

Meaning of UNESCO's Jargon

MABNet: The MAB Programme's website, MAB: Man and the Biosphere, BRs: Biosphere Reserves, SC: Natural Sciences Sector of UNESCO, DIT: Division of Information Systems and Telecommunication

In this first news on the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the MABNet we give you the views of two UNESCO staff members who were leaders in the launch of the MABNet in 1994. They were both asked the same questions; the questions as well as their responses are recorded below.



Han Qunli



Yassin Baruani, Walid

Can you briefly introduce yourself?

H.Q.: I was an Assistant Programme Specialist when the preparations for the MABNet started in 1994. I was working for the Secretariat of the MAB Programme and the Division of Ecological Sciences (SC/ECO) of UNESCO at its Headquarters in Paris. I am still working for SC/ECO and MAB in the [Jakarta UNESCO Office](#).

Why a website?

H.Q.: When the work started in 1994, there were several options. Gopher and FTP, etc., were ready to be used. UNESCO established a Gopher server for text retrieval service/purpose, and we were advised to take Gopher first. We, in ECO, considered that the Web had already shown interesting capacities - ideal for networking of MAB institutions and activities and for [the World Network of Biosphere Reserves](#). So, rather than moving slowly from the low-end options, we decided to go directly for the Web. This proved to be a very good decision because very quickly Gopher was out of the common uses among Internet users.

What was your role in the creation of the MABNet?

H.Q.: The MABNet was set up through collaborative work of SC/ECO and the Division of Information Systems and Telecommunications of UNESCO (DIT). I was the focal technical staff in SC/ECO for this project, under the then SC/ECO Director, Pierre Lasserre, and we were provided

Can you briefly introduce yourself?

Y.B.W.: At that time I was an Analyst Programmer in DIT and was given the technical task of starting UNESCO Gopher and WWW Services for both Intranet and Internet uses.

Why a website?

Y.B.W.: We had a Gopher Server, which was mainly for text kind of information. The MABNet project consisted in worldwide maps and layouts showing locations of biosphere reserves, which needed to be put on the Internet. There was no Web server software that was widely available at the time; therefore I configured the Gopher server to allow menu types of information. The result was a series of html-generated files embedding gif files, which could be viewed with 'Mosaic' later Netscape browsers (IE did not exist back then).

What was your role in the creation of the MABNet?

Y.B.W.: My role was purely technical and consisted in coordinating the work of consultants who provided inputs from the types of software that were not available at DIT, for example scanned photographs.

Which themes did you choose to present the MAB Programme?

Y.B.W.: Theme ... was not part of my job

How many web pages were created?

Y.B.W.: Hundreds of web pages and the

Director, Pierre Lasserre, and we were provided general guidance from the Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves and the **MAB Council**. My role was to prepare draft MABNet web pages and design the structure and functions in coordination with DIT colleagues, notably Mr Baruani, to make it technically workable (we received much help from them especially in resolving server problems and connection issues between the two sites of UNESCO in Paris). Data on the MABNet web pages were prepared mostly using the existing MAB documents and publications.

Which themes did you choose to present the MAB Programme?

H.Q.: At the initial stage, we used the general MAB information that was available then, i.e. the **MAB National Committee Directory** and the Directory of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. These first web pages were presented at the Seville Conference in March 1995. Soon after, the Division decided to have a comprehensive change in the MABNet - in a few month, there was information on MAB research themes, **Biosphere Reserves, thematic and regional networks**, capacity building and partnerships. The revised MABNet was presented as part of overall SC presentations during the UNESCO General Conference in October 1995 and at the following MAB Council and Bureau meetings.

How many web pages were created?

H.Q.: I can't remember exactly. I think it was somewhere between 500 to 600 (each biosphere reserve had a separate page, and so had each MAB National Committee, plus additional general pages, MAB publications, etc.). Today this does not represent much, but at the time when we did not have good editing tools for web pages, it was quite a task.

Which technical tools were used?

H.Q.: DIT used a web server supported by Unix.

Which software?

H.Q.: HTTP Editor at the beginning - editing was done line by line on codes. Later Mosaic and Netscape editors became available, which made our work much easier.

Was it the first website of UNESCO or one of the first?

H.Q.: In UNESCO's own web server in Paris, the

Y.B.W.: Hundreds of web pages and the number kept growing everyday.

Which technical tools were used?

Y.B.W.: Server Gopher Server called G-Server a freeware from Northwestern University. Later a Web server NCSA and later Apache.

Was it the first website of UNESCO or one of the first?

Y.B.W.: Yes, it was the first ever Gopher/WWW site at UNESCO

What was the status of the Internet at the time?

Y.B.W.: The status of the Internet was at its infancy. Mr Han carried a copy of the MABNet in his PC to give demonstrations in places where there were no Internet connections at all.

How much time did it take to set up the website and the connection?

Y.B.W.: Mr Han saw my Director about that idea in February 1995 and we finished the project well in time for him to present the Web site at the Seville International Biosphere Conference in May 1995. So it was practically a three months' work.

What kind of problems did you encounter?

Y.B.W.: Problems arose due to lack of resources, books and documents, reliable connections since it was a new paradigm being born.

How did you manage with the layout?

Y.B.W.: Not part of my job.

Do you have a copy of the first website?

Y.B.W.: Mr Han could have it in his now outdated PC (if it is still alive!!).

What do you think of the current MABNet?

Y.B.W.: Not part of my job.

What kind of information do you wish to see?

Y.B.W.: Not part of my job.

H.Q.: In UNESCO's own web server in Paris, the MABNet was the first. Please check with Mr Y. Baruani in DIT. The former DIT director should also remember but he may be retired now - he was very supportive to our initiative. We (Mr Baruani and I) worked together with a technical consultant to put the first BR map on line. I remember the thrill in DIT when it worked. Then very quickly followed the [IOC](#) and [World Heritage](#) web sites, as DIT wanted to have a group of Web sites of UNESCO Programmes on line. Some SC programmes might have already published web pages outside UNESCO, before the MABNet. This needs to be checked.

What was the status of the Internet at the time?

H.Q.: The Internet was not used much by the general public at the time in Europe - although it was already quite advanced in universities and academic communities, but still very limited for government offices, international institutions.

How much time did it take to set up the website and the connection?

H.Q.: It took four or five months to have the initial pages on line: There was a lot of work to prepare these and set up good linkages. In 1994, UNESCO started to change its mainframe system and upgrade network cables for the two sites. The technical connection at the time was not always stable.

What kind of problems did you encounter?

H.Q.: Many problems. The overall connection of UNESCO for the Internet was very limited (256k for the whole Organization), our LAN was not functioning well - we were using both Token Ring and Ethernet, and Macs and PCs, which caused a lot of technical barriers. The Sector did not have many people familiar with the Internet, especially the Web, and technical staff in DIT specialized in this field was also very limited. But through real dedication and effective cooperation, it worked in the end.

How did you manage with the layout?

H.Q.: Most of the layout was done by UNESCO's Division of Ecological Sciences. Later we had some external help to develop special graphics to make the layout more attractive.

Do you have a copy of the first website?

H.Q.: Unfortunately, not. The first website was in quite simple design, with a MAB logo and some

quite simple design - with a MAB logo and some logos for BRs, and MAB publications, as well as photos from biosphere reserves. I remember I asked some friends from California to comment on our first website. The response was that this was a very good start, but the design could be much fancier. I guess this tells.

What do you think of the current MABNet?

H.Q.: I think it has improved so much and is now in good shape - a well-maintained professional website.

What kind of information do you wish to see?

H.Q.: To me, as a Programme Specialist for a specific region, all the information now on the MABNet is useful. I wish the MABNet could provide stronger connections between scientific information, knowledge and actual case studies and contexts of ecosystem management. More information on new tools and methodologies as well as innovative ideas in the field of biodiversity and ecosystem management, especially those used and tested in biosphere reserves, should be provided.