

The International Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (ICSRC)

Gary Clarke

Canadian Biosphere Reserves Association

Ellie Bennett, PhD

Frontenac Arch Biosphere Network

info@sustainrural.ca

ABSTRACT: The establishment of the International Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (ICSRC) was proposed as a legacy project at the October 2013 meeting of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, which included 36 countries from Europe and North America, known as the EuroMAB Group, held in Brockville, Ontario, Canada. The delegates endorsed the proposal to form an international EuroMAB Working Group to advance the project. The ICSRC will be located in Brockville, within the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve. It will contribute to the EuroMAB Mission and Vision and address the objectives of the Lima Action Plan for UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme and its World Network of Biosphere Reserves (2016-2025). Here we summarize the status of the project, its vision and mission, and give an overview of the Centre's proposed activities.

Keywords: EuroMAB, Indigenous peoples, rural, Man and the Biosphere, ICSRC

Introduction

Over 650 Biosphere Reserves (BRs) worldwide are challenged by the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Program (MAB) to develop innovative strategies to encourage sustainable development. The ICSRC would contribute to the EuroMAB Mission and Vision by providing "a platform for the sharing of knowledge, know-how, and experience on sustainable development, and a collective tool for the support of sustainable development practices amongst the various players of the 36 member states of EuroMAB". Importantly, the Centre will assist in achieving the Indigenous priorities endorsed at EuroMAB 2013 (UNESCO, 2013).

During EuroMAB 2015 in Estonia, delegates were asked to respond to a survey to put in order of priority the proposed functions of the Centre. In November 2016, the EuroMAB Working Group met to advance the ideas for the project. The Working Group developed the ICSRC's mission and vision, and proposed activities.

About the ICSRC

Mission

We will inspire creative, innovative, and effective ways for people and nature to thrive together in rural communities. By linking Indigenous and traditional knowledge from rural communities with modern science, facilitating networking among EuroMAB partners, promoting innovation, and leveraging funds and resources, we will generate solutions for important local, regional, national, and global challenges.

Vision

A world in which thriving, inclusive and healthy rural communities are recognized as integral to an inclusive sustainable future.

Outcomes

- A. A collective Centre for the support of sustainable development practices amongst the various players of the 36 member states of the UNESCO EuroMAB network.
- B. Recognition, recording, sharing, and application of Indigenous, traditional, and scientific knowledge to produce innovative solutions for the challenges of biodiversity loss, climate change, and sustainable development.
- C. Dialogue, research and education to inspire and inform community leaders and the

general public about pathways to achieving thriving rural communities.

- D. An inclusive governance system recognizing the diverse sources of knowledge and ways of knowing.
- E. A physical and virtual hub for achieving the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere program Lima 2016 strategic objectives (UNESCO, 2017), focusing on rural communities.

Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge

A key approach of the ICSRC is in bringing together the learning and approaches to sustainable development, biodiversity, and climate change of the many Indigenous peoples that are identified in the UNESCO EuroMAB area. Recognizing, recording, and applying Indigenous and traditional knowledge as well as modern science is essential to a sustainable future for all.

Freshwater Issues

The Centre will be located on the banks of the St. Lawrence River, which drains the Great Lakes and is the source of 21% of the world's freshwater. As a result of a local economic priority to invest in a Freshwater Institute (Millier Dickinson Blais, 2015), a Round Table met in November 2016 to explore freshwater issues and investigate whether the ICSRC might fulfill some of that role. The group determined that the Centre will act as a hub for collecting Indigenous knowledge and expertise from the EuroMAB network to find innovative strategies in the context of freshwater, which complements the work of other existing institutes that focus solely on freshwater issues.

Research

The ICSRC will be a hub that gathers together global Indigenous, traditional, and scientific knowledge on the key issues of Sustainable Development, Biodiversity and Climate Change, and applies the research to the benefit of rural communities. The ICSRC will facilitate collaborative research between organizations across the EuroMAB network and be a repository of experts and expertise on sustainable rural community research and practices.

Education

The ICSRC will be a venue for workshops and conferences where people can exchange

knowledge, ideas and best practices. It will also be a provider of tools and resources for education, such as Mass Open Online Courses, a location for school, college and university field trips, training for BR educators, and a venue for public engagement events.

Inspiration

The ICSRC will inspire all people to work together to build sustainable communities, prevent biodiversity loss and adapt to climate change. It will do this via its physical presence in Brockville, with interactive exhibits, through public engagement activities at its physical location and via its online presence.

Next steps

Fifty million people in Canada and the U.S. live within 500 miles of Brockville, Ontario, and EuroMAB members may access three nearby international airports: Ottawa, Montreal, and Toronto. A minimum area of 15,000 square feet will be required for exhibits, meeting rooms, auditorium, offices, classroom, training laboratory, and facilities. The ICSRC will require approximately 12 permanent full-time staff and will attract visiting researchers, educators, policymakers, and BR professionals.

An ICSRC sub-committee has been formed to develop, following consultation with interested parties, governance documents that will ensure balanced, inclusive, and respectful representation in governance processes.

The Centre programs align with local, regional, national, and international policy priorities. A preliminary economic analysis indicates good markets for the facility and a wide range of possible financing partners. Over the coming months the Working Group will be consulting architects, conducting a full economic analysis, incorporating the organization, and will then seek major capital funding to build the Centre. More information can be found at the ICSRC website: <https://www.sustainrural.ca>.

References

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