

UNESCO Chair «River Culture/Fleuves et Patrimoine»

Chaire UNESCO «Fleuves et Patrimoine/River Culture»

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RÉSUMÉ

Le projet de la Chaire UNESCO « Fleuves et Patrimoine/River Culture » prévoit un avancement autour des thématiques de la coexistence harmonieuse entre Homme et Fleuve. Il faut mieux connaître les besoins des écosystèmes fluviaux et leur biodiversité pour mieux gérer les fleuves. La diversité culturelle, surtout "la vie dans le rythme des eaux", est une clé pour cette gestion durable, mais ce patrimoine immatériel est en train d'être perdu. En comparant les fleuves et les êtres vivants des mêmes au Monde, le volet recherche va chercher à apporter des solutions, en se penchant des travaux des membres de la Chaire en Amérique du Sud (Paraguay-Paraná), Afrique (Niger, Sénégal), et Inde (Ganges). Le volet Enseignement renforcera le transfert entre les savoir-faire des pays du Nord et du Sud, employant des cursus d'enseignement existant et en création. Pour finalement appliquer les savoir-faire nouveaux ou redécouvertes, des ateliers thématiques et des publications spécialisées ou grand public sont envisagés.

ABSTRACT

The UNESCO Chair "River Culture/Fleuves et Patrimoine" aims at a harmonious coexistence between man and river. We must better understand the needs of river ecosystems and their biodiversity to better manage rivers. Cultural diversity , especially "life in the rhythm of the waters," is a key to the sustainable management, but this intangible heritage is being lost. Comparing ecosystem functions and the needs of their living beings (including man) in the selected world, the research component will seek to provide solutions. The first network of Chair covers South America (Paraguay -Paraná), Africa (Niger, Senegal) and India (Ganges). The education component will strengthen the transfer between the expertise of the North and the South, using existing teaching curriculum and development of new courses. Transfer of the new or rediscovered know-how is being done by thematic workshops and specialized or mainstream publications.

KEY WORDS

Riverscape, Biodiversity, Cultural Heritage, Functional Ecology, Sustainable Management

UNESCO CHAIR «RIVER CULTURE/FLEUVES ET PATRIMOINE»**A UNESCO Chair to reconcile human management with biological and cultural diversities of rivers**

Rivers are the cradles of humanity. Since ancient times humans have been using riverine ecosystem services, including freshwater, settling space, high productivity of floodplains, and their functions for transboundary trade and cultural exchange. Today, many of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites and Nature Reserves are linked to rivers, however without clearly integrating the river ecosystem into the management and conservation planning. The recent UN World Water Development Report and the WWF Living Planet Report underline that fluvial ecosystems also have an overproportionally high importance for biodiversity, biogeochemical processes and for human water supply. Land use changes, climatic change, urbanization, damming, channelization of rivers and the introduction of new chemical products have developed negative synergies that threaten water safety and increase risks and hazards for the nature and culture of riverine landscapes. Environmental degradation such as soil salinization, loss of fertility, lowering of river discharge and of groundwater levels, devastating floods and erosion of biodiversity are caused by inadequate river management.

The **UNESCO Chair on River Culture** aims at mitigating these problems. This project has been developed by the universities of Tours and Angers, and the Mission Val de Loire (all France), and universities in Brazil, Argentina, Mali and India, and further partners worldwide. Research will be focused on ecological nick points that need special care in environmental management, including experimental and historical approaches to analyse what kind of human intervention is compatible with the natural carrying capacity of rivers. Experts from northern and southern-tropical countries will exchange their experiences during workshops. They will discern general management principles from locally specific solutions and improve and disseminate best management practices. Participation in international Master courses will transfer this knowledge and technological expertise on river restoration to early-career managers working in urban, natural and cultural heritage sites. The Chair will deliver a communication platform to further transfer this knowledge by supporting cross-cutting research projects, south-south and north-south-south professional networks, internationally visible publications and e-learning structures that are available for higher education institutions and development bodies.

The UNESCO Chair for River Culture will link the natural and the cultural aspects of rivers as heritages for mankind, by fostering research and education on (a) the understanding of natural (biological, physical, chemical) processes of river systems, (b) the inspiration of human cultures by the nature of rivers around the globe ('learning from river's nature') and (c) the integration of these insights into wise use of the natural resources and improving the preservation of biological and cultural diversities in riverine landscapes by sustainable management and restoration. These intricately linked elements form the "River Culture". They are understood as thematic elements of an exchange between different countries and cultures. The activities include lecturing in international master courses, exchange of scientists, workshops, elaboration of scientific projects, publications, and guidelines on best practices. They will enhance capacity building of river managers and managers of natural and cultural heritage at rivers, and strengthen the North/South/South cooperation.

The development objective of the Unesco Chair for River Culture is the transformation of the negative effects of human impacts on rivers into positive synergies by reconciling preservation of biodiversity, water quality management and maintenance of ecosystem functions (including a buffering effect on floods and droughts), a socially and environmentally balanced use of riverine resources and valuing of cultural heritage in riverine landscapes. By overlaying natural and cultural aspects of rivers, it aims at developing an interdisciplinary approach for river valleys and to provide results for the improvement of their management on a global scale. In short, the long-term objective of this chair is to harmonize human use with the requirements for ecological functioning of river systems. Considering the social, economic and cultural development, it aims at improving social and environmental justice by improving the valorisation of riverine ecosystem services including monetary and non-monetary values, and the valorisation of traditional use cultures e.g. that of riparian dwellers, which are not sufficiently recognized yet. Fostering these sustainable use forms will reduce the improper use of natural resources and ecosystem functions and create new professional activities, and subsistence techniques. Results will be published on homepages, scientific articles and media releases.