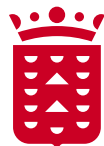


A
Tapestry
of
Words

PROPOSAL



Cabildo de Lanzarote

50th Anniversary of the MaB Programme 1971-2021 UNESCO

A Tapestry of Words

(Agreement of the Scientific Board · 22 January 2021)

“People have always been inseparably connected to nature and now, more than ever, we are in an interconnected world. But that fact does not make the world more just. Our quest for consuming and accumulating more overwhelms the universal right to enjoy a full relationship with the tapestry of life, because following the law of physics and biology, if you devour too many of the strands in one area of the tapestry, inevitably, holes will appear in another. There are more and more holes and they are poorly distributed in the process of environmental and global injustice at a new scale.

There is very little time left and it is going to be very difficult, but we are still in time to reweave this tapestry and get ourselves weaved in it. Each thread would be fragile but the tapestry all together would be the solidity of many, a sturdiness made of many fragilities.

I dedicate this prize to all the fragile people, of whose loving battle depends on and will depend on the persistence of the tapestry of Life on Earth”

Sandra Myrna Díaz, Princess of Asturias Awards 2019

50 years later, let's seek wisdom in the MaB margins... We are Biosphere

The UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme (MaB) was born to practice and try to restore the necessary link with nature that every human society requires. Its own name showed the solution in the copulative conjunction, Person **AND** Biosphere, opposite to the misguided choice, Development **OR** Nature, which lead us to a future full of problems: that's the future we are living now and the future we envisage for our children, fifty years later.

The dominating Western culture colonized the planet spreading its faith in technology

For the last four centuries, the advancement of science, technical innovations and cultural creativity towards an indefinite Progress, appear to have revolved around the Atlantic Ocean. As they dared to cross it, the cultures of the smaller and more fragmented continent achieved a first expansion of the European sphere of action, first of all relaying on the colonization of the Americas. Three centuries later, in the United States of America, a global business culture with continuous expansion was given impetus, as if the world might endlessly extend its limits, recreating the surprise generated by the discovery that the Planet was bigger than they had thought until then, when they were only trying to find a shorter route to India

It was a febrile mirage which continues today, searching new technological developments, new business profits, new Promethean worlds, with no consideration for the mineral requirements, the ecological footprint or derivative cultural changes; without giving any thought to the fact that the inherent nature of the biosphere complexity and the complexity of our interaction with it, turn that constant search for novelty, in expeditions throughout oceans of future, in search of unknown lands, for which we have no maps.

Insular cultures, indigenous cultures, societies aware of their limits

As an accurate visual metaphor, the French philosopher Bruno Latour remembers the scene where Galileo Galilei uses one of his first telescopes, in the Venice lagoon, raising his gaze from the sailing ships up to the stars. By questioning himself about the similarities of those stars with our Planet, he contributed to the first steps of Science and Modernity, which run parallel to the European scientific exploration of the world.

Latour concludes that current Science must change its approach, turn its instruments and its gaze to our planet and question itself about the phenomenon of Life which makes it habitable, in such a different way to those other planets. Who makes this planet habitable?

In the same way, each culture in each BR shall have its own feature and what they have in common may be essential to identify our current ignorance regarding nature. In the MaB 50th Anniversary, we propose to conduct a learning exercise on local cultures that co-inhabit with the best natural areas of the planet, the Biosphere Reserves (BRs).

In particular, some islands designated by the Unesco as reserves, offer beautiful examples of self-limitations and defence of their development model. Because their cultures are more impregnated by their local natural conditions, they sometimes find the inspiration in their own limits and, perceived as a singularity, they choose to assume such limits as their own identity.

All biosphere reserves contain some ecosystems where human cultures keep appropriate practices for maintaining that greater biodiversity and the natural resources which allow the social life. Usually, those practices have been achieved through generations of trial and error and maybe nowadays we don't seem to know why such tasks are done in those ways. That is the reason why we need to analyse the wisdom inherent to the vernacular languages, because they express treasured knowledge, sometimes forgotten. Or maybe it will be the metropolitan cultures which end up not achieving an accurate translation of the essential indigenous words.

This way, we understand that societies in BRs have some cultural knowledge and a way of interacting between them and with their surrounding nature, which is the fruit of their common history, their economic and political decisions and their conflicts and alliances. This will not be an exercise of quantifying and creating social typologies once again but using qualitative study techniques which raise what is really at stake in those societies when they interact with nature.

Words, charged with sense and emotion, are an open window to social representations of the people living in a territory. How they live, how they interpret it, how they suffer it or enjoy it... only they can transmit, with their own narrative, their own experience to the other managing institutions.

We are talking about a Dictionary Tapestry of Words, of human links to Nature

In this Century of the Great Test we should look into how we got here. Western culture has lost something. Something that prevents us from recognizing the unfeasibility of our unlimited greed or indefinite expansion. And that something is related to the way how the human being understands their position relative to nature, the way that we disengage from our own implication in the biosphere and from our dependency with other people.

As part of the process of separation from nature, humans change the rural language culture for an industrial and metropolitan language. By turning away from nature, by ignoring it, we have lost the deep awareness of connection and dependency we had with all the living systems of Earth, according to several authors. This awareness was present in indigenous cultures, with their deep

knowledge of their surroundings and their interpretation that everything was interconnected and everything interacted reciprocally.

Lolita Chávez, an indigenous leader from Guatemala, during the seminar called “Ante el Antropoceno”, organized in 2019 on occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the birth of Cesar Manrique, on the island of Lanzarote, spoke of this topic and of the indigenous cultures in Abya Yala, which still invoke Mother Earth every day as they feel an inseparable part of it. In all cultures of these indigenous peoples of the World there is a relationship between the Cosmos, the Earth, human and non-human life and physical environment.

As the 50th anniversary of the MaB Programme arrives, our society seems to be developing a growing consciousness of the limits of the Biosphere, which goes beyond human action. This can be seen in the new nature-friendly social movements which correspond in some way with the need to recover the respect and the ethical-affective link to nature.

On this wave of awareness on planetary limits, we request from the World Network of Biosphere Reserves to boost the 50th Anniversary and to represent that growing social impulse of turning our eyes to nature. If the West lost something in its planetary expansion, we propose searching the margins of such civilization, which is nowadays a metropolitan society, for the words linking humanity and nature. Those words will sometimes be purely relics of the past which have persisted until present and some other new words relating to old and new relationships.

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The essence of this open and collaborative proposal is attached on the next page, which begins with the approval of the BR Lanzarote Scientific Cabinet, it has already obtained the support of all the Spanish Biosphere Reserves and of its Scientific Council, to send it to the Spanish MaB Committee if it captures its interest and then present it to UNESCO and, from there, to the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

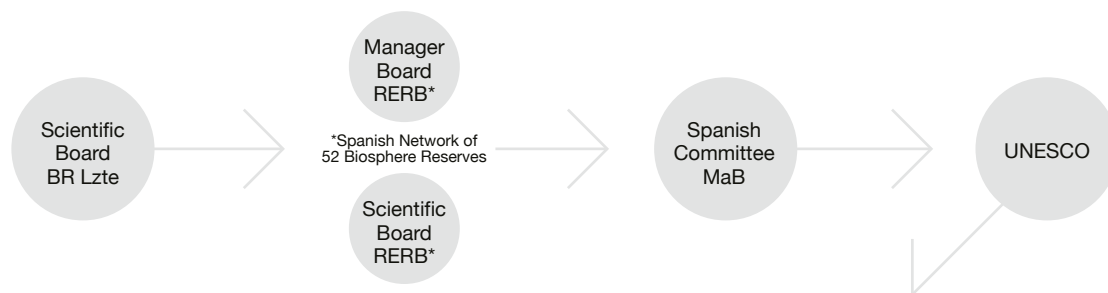
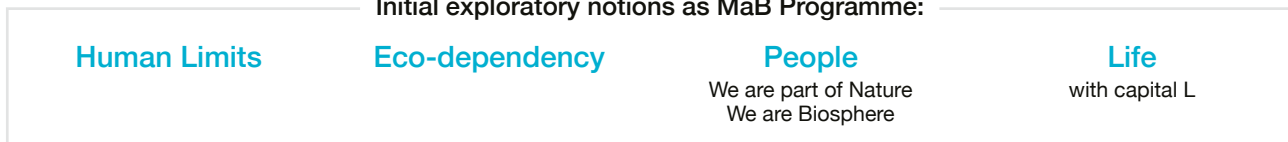
Proposal

A Tapestry of Words

50th Anniversary of the Man & the Biosphere Programme

Our proposal to UNESCO is to launch the Tapestry of Words' Initiative in 2021, towards the World's Biosphere Reserves, with a selection of words connecting human and nature in vernacular languages spoken by the communities most involved in coexisting with the best quality ecosystems within each Biosphere Reserve.

Initial exploratory notions as MaB Programme:



- 1 Set a date in Autumn 2021 to get a first collection of words, promoting dialogue and agreements in each culture, spreading relevance of the initiative.
- 2 Celebrate regional MaB workshops to assess the collected material and to examine the local wisdom in each BR which is implicit in the collected words.
- 3 Convene a Conference to set the features, method, scope and entities to get involved.

Some of the expected outcomes include, but are not limited to:

- **A Tapestry of Words for each BR**, to understand the relationship between society and nature in its own context so that managing bodies have results they can “relate to” and not only a list of words with their definition. A mirror where they can see themselves as a BR in terms of culture.
- A first version of a **Dictionary Tapestry of Words**, as a collective and progressive construction, within the World's Network of Biosphere Reserves, in alliance with... VV.
- **Regional maps** and a **World Map** with one word for each BR or a primary word for each continent, each language, culture...
- Initiative to get the Tapestry of Words included in the **List of Intangible Cultural Heritage**, understood as a Bank of Seeds for the Future, inspired, among others, by the message of Sandra Myrna Díaz in 2019 Princess of Asturias Awards.

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One of those abandoned words in Europe was Gaia. At the same time as when the MaB Programme was created, from the Western scientific development, J. Lovelock and L. Margulis had to go back twenty centuries in time to find the name of a Greek goddess, Gaia, after whom they named such hypothesis, currently a theory, which proposes that there are unmistakable signs that everything interacts with everything, that the web of life which makes our planet habitable is enormously complex, with levels of systemic integration and this should prompt us to an attitude of greater humility and prevention in our activities and development.

Support received from all Spanish Biosphere Reserves and from Scientific Board of Spanish Network to the Tapestry of Words initiative and its drive towards UNESCO and the World Network

