaviors towards nature and conservation. There is a feedback loop because you don't want to have contact with nature, we protect less and so on. Hopefully, the experience of nature is not extinct. May be it is only decreasing or transforming, but it is still time to define new connections. Several types of connection exist: emotional, sensitive, cognitive, social, memorial, observing or interacting, alone or with someone or something, in your daily life or exceptionally, the experience can be positive or negative...

From the psychology point of view, literature says that it is well known that being in nature is positive for your emotional and psychological wellbeing. At individual level, it increases your

concentration, attention, decrease your stress. It also can have good consequences at social level. Being often in contact with nature increases the sensation to be part of nature, the “environmental identity”, and the willingness to protect. The issues to discuss in this workshop is whether experience of nature could increase or decrease and in which sense, what we could call the social ecological wellbeing mixing nature, biodiversity, social and ecological wellbeing.

#### **WORKSHOP PLAN**

- Sharing current and key local practices and initiatives that already exist in BRs, and all initiatives and practices that connect biodiversity conservation, wellbeing and active practices. Discuss and put the more interesting initiatives on a board.
- What could be done in the future, continue good initiatives, and/or start imagine new initiatives.
- Join in groups to discuss the several initiatives and forecast a network for the future.

#### **EXISTING INITIATIVES**

- Children education (Israel). “Education, culture and heritage. Man and biosphere connection, sustainability, learning outside, appeal to feelings, interactive game for visitors created by children, the child is not a tool, they are the goal itself!!”- An education program to share.
- Agricultural discovery (Austria). Students from Austria and Slovenia (cooperation) spend few days to a farm, to discover how to make beverage, sweets, from Alpine herbs. They also learn how to recognize plants. 6 personas at the park work with children. 1500-2000 children a year reached by the program.
- Students trips (Italy). During 3-4 weeks in winter, a group of 20-30 students (primary or secondary) come to the BR and stay in the mountains experiencing natural environment.
- Quests and retreats. Spiritual and mythical history activities within parts of the biosphere.
- Europarc wilderness areas (Germany). Go deeper in the natural well-being. Sacred sites, cultural, natural, spiritual. Go beyond and experience it firsthand.
- Trojan Horse (Belgium). See bombs to throw in the garden. Explain sustainability to kids.