

TO DO! 2008
Contest Socially Responsible Tourism

Award Winner

UNESCO BIOSPHERE ENTLEBUCH

Model Region of Sustainable Living and Working

represented by:

Theo Schnider
Director, Biosphere Management

Canton of Lucerne

SWITZERLAND

Rationale for the Award

by

Dr. Dietmar Quist

1. INTROCUCTION

The contest application by UNESCO BIOSPHERE ENTLEBUCH was checked from 3rd to 8th December 2008 on behalf of the Institute for Tourism and Development (Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung e.V.). The statements on concept and objectives of the project could be verified without difficulty.

Conclusion: The expert in charge recommends awarding UNESCO BIOSPHERE ENTLEBUCH with the TO DO! 2008 at ITB 2009.

2. BACKGROUND

The UNESCO BIOSPHERE ENTLEBUCH (UBE) belongs to the Canton of Lucerne in the central part of Switzerland. Situated between Berne and Lucerne, the Entlebuch covers about 1% of Switzerland. It comprises about 40,000 hectares, 10,000 of which are moor. The typical pre-alpine landscape lies between the Nagelfluh mountains of Napf in the North and the Brienzgrat in the South. The most important mountain is the Brienz Rothorn (2,350 m). About 43% of the Entlebuch are covered by forest, 18% of the area are alpine pastures in the Alps, 30% can be used for agriculture, but only 0.8% for cultivation. Only 2% of the area are populated.

Just about 17,000 people live in the eight municipalities of the biosphere reservation¹, about 0.25% of the Swiss population. The largest municipalities are Schüpheim, Escholzmatt and Entlebuch with about 3,500 inhabitants each. The number of inhabitants slightly decreased during the last centuries. In comparison: At the time of the census in 1850, 18,732 people lived in the Entlebuch – 10% more than today. During the same period, the number of inhabitants in the canton of Lucerne increased from 132,000 to 346,000.

There are about 1,000 farms in the Entlebuch which mainly engage in dairy farming. Most of their milk is being processed regionally to produce cheese, butter, and yogurt. A bit more than one third of the inhabitants work in agriculture and forestry (Switzerland: 5%). About one fourth of the working population is employed in the construction sector and in industrial production, and almost 40% work in the services sector. (Switzerland: 66%). The three largest employers have about 200 to 250 employees each and belong to different sectors, such as disposable medical products (syringes, port systems, three-way stopcocks), manufacturing of thin wire and sheet metal forming.

2.1 General Situation

Measured by income per capita, the Entlebuch is one of the poorest regions of Switzerland. To be able to fulfil their municipal obligations, the Entlebuch municipalities receive an annual financial contribution of 1,230 Swiss Francs (about 823 €) per capita from the canton of Lucerne. This contribution is to be reduced in the future. The possible consequences: The population might decrease further because of out-migration. In 2030, 45% of the population might be more than 55 years of age.

Life in the Entlebuch is characterised by a lively village culture, decentralised power structures and committed leadership. There are a lot of club activities; with more than 300 clubs and associations, including 19 yodel clubs, 13 gymnastics clubs, 20 music societies and 21

¹ The name biosphere reservation was not accepted by the people of the Entlebuch. From their perspective, “reservation” implied a notion of lack of development and lack of perspectives, of neediness and incapacitation. Nobody wanted to live in a (North American Indian) reservation. The compromise: “BIOSPHERE ENTLEBUCH.”

“Guggenmusiken.” (“Guggenmusik” is an important component of [Alemannic carnival](#). In Swiss German, the term “Gugge” refers to all kinds of brass instruments.)

Tourism has been playing a role at least since the early 18th century. Sörenberg, Flühli and Schüpflheim had the first mineral spas, which slowly led to the development of health tourism. In 1894, sulphur springs were tapped in Flühli to supply the health resort. The most famous health tourist visiting the region was probably Lenin. He spent three months in Sörenberg in 1915.

When skiing became popular, Sörenberg began to take off as a winter sports destination. In 1948, the first platter lift was in operation, and by the 1970s, another 25 lifts had followed. The region expanded within a few years, land prices shot up, the village was dominated by guest houses. During the winter months, on sunny days which were ideal for winter sports, close to 15,000 excursionists used to cause major traffic jams. Sörenberg is the largest winter sports destination in the canton of Lucerne (10.5 hectares are permitted to be mechanically covered with snow, under the condition that this will not extend the season).

The total number of overnight stays in the Entlebuch is 450,000 per year. Since 2000, great importance has been accorded to sustainable tourism at the planning level. This, along with the activities by UNESCO BIOSPHERE ENTLERBUCH to promote summer tourism, fundamentally changed the annual distribution of overnight stays. 20 years ago, 2/3 of the overnight stays were recorded in winter and 1/3 in summer. Today, there is a perfect balance, with 50% overnight stays respectively.

3. The UNESCO BIOSPHERE ENTLERBUCH (UBE)

Unlike all previous TO DO! award winners, this is the first time that a UNESCO Biosphere Reservation is awarded with the TO DO! So far, more than 500 regions in more than 100 countries have got biosphere reservation status by UNESCO. The Entlebuch is listed along with Serengeti, the Galapagos Islands, Yellowstone Park, Camargue, etc.

What is special about the UBE is that these were not federal, regional or externally initiated initiatives which were implemented here. It was rather the local population which, in a municipal referendum in 2000, cast 94% of their votes in favour of entrusting the local politicians in charge in the respective municipalities to submit the application for recognition as a UNESCO biosphere reservation.

This marked the starting point of a “collective adventure.” Certainly, the incredibly high percentage of proponents had also been due to the fact that the opponents did not have any alternative proposal and therefore did not take part in the referendum.

By as early as September 2001, Entlebuch had been awarded the status of a UNESCO biosphere reservation. It was the first biosphere reservation which came into being through the involvement and decision of its inhabitants – upon a demand voiced “from below.” What is hardly known: this had consequences at the international level. Today, all UNESCO biosphere applicants have to use the participation model of Entlebuch as an orientation. Interested groups and organisers of biosphere reservations from all parts of the world keep visiting the Entlebuch in order to find out more about its participatory model.

3.1 History

At this stage, there is a need to take two steps back and ask what has happened to make it possible for one of the most conservative corners of Switzerland to turn into a progressive model region.

In 1987, Switzerland adopted the so-called “Mooreland protection initiative” by referendum. Since in terms of landscape ecology, about half of the area of the Entlebuch was and is considered moorland, for the Entlebuch this meant at the time that about 50% of the local subdistrict would come under national nature protection. Heated debates and arguments ensued.

The Entlebuch, which had never been a prospering region, felt acutely threatened in its existence. It was feared that certain areas would be lost to agricultural use, that every activity would need to be authorised. Winter tourism seemed seriously at stake as various ski slopes ran through the newly protected areas. All other economic development opportunities seemed to be spoilt. The rural population felt dominated and patronised by the townsfolk and the canton.

However, the heated arguments also showed that opposing nature protection could not possibly be successful; and nature was not considered an enemy after all. Meanwhile, the people of the Entlebuch recognised that what they perceived as limitations might also be new opportunities, if they integrated nature protection into their lives.

With the self-confidence they had, and with a strong sense of commitment they founded groups and initiatives and started by first setting up a moorland protection centre. Very soon everybody involved could understand that only a comprehensive, integrated concept would ensure a real balance between man and nature. The guidelines of UNESCO’s “Man and the Biosphere” programme were adopted. As an outcome of the collective discussion and learning process across all political divides people realised that they would have to shape their future way of living in the Entlebuch by attaching equal importance to nature. The result: They managed to demonstrate the possibilities of a regional development that people would be able to believe in.

One person who had in 1987 vehemently protested against “excessive” nature protection was Theo Schnider, at that time spa director in Sörenberg. He later became one of the initiators of the biosphere initiative and is today director of the Biosphere Centre. For his life’s work, his commitment at the ENTLEBUCH, he was awarded the “Milestone 2007”, the most important tourism award in Switzerland. Only 14 years after strongly resisting all kinds of conditions imposed for the sake of nature protection, the ENTLEBUCH had become a biosphere reservation that would from now on serve as a model both nationally and internationally.

However, it also needs to be mentioned that it is thanks to Theo Schnider’s and his supporters’ communicative and integrative skills that participatory methods across different municipalities could mobilise the population to be part of the process. Groups came together at a “round table” that would normally consider each other as enemies and competitors: conservationists and farmers, bikers and foresters.

The dialogue thus practiced led to joint decisions. Furthermore, people recognized the opportunity to actively participate in shaping their own future. It became possible to involve the most important stakeholders in industry and politics. Above all, a major success was to ensure that the project would be financed: The Swiss government subsidised the RegioPlusProject “Entlebuch Habitat” from 1998 to 2001.

This, however, was only the beginning of a process to develop the ENTLEBUCH, which is not just considered as a “green paradise” by its inhabitants, but rather as a “learning region”. Research findings and dialogues are used in order to come to the right compromises between different views and needs.

3.2. Objectives and Concept of UNESCO BIOSPHERE ENTLEBUCH

UNESCO biosphere reservations/parks are created to show how habitats that deserve special protection can be preserved for future generations. In a global network, model regions are identified and accompanied scientifically. There are areas dominated by nature and others dominated by man. As a rule, in most of the areas, man and nature should mutually and positively complement each other. The treasures of nature thus form the basis of people’s quality of life, and of the sustainable development of work, agriculture and tourism.

The basis of the UNESCO BIOSPHERE ENTLEBUCH (UBE) is the concept of UNESCO, distinguishing three zones:

- The core zone of a protected area must cover at least 3 to 5% of its surface. Its main purpose is the protection of natural ecosystems. In the UBE, 8% of the area belong to the core zone.
- The buffer zone should – together with the core zone – cover at least 20 % of the area. Here, the protection of traditional cultural eco systems is the main objective. In the UBE, this area covers 42%.
- The transition zone, that means settlements and intensive forms of land use, may occupy a maximum of 80% of the area. In the UBE it is 50 %.

The objectives of the UBE also correspond to the guidelines issued by UNESCO:

- Protection and conservation of natural and culturally influenced biodiversity, while sustainable development is of equal importance.
- Model role as a concept for regional planning and as a space for experiments in sustainable regional development.
- Facilitation and promotion of research, monitoring, education and training with regard to biodiversity, the development of natural and cultural eco systems, nature conservation and sustainable development.

In the cooperation model, regional and biosphere management take centre stage. Motivating, initiating projects, coordinating processes, balancing different strategies and objectives, and using potentials for integration and synergies are the most important permanent or recurring tasks in the field of sustainable regional development.

At the same time, the management is getting advice from, and is also controlled by various forums, networks, cooperation partners, the science platform, the sponsoring association, and local authorities (and thus the electorate).

4. ASSESSMENT

The comparison of the activities conducted by UNESCO BIOSPHERE ENTLEBUCH with the **six TO DO! contest criteria and three additional questions** leads to the following assessment:

Evaluation against the TODO! contest criteria
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1. Taking into account the different interests and needs of the local people through participation

In autumn 2001, the Entlebuch was included in UNESCO's global network of biosphere reservations.

Entlebuch became the first UNESCO biosphere reservation that was – as described earlier – founded through a participatory process. At first, the Entlebuch's model of cooperation was unique; it is globally considered to be "best practice". Today, it is one of the conditions for a region to be awarded the status of a biosphere reservation.

With the Entlebuch's model of cooperation, a culture of participation has emerged which is considered to be the basis of the biosphere's success. Specific forums have been established for sectors such as agriculture, education, energy, female farmers, trade, wood, and tourism. There is also a UBE citizen's and friends' sponsoring association that gives awards. For example, one award was given to the Entlebuch's kitchen carpenters who agreed on a joint kitchen concept made of "wood genuinely Entlebuch."

Linking the different sectors, networking, exchange and coordination in the forums and initiatives is important, as in this creative "space" joint learning processes take place, which develop their own dynamics and constantly generate new ideas and initiatives.

Farmers coordinate with the cheese producers of the Entlebuch, local herbal gardens supply herbs to the restaurants. Strengthening what is regional and "genuine" remains a permanent concern. Without participation and coordination, this approach cannot be realised, and is being backed by very different kinds of groups.

For example, the association of Entlebuch's chefs tries to serve mainly local products which does not limit their creativity. The menu includes delicious stone, moor and hay soups and meals with the title: "What about some moor?" In a nutshell, as "Gastropartner" (catering partners), the restaurants have set new quality standards for themselves, while the butchers offer "Extrawürste" (literally "special sausages," but the idiomatic usage implies "special treatment") made of products from the Entlebuch. The same applies to the processing of milk. It is turned into various local cheese specialities, and even the strawberry wine is made from strawberries grown in the Entlebuch. As a unique selling proposition, special, rare and unique features are emphasised. There are currently about three hundred products certified as "genuinely Entlebuch."

It does not come as a surprise that the positive development of BIOSPHERE ENTLEBUCH has become the pace maker and model for about 30 new nature parks in Switzerland which are in the planning stage.

2. Enhancing the awareness of the local people with regard to the chances and risks of tourism development in their everyday economic, social and cultural life

Time and again, strategy papers are being developed for the tourism sector, and statements of intent are devised in cooperation with the associations and forums of the different communities.

These statements of intent are regularly subjected to scrutiny in SWOT analyses (profiles of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) for all the areas of operation. The management plan resulting from these analyses is presented to the government's supervisory body as a basis for an agreement on programmes. In this way, the bottlenecks, risks and threats associated with tourism also become clear. The discussions take place in the coordination council, in the brand commission, during training programmes, in the forums twice per year and at the meetings which are held in order to exchange experiences, usually four times a year. As the forums are well-connected, a high degree of transparency and awareness of "bottlenecks" and risks associated with tourism will be achieved among the people involved, who also represent their communities.

On the basis of a division of labour and in coordination with the other communities, every community develops and markets its own tourism product and has the possibility to develop its own tourism profile. At the same time, however, people become aware of the risks and threats to the region as a whole.

Two examples: The nature and landscape are severely affected by the snowshoeing boom. Hikers often do not stick to the paths or trails. Having identified the risk, efforts are under way to counter this trend by conducting an awareness campaign which includes visitor management, e.g. guided tours, information, interviews, and monitoring. In 2009, a pilot project was launched in cooperation with the Federal Office for the Environment: "Respect your nature". This project is to be expanded to the whole of Switzerland at a later stage.

The high volume of traffic, especially in the peak season, has also been affecting the communities. A sports bus has been introduced, a biosphere pass (mobility pass) is being offered (and slowly gains acceptance), bus transfer services from the town to the skiing area has been developed, the mail van connections have been increased (by four percent in 2008). And guests who agree to surrender their car keys during their holidays in the UNESCO Biosphere Entlebuch in summer 2009 will be issued a mobility pass for the public transport system free of charge.

3. Participation of broad local population strata in the positive economic, social and cultural effects of tourism

Beyond the economic and participatory effects described under the first criterion, the following social and cultural effects can be noticed:

The inhabitants' identification with their region has increased enormously. From what was once considered a backward region, the Entlebuch has developed into a model, both nationally and internationally. This also includes practical, ordinary effects, e.g. local people using the hiking trails and bicycle paths developed for tourism, and a perception of increased value of their region as a place to live.

Both local people and visitors make use of the wide range of tourist products: the Zyberliland "play worlds," gold washing in the municipality of Romoos/Doppelschwand, the Seelensteg of Heiligkreuz, Flüfli's Kneipp hydrotherapy resort, and more than 350 km of marked hiking trails. The same applies to the bicycle routes, cross-country ski-tracks, and downhill runs in

the winter. Meanwhile, the UBE has become the most important organiser of nature excursions in Switzerland. The area is planned to become the so-called “biggest classroom in Switzerland.” To that end, UBE already offers project weeks at the Biosphere school and at a farm. Every year, 20 classes with 700 students make use of this opportunity. The 250 teachers in the Entlebuch want to integrate the topic “Biosphere and tourism close to nature” into their curricula. Similar projects are to be offered in the field of adult education.

4. Guarantee of the attractiveness of jobs in tourism for the local people by improving working conditions relative to payment, social security, working hours as well as education and training

The Biosphere Centre in Schüpheim provides qualified jobs for highly skilled employees (seven full positions are granted, to be divided at the discretion of the employers). About 40 people earn an extra income as visitor assistants and guides on excursions. It is not possible to say exactly how many jobs have been created by increased sales and in the field of nature-based tourism, as these jobs are part of the tourism induced, indirect services (workmen for example, who benefit from tourism development).

The Institute of Business Administration/Tourism at Lucerne University regularly supervises theses in the Entlebuch, and at least three UBE employees teach subjects such as “sustainable development“ and ”nature-based tourism“. All those working in tourism benefit from these links between theory and practical application. Furthermore, with regard to remuneration, social security and working hours, the usual Swiss standards apply.

5. Strengthening the local culture and the cultural identity of people living in tourism destination areas

The development from one of the backward regions to a nationally and internationally recognised pioneering model region has as such significantly strengthened local and regional identity. The certified label “genuinely Entlebuch” for more than 300 products has also contributed to strengthening regional ties.

A local pool of apprenticeship positions offers young people an overview over apprenticeships in the region that give them the chance to stay in the area.

In the meantime, hundreds of farms have got boards displaying their traditional names. For the guests, farmers and their farms have been rescued out of anonymity. These measures strengthen the notions of “We” and “Together” and at the same time increase the guest’s sense of belonging and orientation in his/her holiday destination.

Over the past few years, an average of 18 articles per week has been published about the ENTLEBUCH. ENTLEBUCH has become a name that signifies quality, and this has made the people proud of their region. This is also reflected in the activities of more than 300 clubs and associations. One example: The theatre society of the Entlebuch was founded in 1834. Since 1927, operettas accompanied by orchestra have been staged (usually every three years) in the theatre hall of Hotel Port in Entlebuch. In 2008 “Gasparone” by Carl Millöcker was performed: played, sung and danced by the local school teacher, kindergarten teacher, restaurant owner, carpenter or electrician. This seems possible only where regional ties are still intact.

6. Avoiding and minimising any social and cultural damage caused by tourism in tourism destination areas

The region is offering new perspectives. Year-round tourism has also contributed to that. It was possible to stop the massive flow of out-migration. The stable, lively culture of clubs and associations is certainly a good indicator showing that the ENTLEBUCH is socially balanced. The forums which emerged in the participatory process and the regional networks which are linked to each other are active and facilitate continuous exchange. The danger of drifting apart has been reduced. Opportunities and perspectives are discussed; mutual support and assistance are part of the process.

Evaluation against the TODO! additional questions

A) Could you give some examples which document that your project/measure is in line with environmental compatibility?

Sustainability and environmental compatibility are conditions that need to be fulfilled if a region is to be recognized as a UNESCO biosphere reservation. Under scientific monitoring, biosphere reservations have to prove in regular intervals that they continue to meet the criteria. Meanwhile, part of the more than 10,000 hectares of moorland have been included in the list of Ramsar sites and belong to the "world's most beautiful wetlands." Part of the core zone has been declared the first wood grouse reserve of Switzerland, because of the very positive development of the wild population of wood grouse. And: Since September 2008, the ENTLEBUCH has been Switzerland's first Nature Park.

Local businesses are increasingly trying to think in terms of chains of value addition, and to act accordingly: short distances, guaranteed quality and sticking to locally produced environmentally friendly products. Only products that meet these criteria are certified as "genuinely Entlebuch." The milk produced by local cows and sheep is not just processed into simple cheese, but into more than 40 types of cheese which are "genuinely Entlebuch". The same applies to the processing of herbs, sausages, meat, wood, schnapps and fruit wine into products which are "genuinely Entlebuch".

B) Are there any examples in the framework of your project/measure which make clear that a just participation of women and men has been taken into account during the planning/implementation phase of your project/measure? Considering gender relation, can be found any improvement of the status/situation of women within your project/measure?

Two third of the team members of the biosphere centre are women. At management level, however, men continue to dominate. However, in the forum on education which deals with the tourism products, in the biosphere school, and in the project "school on a farm" women call the tune. Besides, the coordination council is headed by a woman.

Furthermore, there is a female farmers' forum in which the women have defined three objectives for themselves: to establish a network for the exchange of knowledge and information, to conduct joint training programmes and evenings focussing on specific issues, and to establish a "job exchange" in order to support each other during busy times. Experience has shown that since the peak work load occurs at the same time for all of them, the last point is difficult to implement.

C) Through which measures/mechanisms is the economic and institutional sustainability of the project guaranteed? In the context of safeguarding the future of the project, where do you see problems and risks?

The ENTLEBUCH offers beautiful, unspoilt nature. However, this does not, by default, bring money into the region. There is a need for financial support from the official side, and there is a need for marketing strategies and their implementation at the local business level.

The financial conditions of the ENTLEBUCH will be undergoing changes. Thus it is expected that the canton of Lucerne will cut the subsidies through which richer regions support poorer regions. As the ENTLEBUCH, like many other mountainous regions in Switzerland, depends on these payments, financing will become difficult. As countermeasures, efforts are being made to change and reduce the administrative structures accordingly.

Yet, the situation remains ambivalent. 70% of the tourism flows to the ENTLEBUCH are dominated by local and regional visitors (family tourism); Lucerne and Berne are just on the doorstep. This means less dependence on international fluctuations, but the less profitable excursionists need to be catered to. Excursionists often use a region's infrastructure free of charge and spend little money, as they bring many things from home. The traffic on weekends and when the weather is nice is sometimes more than the region can cope with. Too few of the tourists make use of the cheap bus, train and tourism offers, but at the same time they expect parking space that is free of charge.

Another problem is that increasing global warming has more and more consequences, in the ENTLEBUCH, too: Sometimes there is not enough snow in the winter season. The skiing areas of Sörenberg are "too low" (most of the downhill runs start at a "low" altitude of 1,600 to 1,700 metres). A major decline in winter tourism would be a serious blow for the region's economy. However, people in the BIOSPHERE ENTLEBUCH believe that thanks to the structures created, they will be able to face these challenges.

The recognition as UNESCO Biosphere does not imply a standstill or a need for museum-like nature conservation, but challenges the ENTLEBUCH to constantly adapt and change and develop the region in a sustainable manner. This seems to be ensured.

The biosphere management offers information, communication and coordination for all the groups, activities and forums (wood, trade/industry, health, energy/mobility, agriculture, art/culture, nature/landscape protection, tourism forums, and municipalities). All the forums are interconnected and thus increase their efficiency. The population is involved in the discussions and developments. Regional cooperation partners are involved, also from the business community, and there is an intensive exchange with national and international networks and academic institutions.

5. CONCLUSION

The cooperation model developed by BIOSPHERE ENTLEBUCH, which promotes and enables dialogue between all economic and social stakeholders, lays the foundation for tourism that is designed to be sustainable, ecologically acceptable and socially responsible.

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