

## Transcript of the Video

### Said Boujroutf

Hello Saïd Boujroutf, professor at Cadi Ayyad University and member of the EduBioMed programme. Today, I would like to talk to you about the enhancement of the cultural and natural heritage of biosphere reserves in the case of the Arganeraie Biosphere Reserve in Morocco.

This vignette is part of the MOOC entitled: "Biosphere reserves as living laboratories for sustainability education, applied research and local development". Our initial questions are threefold. Firstly, how can heritage be enhanced for sustainable territorial development? Second, are biosphere reserves a tool for heritage enhancement? Third, could heritage development contribute to the preservation and resilience of biosphere reserves? So, to answer these questions, we have set two main objectives; Starting from the fact that Unesco when it defined biosphere reserves as learning places for sustainable development, among others. For this reason, we are looking for a general objective that can be manifested in the following questions: How can biosphere reserves serve to understand and manage changes in the interactions between social and ecological systems? And how can the enhancement of the biosphere reserve and its heritage contribute to a strong awareness among stakeholders and learners of the role of this reserve in territorial and sustainable development? Thus, biosphere reserves are an open-air laboratory. It helps us to observe, learn, understand and act on sustainable development issues. And of course, we are going to see all this from the case of the Argan Biosphere Reserve (ABR) located in central western Morocco.

So, the ABR is the first biosphere reserve recognised in Morocco by UNESCO in 1998. It was declared as an area that could be preserved and be a conservation area. But, at the same time of human, social and sustainable development. Because it is inhabited by the local population who have the right to exploit the natural resources found in these areas. This reserve covers an area of approximately 2,500,000 hectares. It concerns 8 provinces and prefectures, located in the centre-west of Morocco. It covers a vast intra-mountainous plain, bordered by the High Atlas and Anti-Atlas mountains and the Atlantic Ocean in its western part. Thus, it reaches an altitude of 2,500 metres and is part of the Saharan Mediterranean transition zone established around a forest species endemic to Morocco called *Argania Spinosa*, the main characteristic of the Moroccan sector with a vegetation of Mediterranean forests, woods and scrub. This biosphere reserve extends from the Essaouira region in the north to the Sidi Ifni region, Guelmim in the south and as far as Tafraoute in the east and the Tata region. This large area of the RBA recognises the singularity of the production system and the potential of biodiversity combined with a specific cultural identity. This is a situation for which sustainable projects are needed.

The main objectives of the creation of the biosphere reserve are as follows: Firstly, the preservation of biological resources, landscape and cultural values. Secondly, to maintain the balance and the ecosystems. And finally, the promotion of environmental education and the contribution to local and regional development in this area of Morocco.

The enhancement of this heritage, which is natural, human, diverse, rich and specific, requires sustainable territorial development in order to make the RBA sustainable. To this end, in order to enhance this heritage, the efforts of the various actors and stakeholders must be combined to ensure an enhancement that brings

several elements and several important results for the sustainability and the social, human and sustainable development of the reserve and the local population. Firstly, the well-being of the population within the framework of an inclusive human and social development. Secondly, a sustainable development of biodiversity in a sense that integrates the economic aspects related to the life of the local population. Thirdly, a construction of the heritage resource on the basis of the specificity linked to the endemism of the argan tree and to the local human treasures, the result of the know-how and life skills of the populations. Fourthly, a better contribution of the biosphere reserve's ecosystem services, as it provides services related to water, wood, agricultural products and crafts with the population. Other services are added that are linked to its resilience, such as the fight against erosion and desertification. Thus, the RBA is a space of conciliation between man and nature. A space that offers its natural capital for the promotion of sustainable solutions, especially the resilient tree that is the argan tree. Therefore, enhancing the heritage for a sustainable territorial development of the biosphere reserve requires combining the efforts of the different actors and stakeholders to ensure an enhancement that brings in the 5th point, the labelling and certification.

This fifth point should be connected and complementary, ensuring geographical origin, food quality, fair trade and ecotourism, etc. Thus, for the role of labelling in the heritage of the RBA, we can see that the relationship between enhancement and the recognition of the biosphere reserve as a world heritage site emerges as a strong issue and produces economic spin-offs and a real race for 'labelling'. In fact, labelling is becoming a means of justifying the discourse and practices of environmental protection. But also, to reinforce the territorial anchoring and the reconstruction of the resources which become of course patrimonial. In this respect, several labels and certifications are emerging, based on the concepts of ecotourism, ecolabelling, and agricultural and craft certification. There are at least a dozen labels and certifications that take into account the specificities of the RBA, its heritage and its natural and human capital. So, the role of labelling in the heritage of the Argan Biosphere Reserve is important, but we must pay close attention to the developments that are beginning to take place in the field and that we have noticed in a certain number of field surveys, especially in the city of Agadir. Although general or specific labelling contributes to the construction of a territory brand and a local identity, we must be careful about the trivialisation that could affect the specification system and risk eroding its constructs. For example, the idea that labels for local products protect local knowledge and specificities needs to be demonstrated; especially, on the one hand, with the few deviations that are beginning to be noticed in the different places and territories of the biosphere reserve. On the other hand, noticed in the urban space and noticed, essentially, in the markets.

Another important aspect, which makes the valorisation and patrimonialisation help the sustainable development of these specific territories, is the recent recognition of the International Day of the Argan Tree by the United Nations.

This is another way of raising awareness, education and heritage of the RBA, which promoted an international day of the argan tree, on May 10 of each year. The year 2021 was the first day to celebrate this tree which is the argan tree, presents not only natural endemism, but also a whole human, cultural and identity heritage behind; Thus, how this resilient tree that can cope with difficulties and climate change, but also fight against desertification, degradation of the environments of this vast territory. Thus, this International Argan Day is another way of raising awareness, educating and making the biosphere reserve a heritage site.

Promoting heritage for sustainable territorial development of the biosphere reserve also involves promoting tourism, which is an important aspect of heritage development. In the context of the RBA, this tourism development is carried out in connection with a tourist hub, the city of Agadir. At the beginning, tourism in the RBA seeks to diversify the offer of the tourist city of Agadir with approximately one million tourists in 2015, of which more than 95% of tourists are mainly targeting the seaside. Tourism in the hinterland of Agadir is small, accompanied mainly by small rural accommodation structures with an essentially itinerant tourism. At the same time, eco-tourism is beginning to mobilise the heritage resources linked to the biosphere reserve and which involves crafts, cultural art, gastronomy, identity and local products, etc., with a real start to raising awareness of the sustainable development of the biosphere reserve, with a concretisation of the biosphere reserve concept by means of labelling, certification and conciliation between the needs of the population and the need to conserve the natural capital. A diversity, therefore, of local, regional, national and international stakeholders who come to carry out preservation projects, but also human development projects in these territories of the RBA. These territories are fragile, specific and are the breeding ground for a new territorial construction that seeks to establish a local ecotourism adapted to the environment of the biosphere reserve. But the stakeholder system still needs a specific governance adapted to this biosphere reserve situation. It needs connectivity, communication, building bridges of negotiation, coordination between the different stakeholders, sharing and ways of sharing. As well as, ways of sharing the heritage resources of this territory equitably. This means being able to move towards a territory project and not project territories, which we are currently seeing develop. Of course, this territory of the reserve or these territories of the RBA, seen from the tourism side, is made up of several territories.

Firstly, Agadir, Ida Ou Tanane and Inzegane Ait Melloul, the Chtouka Ait Baha, Taroudante, Tata and Tiznit with the construction either in the sense of preservation and ecotourism; or in the diversification of the offer of the city of Agadir. There are at least 7 major tourist routes; the honey route, the Igoudars route, the route linking the Atlantic to the Anti-Atlas, the orange routes, the Mesguinas route, the Atlantic coastline route and which touches on the Souss-Massa National Park (PNSM), as the last product or the last space for practising ecotourism. There are initiatives, for example, that of the Rural Tourism Development Network (RDTR), which builds tourist circuits around the problem of the biosphere reserve by linking the heritage sites with the diversified landscape linked to the relief and the argan forest. As well as, the sites of the production of local products by criss-crossing the plain areas, the mountain areas, the Piedmont, the mountains of the High Atlas and the mountains of the Anti-Atlas going as far as the Saharan border open to the regions of Guelmim and Tata. If we take a map of tourism in the RBA region, we find that there is a well-developed tourism which is essentially established in the city in the urban area, while on the other hand there is still a timid tourism, linked to rural and ecotourism, in these diversified regions, with territories which can be complementary in the tourist offer, but there is still a lot of work to be done in this direction.

Lastly, to enhance the value of the heritage for sustainable territorial development and to ensure that the patrimonialization that is underway will contribute to the sustainability of the biosphere reserve. To do this, we see that we should move up a gear and set up a system of payment for ecosystem services (PES). We know that Morocco has launched a project with the UNDP called "Circular Economy Approaches for the Conservation of Agro-Biodiversity in the Souss-Massa Region", in the Arganeraie Biosphere Reserve, which is the result of this cooperation between Morocco and the UNDP. However, in order to achieve this goal, which is payment for ecosystem services, it is necessary to use this innovative instrument for the preservation of "nature" capital, which should be integrated into public and private accounting in our country.

Valorisation involves the labelling and marketing of two local products, namely argan oil and honey, which will help to mobilise natural and human capital in a market context. Will we be able, through these choices and orientations, to ultimately face the weakness of the resilience and fragility of the environment of the RBA and the needs of the local population, for the development of their goods and their well-being? Can we, in this way, achieve territorial and sustainable development? And also as a hope, to honour Morocco's commitments to UNESCO, to the local population and to everyone who loves nature and would like to preserve its territories of sustainability and endemism, and even of cultural specificities and identities such as the Arganeraie Biosphere Reserve.

