



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Man and
the Biosphere
Programme

VISHTYNETSKY UPLAND/ ROMINCKA FOREST

Towards an UNESCO biosphere reserve?

Insights and brief explanations on the nomination dossier



Biosphere reserves:
Commitment for sustainability

Guiding principals: Participatory
planning and functional zoning

Key roles and fields of action:
Conservation, development, support

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UNESCO Man and Biosphere (MAB) Programme and its biosphere reserves:

Commitment for sustainability

Unlike traditional protected areas, a modern biosphere reserve deals not only with nature conservation, but it rather focuses on people and their management.

Biosphere reserves thus pursue an ambitious goal, namely, to reconcile the pillars of nature conservation, education and awareness rising, scientific research, environmental monitoring as well as sustainable regional development.

In this way, model regions for the coexistence of man and nature are created.

As of 2022, there are in total 727 sites in 131 countries worldwide that have been officially recognized by UNESCO as biosphere reserves, 22 of them are transboundary regions.

In the Russian Federation 48 sites are part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.



MODEL REGION

The Vishtynetsky Upland in the Kaliningrad region is an attractive and mysterious, an unique and diverse cultural landscape.

About 2.500 locals live in the immediate vicinity of the forest. Stocks, hay meadows and fields are actively developing here.

Vishtynetsky Upland/Romincka Forest in Kaliningrad region: a potential UNESCO biosphere reserve!

On 19 January 2012, about 23,000 hectares of the Vishtynets hills received the status **Vishtynetsky Nature Park**. The main part of the natural complex is covered by forest. The forest ecosystem as well as numerous wetlands and small streams are of high richness of biodiversity. The nature park thus is one of the pearls of Kaliningrad region. Together with its surrounding pastures and agricultural lands it represents an unique landscape connected with historical and cultural heritage of the region.

In its entirety, the region is an intact natural area, which provides locals as guests with ecologically clean products and invites with its special quality and aesthetics to linger. State institutions, public associations and citizens carry out environmental monitoring, educational as well as promotional activities for sustainability.

This natural site, more than any other, has sufficient prerequisites for a successful nomination as a UNESCO biosphere region.



Guiding principles: Participatory planning and functional zoning

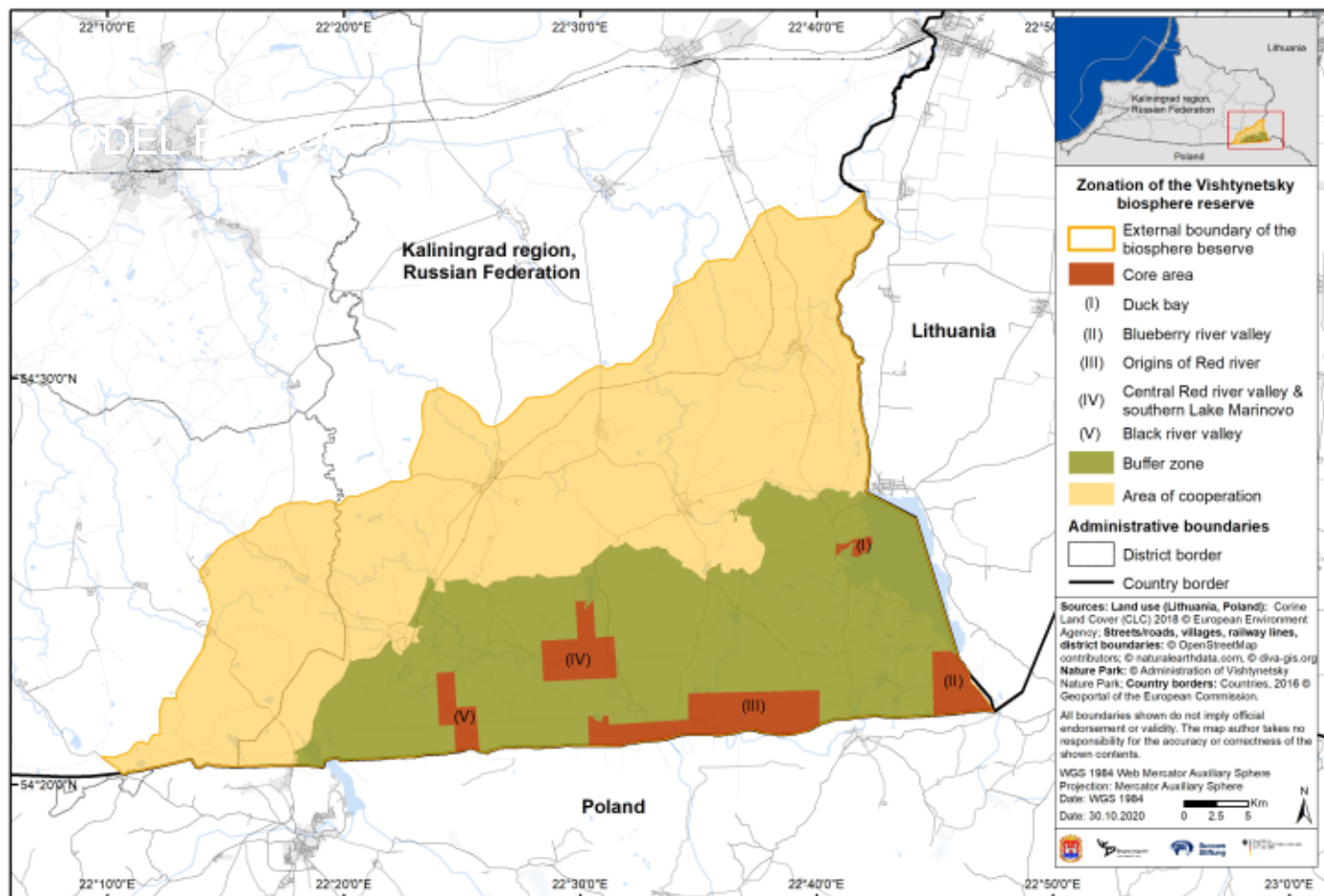
Biosphere reserves are based on successful "people-environment relationships". This means that a planned biosphere reserve requires not only special and intact ecosystems, but above all it requires interest and support of its inhabitants. Formally, this support must be documented at the end of the application process by the signatures of the district councillors and municipal representatives. However, it is just as **important that the population is "involved" from the very first steps of an intended application.**

For example, it is often the farmers who fear additional pressure; however, these fears are usually unfounded, because farms are often located in the "cooperation zone", where it is less about new restrictions than about new incentive and support programmes for sustainable development.

The international criteria for biosphere reserves deliberately leave room for how such a region can be realized. It is up to each management to define and follow this path itself. In the case of the Vishtynetsky Upland, in 2017 the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Kaliningrad region established a coordination committee to prepare for the establishment of the biosphere reserve. Next to representatives of the Nature Park and the Nesterov and Ozyorsk county administrations, this committee also included various stakeholder groups: farmers, the hunting association, the ecological-historical museum Vishtynets and civil society actors.

A biosphere reserve is divided into different zones: This serves as basis for the spatial distribution of objectives and fields of action defined in the management of the territory.





The five **core areas** are strictly protected to safeguard the most intact ecosystems and the biodiversity preserved there. Access is only permitted for research, for monitoring or educational purposes.

The remaining territory of Vishtynets Nature Park forms the **buffer zone**. Here, forest maintenance and hunting are only carried out extensively or are omitted completely. For

recreationists and environmental education various opportunities are in place.

The largest area is the **cooperation zone**. In principle, all forms of economy and land use are permitted here. However, through targeted promotion of model projects and incentives, across society and the economy the conversion to sustainable economic practices is continuously promoted.

Biosphere reserves integrate **three functions**:

1. Conservation of valuable ecosystems, biodiversity, and cultural diversity;
2. Development that is socio-culturally and environmentally sustainable;
3. Logistic support: research, monitoring, education, and public relations.

These three functions are interdependent and equally important.

The main objective of the creation of a potential Vishtynetsky Biosphere Reserve is following this integrated approach, in which the processes of conservation and development of the territory are closely interrelated.

Key roles and fields of action: Conservation and development

Conservation refers not only to certain rare and endangered wildlife species, but also to their habitats, particularly **valuable forest, wetland and freshwater ecosystems**.

Particularly noteworthy are the undissected area of the Romincka Forest, the habitat of Rominter Deer, the large Lake Vishtynetskoye, the Krasnaya River Valley and numerous wetlands, springs and streams with particular importance as freshwater catchment area for the Kaliningrad region.

Ecosystems contribute significantly to human well-being through ecosystem services such as water, food, regulating cycles or good air quality. They offer recreational opportunities in nature and provide many stimuli for culture and science.

The **preservation of this near-natural area and, the restoration of its ecological functions** is therefore of utmost importance. In this sense, the biosphere reserve supports the goals and tasks of the Vishtynets Nature Park.



A photograph of a dense forest. In the foreground, a large, moss-covered log lies horizontally, with several small, light-colored mushrooms growing from it. To the left of the log, there is a large, leafy green bush. The background is filled with numerous tall, slender tree trunks and a thick canopy of green leaves. The lighting is soft, suggesting a dappled sunlight effect.

CONSERVATION

The development of the Vishtynetsky Upland has always been associated with the use of natural resources. In addition to agriculture, in which the majority of local inhabitants were engaged, forestry, hunting and fishing flourished in the region. Over the past three decades, open areas have been used very extensively or not used at all and are characterised by a great abundance and variety of wild flora and fauna. Local connoisseurs collect (medicinal) herbs as well as berries and mushrooms here.

Over the past few years, the situation has changed significantly. With the establishment of the nature park the number of local people engaged in forestry has dropped significantly.

While the need for farmland in Kaliningrad region increased rapidly, also fields in the Vishtynetsky Upland were developed and newly cultivated by agricultural holdings. A few small and medium-size farmers and beekeeper remain who earn their living by producing "homemade products".

At the same time, awareness and popularity of the region increased. More and more locals got involved in tourism, providing accommodation and meals as well as excursions into nature. Some villages have also seen an influx of people seeking peace and quiet from the city, including individual artists and young entrepreneurs.



DEVELOPMENT

The potential of a Vishtynetsky Biosphere Reserve as living lab for sustainability is associated with following specific fields of action:

Conservation or restoration of the **red deer (Cervus elaphus (europaeus)) population** will preserve the unique gene pool and occurrence, which, in turn, will increase the animal's economic importance.

supply, sale of regionally produced food, handicrafts and souvenirs, development of a sound visitor management, education and information offers, and supporting marketing.

Transformation of abandoned settlements into hospitable and attractive residential places with an **intact village structure** will support local identity, culture and creativity.

Vishtynetsky Biosphere Reserve - potentials as model site and living lab for sustainable regional development

Development of sustainable tourism e. g. eco-, agro- and rural tourism will involve locals and communities in serving visitors. Positive regional-economic effect can be achieved and maximized by supporting services and cooperation of various stakeholders along the tourism service chain: Expansion of local public transport, improvement of the accommodation, gastronomy and leisure offer, environmentally friendly conversion of communal

Development of environmentally friendly SME and **local organic products** such as forest honey, medical herbs and teas, home made farm products, etc. will be supported while a **new brand (trademark) delivered by the biosphere reserve** is initiated in the frame of a partner programme. By guaranteeing ecologically sustainable and socially responsible production, the brand may claim subsidies and achieve higher revenues in the long term.



Research and monitoring

Research and monitoring are among the essential tasks of biosphere reserves carried out by scientists and rangers of the nature park as well as in cooperation with regional and international institutions. Both is necessary as well in core areas to deepen the understanding of ecosystem processes and climate change impacts, as in buffer and cooperation zones, where for example continuous visitor monitoring, studies on forms and intensity of impacts of tourism and recreation and analysis of its regional-economic effects are conducted.

On the territory of the Vishtynetsky Upland, in addition, investigations on wolf management, restoration of red deer population and sustainable hunting solutions is undertaken. Other topics are the increasing number of wildfires and their impact on nature and human's health, and the state of forest, wetland, and aquatic ecosystems.



Education for sustainable development

The concept of 'Education for Sustainable Development' (ESD) is an opportunity and an obligation for biosphere reserves, as model regions of sustainable economic and living practices, not only to inform about the occurrence of special animal and plant species and their habitats, but also to pass on their experience and knowledge on how to shape a sustainable development of the region.

With reference to ESD there are two main actors whose commitment to the Romincka Forest complex and surrounding Vishtynetsky Upland is to be emphasised. These are the Department for Environmental Education and Tourism of the Vishtynets Nature Park and the Vishtynets Ecological-Historical Museum in Krasnolesje. Both provide valuable information and educational offers to children, students as well as adult visitor groups.



Public relation and communication

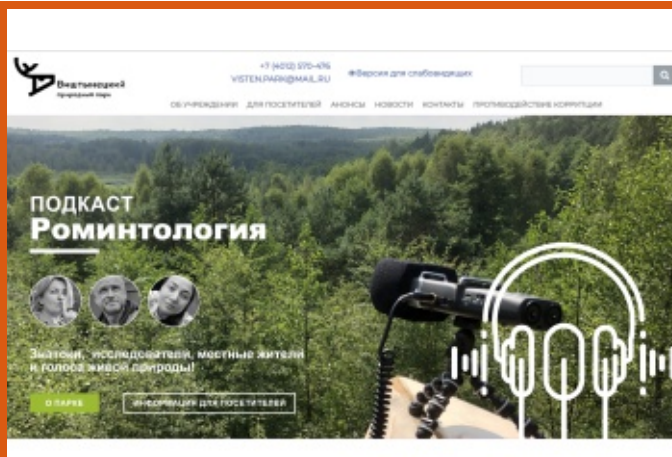
Spreading the word about the conservation site is a key element of a modern and active protected area management. Public relations and awareness rising, thus, form an important part also of a biosphere reserve's logistic support function and help to reduce gaps of knowledge. Through external communication channels and media campaigns a broader public is addressed and informed about the biosphere reserve rationale and objective. By doing so, common understanding about the importance of various ecosystems and the value of ecosystem services is developed. Ultimately, acceptance and support is built for the conservation and development of the region according to the functional zonation.

For the Vishtynets Nature Park administration and biosphere reserve steering committee and working groups the duties were not entirely new.

SUPPORT

Various activities were taken, envisioning a nomination as biosphere reserve: a survey among citizens living within the proposed cooperation zone, information gatherings, Romintology podcast series, image film clips, distribution of leaflets, etc. But there remains ample room to enhance scope, effectiveness, and outreach of communication activities.

The present brochure serves as information for whom it may concern about the initiative taken towards an UNESCO biosphere reserve based on the Vishtynets Nature Park. The nomination dossier for the designation of the area by the UNESCO Man and Biosphere International Coordination Council is currently submitted to the responsible political stakeholders for review and signing.





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