2. The main objectives of the project

The overall objective of the project has been to re-design the research agenda for MAB-Austria, in special consideration of BRIM. Furthermore, the project specified a few other objectives in support, and in addition, to the main objective. We summarize below the main goals of the project.

7 Investigations for a possible research agenda for MAB Austria, in special consideration of BRIM.
8 Engender communication with the scientific community with respect to MAB research in Austria.
9 Guidance for the allocation of resources to MAB research in Austria
10 Signal to funding agencies the importance of this research
11 Integrate Austrian MAB activities to UNESCO-MAB and other national MAB activities
12 Link the Austrian MAB programme to other international programmes

3. Activities undertaken in relation to their objectives

Objective 1. Investigations for a possible research agenda for MAB Austria, in special consideration of BRIM

Activity 1: Research on the status of BRIM (national and international) via interviews, questionnaires, and literature surveys.

As was emphasised in the proposal, the new Austrian MAB research agenda was to be redesigned in special consideration of the *Biosphere Reserve Integrated Monitoring* (BRIM) concept as laid down in the Sevilla Strategy in 1995 and reinforced 5 years later. The concept of "integrated monitoring" for BRs was expressed as an interdisciplinary effort (between the natural and social sciences) for the development and use of concepts,

tools and indicators that would inform of the (sustainable or unsustainable) trend within a BR. In other words, if BRs are lived-in locations where humans are expected to use nature sustainably, the concept of BRIM was introduced to document this usage and its related impacts (see annex 1.1 for a history of BRIM).

Since the new Austrian MAB research agenda was to be in special consideration of BRIM, one of the first activities towards this effort was to undertake research on the status of BRIM, both nationally and internationally. While information on the BRIM situation in Austrian BRs was generated via interviews with BR managers, responsible officials in the government, engaged scientists, and local NGOs, the international scenario was judged through review of literature on case-studies, internet search, direct communication with resource persons and BR managers in other European countries, and by undertaking a formal survey using a questionnaire. Besides, we also used results of the recent EuroMAB survey on BRIM that was jointly undertaken by France-MAB and the Rhön Biosphere Reserve with the support of UNESCO-MAB secretariat.

Results of this research indicate that even 10 years after Sevilla there still does not exist a common approach and understanding of how BRIM could be implemented. Within the Austrian context, we did not find any coherent work in the direction of BRIM, though certain parameters, mostly within natural sciences, are being researched and monitored by university institutes/departments. Apart from this, there are projects aimed at conservation of species and resources. However, it must be noted that most of this research and monitoring is due to the fact that the territory of BRs overlaps with other protected area networks (such as National Parks, Ruhegebiet, etc) with higher protection status and for which substantial finances are available. Gossenköllesee is the only BR whose territory does not overlap with any other protected area, and research here is primarily undertaken by the University of Innsbruck with financial assistance from the Federal government, or the EC. Except for a small core which is protected under Natura 2000, the Grosses Walsertal BR also does not have enhanced protection by way of an overlap with a strictly protected area. Nonetheless, an interdisciplinary approach to integrated monitoring in the direction of BRIM does not yet exist in Austria (see annex 1.2 and 1.3 for list of stakeholders interviewed and protocols of interviews with BR managers/responsible officials).

Internationally too, several BRs in the world do have a variety of (uncoordinated) natural science monitoring and research, but only 42 Biosphere Reserves of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) report about socio-economic monitoring activities. This is

about 10% of all reserves. One has to add that these activities are usually not undertaken in a systematic and frequently repeated manner. A recent survey undertaken by EuroMAB on the status of BRIM within the European-North American network of Biosphere Reserves revealed that of the 57 respondents, only 25 BRs reported natural science monitoring in one or several aspects, and of these only 6 had some component of social science monitoring. Thus the socio-economic side in monitoring, compared to biotic and a-biotic monitoring is heavily under-developed. None, however, had a standardised and systematic approach to integrated monitoring (see annex 1.4 for the EuroMAB survey form).

Few BRs have made efforts to introduce BRIM in their own way but so far this remains only at the planning and visionary level. Even those BRs that could be seen as high profile examples where regional sustainable development and where the logic of a BR is well understood, do not have integrated monitoring. For example, in the Rhön BR in Germany many different government and private institutions undertake monitoring, but as of now, most of the research programmes are sector oriented (fauna, soil, groundwater etc.). Again, in the Entlebuch BR in Switzerland, we find plenty of natural science research such as meteorological measurements and biodiversity monitoring. However, the official website details much information on the vision of integrated monitoring based on interdisciplinary research. In a research project of the University of Zürich a conceptual framework of assessment was worked out. Key-indicators were elaborated to check if the regional economic development is sustainable.

Our own survey was a short internet-based questionnaire addressed to the BR managers. The response was rather low (6%;18 BRs) but covering Europe, North America, Asia and Australia. Of the 18 BRs that responded, 50% were involved in the BRIM-process. More than 70% participate in national research/monitoring networks. In almost all BRs research on the inventory of fauna, flora and landscape is undertaken. However, only 50% use standardised methods and conduct regular investigations and less than half use Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Main obstacles to research relate to funding and deficits in organisation and technical support (See annex 1.5 for questionnaire and detailed results).

Activity 2: Natural science considerations on integrated monitoring

The natural sciences contributed their first considerations on the definition and relevant parameters for integrated monitoring in BRs. In this view, three postulates towards BRIM were emphasised. The first refers to integrated monitoring of ecosystems across media and sectors over time to assess the state of these systems and (social and ecosystem) responses to changes in the systems. Furthermore, monitoring should not only be limited to structural changes of ecosystems and its components, but also changes in processes and function of ecosystems. A useful indicator for this may be mapping of land use patterns to identify the relation between spatial patterns of landscape structure and the basic processes affecting them. Changes in land cover and use may be the key link between social and environmental processes.

Second, the intelligible utilisation of existing data and monitoring networks generated through studies conducted in the Austrian BRs. They could represent the basis for site-specific integrated monitoring, whereupon further activities can be developed. Nevertheless, the actual strategy and methods of observation and monitoring needs re-evaluation, be amended and adapted accordingly. Besides, long-term observation, practical applicability, standardization and assured long-term financing are key issues for validating monitoring activities. The setting up of a central database of all data with long-term perspectives made available by responsible BR authorities would be valuable to science in general and integrated monitoring in particular. Since at present no set of core indicators for BRIM is defined by the UNESCO-MAB secretariat, the monitoring activities of the Austrian UBA (Umweltbundesamt) at Zöbelboden could serve as a model approach.

The third postulate emphasized on promoting basic research on ecosystems within the framework of BRIM. The need for problem-oriented, applied research should not exclude basic science, which at first sight may seem irrelevant for some BR users. In principle, the cooperation between scientists and beneficiaries of science seems useful. For example, contribution of stakeholder perspectives in developing the design of future research in BRs and the enhanced participation and involvement of BR inhabitants/land-owners in various research projects would be particularly rewarding. However, integrated monitoring needs a sound disciplinary knowledgebase; therefore, research policy should not entail competition between a problem-oriented focus and basic research.

Activity 3: Developing a conceptual scheme for integrated monitoring

As mentioned earlier (Activity 1), even after 10 years of the Sevilla declaration, there still does not exist a common understanding of what BRIM is and how this could be implemented. While assessing the BRIM situation in Austria, we found that in general the distinction was not clear between (a) integrated monitoring for sustainability trend assessment, combining social and natural sciences, with which BRIM concerns itself with, and (b) integrated monitoring, combining one or more disciplines within the natural sciences, for the purpose of scientific research alone. While there is much going on in the latter, sustainability assessment as defined in BRIM has largely remained not so well understood.

Sustainability assessment and designing interventions is a task far more complex than monitoring various features of the state of the environment alone. A much greater range of variables – in both the natural and the social sphere, and their interactions – have to be taken into account. It is also more complex with regard to the processes that monitoring and research have to support: the relevant processes include not just a diagnosis of the situation and the prospects of future development, but also the specifying of shared goals and targets, the identification of adequate management responses, and the development of communications that will be trusted by insiders and outsiders concerned with science and biosphere reserves.

The first attempt to come to terms with this complexity was made in the UNESCO-MAB's Rome BRIM Report (Lass and Reusswig 2002). While the effort is pioneering and commendable, an analysis of the conceptual scheme described in the report presented us with some difficulties, particularly its broad employment of social science variables and whether they are monitorable or not. Our procedure was to borrow this basic scheme, give it a somewhat narrower focus and make it operational for an Austrian research plan. Our goal was not to give answers to research questions; rather it was to develop a conceptual scheme that would allow us to specify reasonable areas, and reasonable questions, to guide future research and cumulatively contribute to the development of a coherent monitoring and assessment tool for biosphere reserves (see annex 1.6 for a presentation of our conceptual scheme). In a first step, the conceptual scheme should inform the Austrian MAB science plan about a priority research agenda.

Activity 4: National/local Workshop with BR stakeholders

The process of designing a research agenda for the Austrian MAB programme included consultation with the BR managers and local stakeholders. The consultation was not only carried out onsite (where we assessed the local situation and research needs), but was extended to a setting of a one day local/national workshop aimed to test our ideas before they were presented at the larger international consultation workshop held a month later in Illmitz (see Activity 6). This workshop helped gather feedback and resonance for our ongoing efforts, and strengthened the cooperation between scientists and stakeholders, in particular with BR managers. Furthermore, the workshop offered a unique opportunity for the BR managers to interact among themselves on a common platform. The workshop, held on 27 May 2004, was attended by one or more representatives, either an administrator or a scientist, from the 5 existing Austrian BRs and the upcoming Wiener Wald BR. In addition to our project team, project members of E.C.O. also attended the workshop (see annex 1.7 for the list of participants).

The first half of the workshop was dedicated to presentations on the status and results so far of the project, including those of E.C.O and Lange (see annex 1.8 and 1.9 for the workshop programme and presentations respectively). The IFF+IECB project team proposed a conceptual scheme for integrated monitoring and received broad positive resonance. Nevertheless, the local experts underlined the necessity of a long-term perspective and the involvement of a number of stakeholders. After a common lunch, which was from a social point of view a very important part of this day, the participating BR managers and researchers were asked to undertake a SWOT (**S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats) analysis with respect to their BRs. SWOT Analysis is a very effective way of identifying Strengths and Weaknesses, and of examining the Opportunities and Threats faced in a given context. The results were rather heterogeneous owing to differing socioeconomic and ecological conditions within which each BR operates, including the history of notification (see annex 1.10 for a protocol of the workshop and the SWOT analysis).

Objective 2. Engender communication with the scientific community with respect to MAB research in Austria.

Activity 5: Designing an Austrian-MAB website

In order to engender communication with the scientific community with respect to MAB research and activities in Austria, the project undertook the task of designing a project homepage. Besides, the homepage allowed the Austrian National MAB committee, other projects, BR managers, etc. to follow the progress of the project online. The homepage gives an overview of the central themes and issues and the background of the project and lists documents such as protocols and presentation at workshops along with a calendar of events (a brief overview of the website layout is attached as annex 2.1). A download-area facilitates access to project-relevant documents, discriminating between a public domain, an area with password-access for members of the national committee, and another area with restricted access for the project consortium. Furthermore, the homepage provided access to the online-questionnaire addressed at BR co-ordinators about the status of BRIM (see Activity 1). The questionnaire was linked to the project homepage, possibly leading to a broader recognition of our project aims and efforts.

For the time being it is expected that the present structure of the website will be maintained even after the termination of the project. Nevertheless, it is useful to consider future possibilities/options at the national level and to be aware of the necessity of a central BRIM-database. The project homepage should be converted into a web-portal for biosphere reserves and BRIM in Austria (see annex 2.2 for details). Future steps proposed are web-presentations, Geographic Information Systems and database management systems (possibly building upon the expertise from the GLORIA database and information system). In implementing a national central BRIM-database, data-handling will be a challenging task for future activities, especially the harmonization of spatial data (see annex 2.2 for detailed proposal), which is a pre-requisite for the integrated assessment of monitoring endeavours.

Activity 6: International consultancy workshop

The project design included the organisation of an international consultancy workshop with the aim to generate feedback on our efforts to design a research agenda for MAB-

Austria, and to engender communication with the international MAB community with respect to MAB research in Austria. This workshop, endorsed by UNESCO MAB (see annex 2.3), took place in the Biosphere Reserve Neusiedlersee, at Illmitz on the 17. and 18. of June, 2004, and attracted strong participation from the international MAB community that comprised of scientists, managers, activists, and other national and international MAB programmes (see annex 2.4 for the list of participants).

The input presentations at the beginning of the first workshop day delivered a broad perspective on Biosphere Reserves in Austria, from a practical point of view (presentation by two biosphere reserve managers) as well as the presentation of a study on the research activities in Austria's Biosphere Reserves (E.C.O.) and the stakeholder composition and their importance for the existence of an Biosphere Reserve (IFF). On the other hand, an international UNESCO point of view on the "Interlinkages between scientific research, monitoring and assessment" was presented by Dr. Salvatore Arico (Programme Specialist UNESCO-MaB) as well as an introduction of the "Social monitoring of Biosphere Reserves as a Social Process" by Dr. Fritz Reusswig (Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, Germany) (see annex 2.5 and 2.6 for the workshop programme and presentations respectively).

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this workshop was to present and get feedback on the conceptual considerations in preparation of an Austrian research agenda (see annex 1.6 for the conceptual paper). The presentations were well received and several working groups discussed in detail how they would advise the Austrian National Committee to proceed, including listing three most important research areas/questions suited to BRs (see annex 2.7 on the results of the working groups). While many considered the proposal as an important step forward to make the Rome BRIM report operational, others were afraid that some of the broadness in approaching the social dimensions could get lost. Finally, all participants strongly welcomed the following general principles for future Austrian MaB research:

- *Interdisciplinarity* (across natural and social sciences)
- *Transdisciplinarity* (MAB research should take stakeholders perspectives seriously and communicate research results to them)
- *International orientation*

Objective 3. Guidance for the allocation of resources to MAB research in Austria

Activity 7: Preparing a call for proposals for MAB research in Austria, and an evaluation procedure

Besides the international consultancy workshop that indeed gave us valuable feedback in our attempt to outline a suitable research agenda for the Austrian MAB programme, there still remained a need to broaden our scope of enquiry from guiding principles to concrete ideas. One way to realise this, in our opinion, was to engage a wider range of scientists working in Austrian BRs and generate concrete ideas on what they felt were the research needs of these locations that would help meet the Sevilla mandate. It was envisioned that in doing so, we could build upon the expertise and insights of these scientists to outline, in a transparent way, a suitable research agenda. In agreement with the Austrian MAB committee, a text for a call for proposals was prepared by the project where the guiding principles and major research topics - based on the outputs from the international workshop - were stated in detail. This text contained an invitation to scientists to develop and submit concrete ideas for research in BRs, in line with these guiding principles and topics, under the category of "small and medium scale projects" or "integrated projects" and submitted to the MAB Committee and the Austrian Academy of Science (see annex 3.1). Furthermore, yet another text that outlined in detail the evaluation criteria for the proposal reviewers was prepared (see annex 3.2). The call was announced at the Academy's website in August 2004.

Activity 8: Advice to Austrian MAB Committee on strategic resource allocation

The necessity for an explicit Austrian research agenda for the Austrian-MAB programme arises from the need to allocate the limited resources towards research that would fit well with the particular needs and opportunities of Austrian BRs and would be in line with the priorities set by the International MAB Council. It was already stated in the beginning that this research agenda be developed in special consideration of BRIM since it is essential to know whether a particular BR fulfils its basic function of sustainability or not. In other words, to be environmentally and economically sustainable is the very goal of a BR, and whether a particular BR meets its goal or not can only be known through systematic monitoring. In the Austrian context we found that, apart from scientific research, most

BRs do not report integrated monitoring along the lines of BRIM. Furthermore, it is not only the lack of monitoring that is problematic, but also the lack of a conceptual scheme on which integrated monitoring can be based. Hence one of the tasks in this project was to develop such a conceptual scheme (see annex 1.6) and to discuss its scientific appeal within the wider MAB community. The first presentations of this scheme showed positive results in the international consultancy workshop at Illmitz (Activity 6) and the Glochamore workshop (Activity 13). However, much needs to be done in this direction.

Our advice to the Austrian MAB programme would be to support the development of such a conceptual scheme that could serve as a sound basis for integrated monitoring of BRs. Consultations with BR managers, MAB scientists, and with the wider academic community would go a long way in its further development, as well as in reaching agreements on a core set of (society-nature interaction) indicators to be monitored and/or observed, developing sustainability assessment techniques and parameters, further research on the stakeholder scheme around uses and benefits from BRs, and search for suitable decision support tools. A key challenge that needs to be overcome is to find ways of adapting the model to varying situations. One way would be to undertake pilot studies to test the model for replication and further refinement. Pilot sites could be selected on the basis of (a) geographical distribution, (b) degrees of development/impacts, (c) ecosystem variability. UNESCO-MAB has already indicated their interest to support efforts for pilot studies in other countries. An international cooperation in this direction seems rewarding. Once pilot sites have been selected, UNESCO-MAB has offered to organise an international workshop to bring together those involved in the pilot projects with the purpose to (a) share and compare implementation plans for pilot projects, (b) discuss the overall framework, and redefine if necessary according to the needs of specific sites, and (c) consider applicability and implications of the pilot projects to other countries or regions. UNESCO-MAB has shown their interest to work with the Austrian MAB programme to further the BRIM process, which in our opinion would be a good way to go.

Objective 4. Signal to funding agencies the importance of this research

Activity 9: Interview with BR stakeholders in Austria on funding possibility for undertaking integrated monitoring

It is obvious that sustained integrated monitoring in BRs would require a certain amount of resources on a regular basis. While the Austrian MAB committee (Academy of Science) has shown willingness to support the development of a conceptual framework for integrated monitoring together with the development of tools, indicators, and a central database, regular monitoring must be financed by other sources. Monitoring for sustainability assessment, as mentioned earlier, is distinct from the ongoing scientific research in BRs by university departments and institutes. A first effort in developing a conceptual framework for integrated monitoring was undertaken in this project (see annex 1.6). However, there is still the need to define a core set of indicators that would contribute to a sustainability assessment, those that would be cost-effective in their generation and can use much of the already existing data.

During field consultations we investigated financing options for such regular monitoring. The central idea was to generate a mind-map of the stakeholders at multiple-levels according to the (a) degree of stakes they have in the respective BRs and (b) amount of resources they possess/control (see annex 4.1 for a list of stakeholders according to BRs). A broad summary of results are as follows:

1. Lobau: major stakeholders controlling/possessing resources

- MA 49 : has resources but does not spend substantial amounts yet.
- MA 45: high stakes, the region being a water area; possess and have spent large amounts of resources on projects.
- MA 22: high responsibility for the area, but not much resources. However, they have the potential to partially contribute.

2. Gossenköllesee: major stakeholders controlling/possessing resources

- Umweltschutz Abteilung, Tirol: responsible for the BR, has resources and did not rule out the possibility to contribute to integrated monitoring.

- Kühtaier Liftanlagen Gmbh: A ski-lift company with high stakes and possessing resources.

3. Gurgler Kamm: major stakeholders controlling/possessing resources

- Umweltschutz Abteilung, Tirol: responsible for the BR, has resources and did not rule out the possibility to contribute to integrated monitoring. The case of Gurgler Kamm seemed easier than Gossenköllesee since the area is also a Ruhegebiet with high protection status. The department usually finances research in areas that are listed in the Naturschutzgebiet.
- Tourismusverband: High stakes. They had financed a socio-economic study about 25 years ago in this region and are keen to repeat it. Whether they would support integrated monitoring on a sustained basis is a question of negotiation.
- Verein Naturpark Ötztaler Alpen**:** stakes in conservation and could contribute to integrated monitoring.

4. Grosses Walsertal: major stakeholders controlling/possessing resources

- Buro für Zukunft Fragen: High stakes with resources.
- Umweltschutz Abteilung, Vorarlberg: High stakes with resources

5. Neusiedler See: major stakeholders controlling/possessing resources

The Neusiedler See BR is an area overlapping with other protected area networks (such as National Park, Natura 2000, Ramsar Convention) that have high stakes in the area and have access to resources from the state. It might be possible to negotiate some of these funds towards integrated monitoring which would be of use also these protected areas.

Objective 5. Link Austrian MAB activities to UNESCO-MAB and other national MAB activities

Activity 10: Networking with UNESCO-MAB and other national MAB programmes

In order to enhance and make visible Austrian MAB efforts in the international MAB community, substantial networking was carried out with UNESCO-MAB and with other national MAB programmes. Close contact was established with the Programme Specialist for UNESCO-MAB, Dr. Salvatore Arico, who supported the Austrian efforts and provided valuable suggestions on how the Austrian MAB programme could proceed in the future. This support is clearly visible in UNESCO-MAB's endorsement of the international consultancy workshop at Illmitz, Salvatore Arico's presentation at the workshop, and invitation to the Austrian MAB committee to present the results at the ICC 18 meeting (see Activity 12). Besides, the project established close contacts with MAB programmes in Germany, Switzerland, France, Greece and India. The choice of contacts was based on the experience and level of activity in the MAB programmes so as to learn from their experiences (see annex 5.1 for a list of international contacts). Those involved actively in other national MAB activities were invited to the international consultancy workshop to present their efforts and comment on ours.

Activity 11: Designing an Austrian-MAB website

See details under Activity 5

Activity 12: Presentation at ICC 18 by Dr. Köck

At the 18th meeting of the International Coordinating Council (ICC) of UNESCO-MAB held in Paris from 25-29 October 2004, Austria was represented by the secretary of the Austrian MAB Committee, Dr. Günter Köck. In this meeting, Dr. Köck presented a report, to which we contributed, on the activities of MAB-Austria in the last 2 years. A substantial part of this report was dedicated to MAB-Austria's effort to re-design its research agenda, together with efforts to link to and complement existing research programmes and initiatives at the international level so as to create favourable synergisms. The report provided further details on the call for proposals (see Activity 7) for projects focussing on (a) establishing basic monitoring systems, in line with BRIM and

international standards, (b) supporting design and management of BRs, and (c) major cross-cutting perspectives and development options for BRs. The report further described the current status of Austrian BRs and ongoing research projects (see annex 5.2 for the full report). An important consequence of this meeting was that Austria was nominated to the Vice-presidency of the international MAB programme (see annex 5.3).

Objective 6. Link Austrian MAB programme into other international programmes

Activity 13: Presentation of the conceptual scheme at the Glochamore workshop (GLORIA, MRI)

To take advantage of synergies, BRIM clearly demands collaboration with global initiatives and programmes (some already using BR sites in Austria) such as IGBP (International Geosphere Biosphere Programme), IHDP (International Human Dimensions Programme), GLOCHAMORE (Global Change in Mountain Regions), MRI (Mountain Research Initiative), GLORIA (Global Observation Research Initiative in Alpine Environments), GTOS (Global Terrestrial Observing System) and ALTER-Net (A Long-term Ecological Research Network).

A month before the international workshop at Illmitz, the first thematic workshop of GLOCHAMORE (Global Change in Mountain Regions) was held in Vienna, 9-11 May 2004, titled, "Global Environmental and Social Monitoring". The GLOCHAMORE project (Global change in Mountain Regions), initiated by the MRI (Mountain Research Initiative), is funded by the EU and coordinated by the IECB, University of Vienna. It aims to further the understanding of the causes and impacts of Global Changes in mountain regions through interdisciplinary efforts and collaborating with UNESCO MAB's Mountain Biosphere Reserves in European countries with the explicit goal of implementing the strategy in mountain Biosphere Reserves around the world, in both developed and developing countries. Our project was invited to present our ongoing efforts on redefining the research agenda for MAB-Austria (see annex 6.1 for the workshop programme). The GLOCHAMORE workshop was seen as an opportunity to present our first ideas on the conceptual framework for integrated monitoring for resonance and feedback for further work. The presentation was well received by the

GLOCHAMORE community and the project well-represented (see annex 6.2 for the presentation). Consequently, we were invited to publish our ideas in the workshop proceedings to carry on the discussion (see annex 1.6 for the submitted paper).

Activity 14: Discussion within ALTERNET; participation at the Gumpenstein (Austria) and Halle (Germany) ALTERNET meetings

ALTER-Net is a partnership of 24 organizations from 17 European countries for European long-term terrestrial and fresh-water biodiversity and ecosystem research. Based on existing facilities, the network aims to develop approaches to assess and forecast changes in biodiversity, structure, functions and dynamics of ecosystems and their services, including indicators, and consider socioeconomic implications and public attitudes to biodiversity loss. UNESCO-MAB is one of the partner organizations of ALTER-Net where it contributes to developing a core set of biodiversity indicators.

Our project was represented at two of the meetings of ALTER-Net, one at Gumpenstein (Austria, February 2004), and the other in Halle (Germany, October 2004). In the former, the project was then in its initiation phase, hence the only effect was its visibility. In the latter meeting, our efforts in developing a conceptual scheme received considerable positive response from the European participants, and several indicated their willingness to collaborate. This resulted in a joint proposal of 3 partners (Austria, U.K, and Romania, with Austria as the lead) to submit a proposal to the ALTER-Net secretariat aimed at developing a conceptual interdisciplinary scheme to move from ALTER-Net to ALTSER-Net (A long term socio-ecological research) whereby synergism between Austrian-MAB efforts and ALTER-Net would be established.