



UNESCO Biosphere Reserve – Honour and challenge for the Vienna Woods

The Vienna Woods (Wienerwald) is a remarkable biodiversity hot spot in a central European context in the easternmost part of the Alps. It is located on the territories of the two federal states Lower Austria and Vienna.

Due to the impact of humans, the formerly almost entirely wooded area has become a mosaic of diverse landscape units characterised by different kinds of land use. More than 60% of the area are still covered by wood. Outstanding open-land landscape, different types of grasslands with meadows and pastures, arable farm land, vineyards as well as the richness of structural landscape elements were an important reason for the nomination as a Biosphere Reserve.

The Wienerwald Biosphere Reserve (Biosphärenpark Wienerwald) is characterised by its proximity to the Vienna. This vicinity to a large city (about 1.7 million inhabitants) and to one of Austria's most important economic and urban settlement areas, together with the fact that about 200,000 inhabitants live constantly in the biosphere reserve poses great challenges: the attractiveness as a residential area, the increase of building and the source for an increase of road traffic, the increasing recreational use with various conflicts between different stakeholder groups and last but not least the intensifying, but rather more serious, the abandoning of traditional farming and land use.

With the 2002 Wienerwald Declaration, which was passed with regard to the Biosphere Reserve Wienerwald by the two Federal States of Lower Austria and Vienna, there exists a comprehensive catalogue of objectives and activities for an integrative, sustainable regional development in region. It serves as an overall guideline for the development of the Biosphere Reserve Wienerwald into a pilot site for sustainability.

The process of drafting management plans for core areas, guidelines for meadow management, biomass production in the puffer and transition zone, open-land and hunting has already been initiated and involves all relevant interest groups.

In view of the large number of communities and districts and the high population density in the region, participation processes constitute a particular challenge. Successful participation models have already been established during the planning process. In the current process, a number of participatory bodies ("advisory forums") have been set up in the following spheres: forest & forestry, open-land cultivated areas & agriculture and hunting.

In these advisory forums, the individual planning stages were periodically presented to and discussed and coordinated with all parties concerned. In addition, thematic guidelines for the development of the Biosphere Reserve were being elaborated.

As mentioned, one of the greatest challenges of the region is to maintain and further develop a sustainable agriculture. One aim is to make a name for themselves with particularly high-quality products, innovative services and cooperation with partners. There are numerous examples for such initiatives:

The "Heubörse Wienerwald" (Wienerwald hay exchange) for example, acts as a successful agent between producers and purchasers of high-quality hay thus contributing to the conservation of meadows in the Wienerwald region.



The same goal, the conservation of meadows, pursues the “Wienerwald Weisenmeisterschaft” (Wienerwald meadow championship). Owners and managers of meadows and pastures in the Wienerwald biosphere reserve are invited to announce their areas to the competition. Specialists evaluate the meadows and pastures as well as their management according to ecological and operational criteria. A jury selects the winners from the before-evaluated areas.

Local farmers and small businesses have pooled forces and created the “Vermarktungsgemeinschaft Wienerwald” (Wienerwald Marketing Association to provide a platform for an improved marketing of regional quality products. Within the “Vermarktungsgemeinschaft Wienerwald” a new brand was created, the “Wienerwald Weiderind” (Wienerwald beef). A new initiative that is already successful as an agent between producers, purchasers and gastronomy of high-quality beef.

Another brand, “Biosphärenpark Wienerwald – Der Wein” (Wienerwald Biosphere Reserve – THE WINE) is on the market, yet the second year. The Vienna woods (Wienerwald) is not only wood – as indicated – but also vineyards. The wine areas Thermenregion (southwest of Vienna), Vienna itself and Donauland (north of Vienna) offer excellent conditions for red and white wine. This area is home to traditional varieties like Zierfandler, Rotgipfler, Grüner Veltliner, Riesling, Zweigelt, Blauer Portugieser, St. Laurent, and others. The wine is available in the gastronomy of our partner Biosphere Reserve Großes Walsertal and, of course, at the wineries and in the gastronomy of the Wienerwald Biosphere Reserve.