

Danube
goes beyond



DCC

Danube Competence Centre

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Consultation on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region Contribution by the DCC – Danube Competence Centre Including proposals for a Strategy

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The DCC

The Danube Competence Centre (DCC) is an association under Serbian law, that was established with funding by the German Technical Development Association (gtz). Members are local, regional and national authorities, tourism associations, the private sector and its umbrella organisations and NGOs from the Danube riparian states.

The goal of the DCC is to integrate interests, projects and activities in the areas of tourism, local economy and sustainable regional development in the region of the middle and lower Danube under joint sponsorship and to develop sustainable trans-national cooperation along the Danube.

I. THE STRATEGY

1. Introduction

The Danube Competence Centre (DCC) welcomes the elaboration of the EU strategy for the Danube Region. The joint focus on the Danube macro-region will develop new perspectives and innovative approaches – beyond the EU borders and therefore also contributes to the EU accession process and the EU neighbourhood policy.

Flowing 2,860 km from the Black Forest to the Black Sea, the Danube is Europe's second largest river, the only major river which flows west to east, from Central to Eastern Europe. The river is one of the most international rivers in the world, draining all or part of the territories of 19 countries, including EU member states, accession countries in the Western Balkans as well as neighbourhood countries Ukraine and Moldova.

Geographically the region is diverse, including not only the immediate river and lowlands, but also e.g. the major part of the Carpathian Mountains. It contains a large share of Europe's remaining natural wealth, including its last great wilderness areas as well as rich cultural landscapes that have been shaped over centuries of human cultivation. It is home to over half of the European populations of bears, wolves and lynx as well as the greatest remaining stands of old growth forests outside of Russia. At the end of the river the Danube Delta includes 30 different ecosystems, among them the world's largest compact reed bed area (1,750 km²). It is one of Europe's most important bird sanctuaries, especially for migratory birds, being the Dalmatian Pelican the most emblematic species. Its extraordinary rich fauna and flora makes the delta the world's third place of scientific importance after the Great Coral Barrier (Australia) and the Galapagos Islands (Ecuador).

About 83 million people live in the Danube River Basin, for centuries, the Danube region has been home to diverse nationalities and ethnic groups (17 of them alone within the Danube Delta) - people separated by different languages, dialects and traditions, but bound together by ways of living. In this melting pot of cultures and languages in an extremely diverse developed area – some parts belong to the booming European centre regions, others are extraordinary remote - the challenge will be to find long-term sustainable ways of common regional development - both for the inhabitants and for nature and all along the whole stream.

“The EU Danube Strategy is being developed at a time of this paradigm shift”: Recent policy initiatives such as the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament ‘GDP and beyond – Measuring progress in a changing world’¹, or the report ‘The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) for Policy Makers’² reflect the growing insight that economic security and human wellbeing are fundamentally dependent on environmental goods and services such as the ones provided by nature of the Danube basin. The ‘Climate and Energy Package’³, the ‘EU Sustainable Development Strategy’⁴, and its 2009 review ‘Mainstreaming sustainable development into EU policies’⁵ point to a future with dramatic increases in energy efficiency and significant reliance on clean and renewable sources such as wind, solar and biomass; where resources are used far more efficiently; where waste is not only minimised, but actually transformed through re-designed production and consumption processes to make a closed loop; where essential biodiversity and ecosystem services are safeguarded and enhanced, not only through targeted investments but also by fully integrating environmental concerns in all sectoral policymaking, from agriculture to transportation.” (Quoted from the WWF-NFI comment on the Danube Strategy)

¹ COM(2009) 433 final, see: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/Notice.do?checktexts=checkbox&val=499855>

² See: <http://www.teebweb.org/ForPolicymakers/tabid/1019/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

³ EU Climate and Energy Package (3736/08, 8037/09 ADD1)

⁴ See: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/06/st10/st10917.en06.pdf>

⁵ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0400:FIN:EN:PDF>

Also the current economic crises and the actual man-made and natural disasters open a window of opportunity and necessity to work towards a ‘green economy’ and thus a long-term, sustainable future.

This comment by the Danube Competence Centre (DCC) focus on Middle and Lower Danube and on the sectors of tourism and sustainable regional development. It explicitly supports the comments on biodiversity issues that were brought in e.g. by WWF and Naturefriends International, the network of Danube Parks and by the International Association for Danube Research.

2. Networking with other European policies, Implementation and Sustainable Governance – From Words to Action

Networking with other European policies

In order to achieve the EU overarching goal of sustainability in the Danube River Basin, the Danube Strategy should complement the existent legal framework (e.g. Water Framework Directive, Flood Directive, Birds and Habitats Directives, Bern Convention, Sturgeon Action Plan, etc.) with new policy tools supporting the implementation of environmental friendly measures in projects aiming at social-economic development.

The previous EU macro-regional model, the strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, adopted on 26 October 2009⁶, documents the shift from the sectoral development to an integrative strategy and the prioritization of investments needed for particular areas. While for economic aspects, the strategy focuses to all the countries included in the region, for water quality issues it involves the whole catchment area⁷.

While the Danube River provides an attractive and compelling conceptual approach and organising principle, the Strategy cannot be limited to the immediate river and related issues but includes the broader river basin, including e.g. the highland areas that drain into it. This pays tribute to the fact that 80% of water in the Carpathian Mountains drains into the Danube, making the Carpathians (as well as the Alps) important not only in their own right, but crucial for addressing e.g. flood and water management.

The Danube River Basin Management Plan (DRBMP)⁸, issued in 2009 by the International Commission for the Protection of Danube River (ICPDR) and elaborated in close cooperation with the riverine countries, represents a first step towards the holistic approach of water management issues at catchment scale and a good frame to develop the environmental pillar of the Danube Strategy. It provides a broad, cross-sectoral and trans-national basis for development in the region, was developed in line with requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive, and could be seen as contribution to its implementation. The actions planned in its Joint Program of Measures (JPM) should be supported by this Danube Strategy and complemented by additional measures following the envisaged trends for social/economic development.

Necessary measures should also consider also the connectivity of the Danube River Basin with the Black Sea Region; hence, strategic actions in DRB should be linked with actions in the Black Sea area, e.g., by pursuing intensive cooperation with the Black Sea Commission and linking the aims with those set up in the ‘Black Sea Synergy’ document⁹.

⁶ See: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic/documents_en.htm

⁷ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

⁸ ICPDR] International Commission for Protection of the Danube River, 2009: Danube River Basin Management Plan, http://www.icpdr.org/icpdr-pages/danube_rbm_plan_ready.htm

⁹ COM(2007) 160 final: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Parliament: ‘Black Sea Synergy – A new regional cooperation initiative’, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com07_160_en.pdf

Possible development of the Danube Strategy

Seeing the above described environmental and socio-economic linkage of the Alps and Carpathians to the Danube one could look to the cooperation of the Alpine and Carpathian countries, formally laid down in the Alpine Convention¹⁰ and the Carpathian Convention¹¹.

Both Conventions provide a broad, cross-sectoral and transnational basis for protection and sustainable development in those mountain areas relevant to the Danube basin. The publication Visions and Strategies in the Carpathian Area developed under the Convention, is the first transnational spatial development document for the entire Carpathian region, building on the example of the Visions and Strategies around the Baltic Sea. It encompasses concrete analysis and recommendations for nine action areas of importance for the implementation of the Danube Strategy.

The Alpine Convention is a framework that sets out the basic principles of all the activities of the Alpine Convention and contains general measures for the sustainable development in the Alpine region. It entered into force on March 1995. Specific measures implementing the principles laid down in the framework Convention are contained in the Protocols to the Alpine Convention. In the Protocols, concrete steps to be taken for the protection and sustainable development of the Alps are set out.

The Danube Strategy could be a first step in the development of a common, legally binding, Danube Convention (Danube Sustainable Development Convention). This could be based on the existing Danube River Protection Convention¹² (the base for the Danube River Basin Management Plan), and the Danube Navigation Convention that led to the foundation of the Danube Commission¹³.

Governance and implementation proposals

A joint action of all the countries in the Danube River Basin, member or non-member states of EU, is needed so as to down-scale implementation of this strategy from national to regional and local level; the principle of solidarity should be applied across the whole catchment.

The implementation of the Danube Strategy will serve to further empower local stakeholders, strengthen cooperation between authorities, civil society and other societal actors, enhance essential skills and capacities, and develop inclusive societies. It shall contribute to a new regional, cross-border identity rather based on geographical commonalities than on dividing nationalities.

The prerequisites for successful implementing of the Danube Strategy are instruments like genuine public participation and environmental assessment procedures. The strategy should foresee regular consultations and events should enable broad access and the involvement of all interested stakeholders, including NGOs should actively be enhanced, e.g. by open and non-bureaucratic small-grants programmes and dedicated credit-lines for capacity building within the civil society.

The Danube Competence Centre (DCC) already provides a structure that enables dialogues and common actions of different stakeholders including the Civil Society in the Middle and Lower Danube.

3. FOCUS ON (SUSTAINABLE) TOURISM:

The Danube basin features numerous touristic highlights. These include large cities along the Danube River as well as attractive landscapes and reach from the highly developed tourism destination in the Upper Danube like the Austrian Wachau to mainly emerging destinations in the Middle and Lower Danube such

¹⁰ See: http://www.alpconv.org/NR/rdonlyres/6709D78A-7B83-40E0-B4A0-D88DC62E575A/0/Rahmenkonvention_en.pdf

¹¹ <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/text.htm>

¹² See: <http://www.icpdr.org/icpdr-pages/drpc.htm>

¹³ See: <http://www.danubecom-intern.org/ENGLISH/SUMMARY.htm>

as the Iron Gate and the Danube Delta. Measures should secure the longterm competitiveness and sustainability of the tourism sector as well as regional benefit from new developments and investment.

In this respect Sustainable Tourism is seen as a key element in this area that tackles many different aspects of sustainable regional development and follows the following objectives:

- **Objective 1: Unspoilt natural environment and landscape as well as company's measures for environmental protection are prerequisites for the tourism of the future. (The ecological aspect).**

Natural and cultural landscapes are among the main motives to choose the vacation destination. Therefore, they are the base to maintain tourism. Integrative tourism protects with its income directly the landscape and helps to repair damages. Furthermore, it raises awareness among the population on the importance of unproductive parts of the landscape, respectively areas that are barely suited for agriculture.

Environmental protection has to be seen no longer by business as a strategy for marketing or a prevention of economic growth, but rather as the path to economic success for companies and a starting point for the development of a regional profile. Legislative measures, voluntary incentives and guiding measures support the regional aims.

- **Objective 2: Tourism should be embedded in a sustainable, regionally-specific, networking economy. (The economic aspect)**

Sustainable Tourism takes the need to maintain economic resources into account, in accordance with the respective requirements of each region. The basic principles of sustainable development demand economic planning which encompasses all economic sectors. Therefore it should not be restricted to the tourism and leisure sector in order to set up regional life-cycles and avoid the development of tourist monocultures. The most successful example for this kind of regional development and economy is the necessary and practicable co-operation between tourism and agriculture.

- **Objective 3: Holiday regions will be characterized by a self-determined cultural dynamic and social well-being of the local population and the employees in the tourism-sector. (The socio-cultural aspect)**

Sustainable tourism means a traveller who shows interest in the specific regional culture. The aim is to integrate tourism carefully within the local and regional culture and not an adaptation of local cultures towards the requirements of tourism. Museum like conservation is faced by cultural self-determination and cultural creativity of the local population.

The tourism economy helps to avoid negative cultural and social impacts that could be caused by tourism. This has to be especially taken into account in regard to indigene cultures as well as the protection of children from commercial and sexual abuse.

Moreover, the quality of tourism is determined by the quality of services provided. Therefore, the enhancement of education and training standards and the improvement of social protection for those employed by the tourist industry are of great importance. Attention should be paid to the difficult social position of children in family-managed tourist businesses. Similarly more value should be attributed to the multiple burdens placed on women in those families whilst still straining for greater equality.

- **Objective 4: People are the central focus for a policy on tourism. The whole local population should have access to all information and is able to participate equally in all decision processes.**

In respect to institutional sustainability the planning and execution of any measures related to tourism must involve all the implied actors of tourism- and leisure policies. This includes the following actors: those with political or administrative responsibilities for tourism, travel agencies, organisations, those affected by and consumers of the tourist trade. For it is only through the co-operative development of projects that a sense of identification and entrepreneurial initiative can be achieved, which might lead to co-operation between economic sectors. All interested persons and organisations have access to all

information. They are able to participate actively and equally in decision-making processes. The implementation of relevant 'external' know-how supports the regional decisions to be made.

- **Objective 5: Intensively exploited tourist destinations have to develop and implement environmental-management-systems for companies and the region itself as well as regional sustainability strategies.**

A tourism policy for the future has to confront the ecological and social problems of mass-tourism. No area should be simply given up. Instead those areas should be converted by means of new legislation, voluntary taxation and disciplinary measures. The development of sustainability-strategies and the use of new instruments to take them into action like the Local Agenda 21 are even possible in intense tourism areas. In terms of infrastructure arrangements and environmental measures it has to be examined whether they are relevant for local inhabitants and can be used by them.

- **Objective 6: Sending regions in conurbation areas and the higher levels of the political system take responsibility for the effects and impacts of tourism in the destinations.**

Problems which tourism engenders are not only problems of the destinations. Rather, the motivation and behaviour of tourists themselves, which are largely determined by their living and working circumstances at home are a contributing factor. There is the need for a co-operation with the sending areas to enhance the sensibility of the tourists.

Decisions should be made generally at those places where people are affected directly by them. Thus, on the one hand, political and legislative frameworks must be set up on all political levels that allow for autonomous decision making on the development of tourism on a regional level and that lead towards sustainable development. However, destinations are not able to take influence on all decisions in regard of tourism impacts. Therefore, co-operations have to cover superior political levels, i.e., on national and on European level.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This Strategy has the potential to bring short-and long-term benefits to the population of the Danube Region by using sustainably its enormous natural and cultural assets. It can make the European vision of a resource-efficient and low-carbon economy reality and turn the region into a model for the rest of Europe. However, this will only be possible in a concerted and integrated effort, involving all countries, levels of government, sectors and stakeholders.

⁸ European Parliament resolution of 21 January on a European Strategy for the Danube Region (RC-B7-0031/2010) ⁹http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2006/Golden_Rules_for_partnership.pdf

II. PROPOSALS FOR AN ACTION PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

This proposed actions by the Danube Competence Centre (DCC) focus on the Middle and Lower Danube and on the sectors of tourism and sustainable regional development.

The following suggestions for concrete actions will indicate the relevant above mentioned objectives. The actions are sorted according to four different basic requirements:

- **Improve the sustainability performance of the tourism products**
- **Improve the sustainability performance of the tourism related transport**
- **Improve the biodiversity of the Danube region as precondition for tourism development**
- **Improve the Sustainable Governance of tourism policies**

2. ACTIONS

2.1 Improve the sustainability performance of the tourism products

Strategic actions

- Support the improvement of the quality of tourism products and the supply chain by the development of regional sustainable tourism strategies and the definition of quality criteria.
- Put special emphasis on ensuring consistent professionalization and environmentally sound product development of emerging tourism destination in by capacity building and training, the development of regional marketing structures and multi-stakeholder participation.
- Support biking tourism along the Danube and interconnect destinations.
- Promote sustainable forms of tourism to European consumers and the development of eco-labels and certification schemes.

Flagship projects

2.1.1 Development of sustainable tourism products in the middle and lower Danube basin

Encourage entrepreneurship and development of SMEs in emerging destinations, empower local stakeholders and foster vibrant communities through the following activities:

- Training programmes for entrepreneurs and decision makers on issues of sustainable tourism including very basics (e.g. needs and expectations of tourists, etc.) and languages skills
- Implementation programmes for the EU eco-label ('flower') for tourism accommodations,
- Development of regional sustainable tourism strategies
- Establishment and support of regional tourism associations for communication with and cooperation and active participation of all relevant stakeholders especially in those regions where such structures do not exist so far, e.g. the Danube Delta.

Objectives: 2, 4

Possible Partners: Danube Competence Centre (DCC), relevant authorities, tourism associations, regional

and local development associations/agencies, NGOs focused on sustainable tourism.

2.1.2 Quality label and CSR certification for Danube Tourism

In order to support the competitiveness and sustainability of Danube tourism (destinations, accommodations, tour operators, services like cruises, excursions, etc.) define criteria for high quality tourism including sustainability and corporate social responsibility.

For destinations the new Sustainable Tourism Criteria of DG Enterprise and Industry could be used. Accommodations should implement the EU eco-label ('flower'), therefore guidance is needed, tour operators and travel agencies should be empowered to apply for and implement the Corporate Social Responsibility Certification 'TourCert'.

Special communication instruments, e.g. a web-based booking platform, image campaigns, etc. should especially highlight quality tourism products.

Objectives: 1, 2, 3, 4

Possible Partners: Danube Competence Centre (DCC), TourCert, relevant authorities, tourism associations, regional and local development associations/agencies, NGOs focused on sustainable tourism.

2.1.3 Support for Greenways and cycling tourism

Cycling tourism is a form of sustainable tourism and often a contribution to cross-border development of European regions. This project aims at using the growing importance of cycle tourism – e.g. along the Danube cycle trail or other long distance cycle trails within the region, such as the planned Iron Curtain Trail – to link natural and cultural attractions and regional cycling networks to create tourism products that increase regional benefits. There are already a number of successful regional and international cycle routes in the region, including e.g. the Prague-Vienna Greenway or the Amber Trail from Budapest through Slovakia to Krakow in Poland, as well as national and sub-national routes, such as the Wine Trails of Southern Moravia and the Austrian Weinviertal, that can provide experience and inspiration, not only in terms of development of trails but also related economies, including products and services. Support can also be given to the further extension of the existing network of certified cycle-friendly service providers (e.g. accommodations, beds & breakfasts), e.g. the Cykliste vitani (Cyclists Welcome) label in the Czech Republic and similar schemes in neighbouring countries of Slovakia and Austria.

Objectives: 1, 2

Possible Partners: Danube Competence Centre (DCC), relevant authorities, tourism associations, regional and local development associations/agencies, NGOs focused on cycling tourism.

2.1.4 Development of cross-border tourism products

To improve attraction and cultural experiences for tourists a focus should be laid on the development of cross-border tourism products. Ideal regions for cross-border products could be the Danube Delta and the Iron Gate region. A series of models for such cross-border tourism products could evaluate the bureaucratic and practical-logistic obstacles and the economic success of such offers and motivate other suppliers to work cross-border.

This measure would also help to overcome old borders in the minds and increase the regional identity of the local population.

Objectives: 2

Possible Partners: Danube Competence Centre (DCC), tourism associations, regional and local development associations/agencies, NGOs focused on sustainable tourism.

2.1.5 Marketing focus on sustainable and cross-border tourism

Analyses show that there is emerging interest of European tourists in sustainable tourism products that broaden their cultural and geographical horizon, but often those offer lack effective and innovative marketing ways.

Therefore the above mentioned sustainable and cross-border products need to be highlighted within the marketing activities and secondly specially designed marketing activities for those offers both on the domestic and inbound market should be developed.

This includes interactive web-sites, booking systems, attractive participation in tourism fairs, media events, etc.

Objectives: 2

Possible Partners: Danube Competence Centre (DCC), tourism associations, regional and local development associations/agencies.

2.1.6 Cooperation and networking of protected areas in the field of tourism

Support the cooperation of protected areas administrations in the Danube Basin and the development of cooperation with regional tourism authorities for the establishment of nature related tourism products, that contribute both to the conservation objectives of the protected areas and regional income and creation of 'green jobs'.

Objectives: 1, 2

Possible Partners: Protected areas authorities, regional and local tourism associations

2.2 Improve the sustainability performance of the tourism related transport

The high degree of mobility we have come to take for granted has many positive aspects, such as access to education and jobs also for peripheral regions. On the other hand it involves quite a number of negative consequences for the environment, caused by traffic and transport. These consequences have to be borne by both the resident population and visiting guests. Holiday resorts that are hard hit by traffic may experience a decline in tourism with potential secondary effects on their economic situation.

In 2006, Europe first registered over 460.8 million international arrivals, raising its market share in world tourism to 54.4%. For 2010, UNWTO – the World Tourism Organisation – has forecast an increase of international arrivals to 527 million and the figure forecast for 2020 is as high as 717 million. The share of road-bound tourist traffic in Europe amounts to 75%. A Europe-wide study commissioned by the Directorate General Enterprise of the European Commission has evidenced that 50-75% of the environmental consequences of tourism are caused by tourist traffic.¹⁴

Transsectoral measures designed to calm traffic, to upgrade access trips to holiday regions as well as on-the-spot mobility by resorting to public and soft-mobility means of transport, to introduce innovative transport technologies, to raise awareness and to manage mobility have even now been launched by a number of local and regional initiatives in Europe.

The EU Danube Strategy has an important role to play not only in addressing gaps in connectivity within and between countries of the region and other parts of Europe and the outside world, but also in ushering in the revolution in mobility that will be needed to achieve a clean, green and prosperous society.

¹⁴ Multi- Stakeholder European Targeted Action for Sustainable Tourism & Transport. Mustt report, DG enterprise, 2004

A fundamental shift is needed, specifically away from new roads and aviation and to creation of low-carbon and energy- and resource-efficient solutions such as rail and mass transit as well as electric vehicles. Investments in clean transport systems and soft measures (such as intelligent transport systems, clean urban transport, taxiing, etc.) are essential to guarantee mobility, especially for socially disadvantaged groups. Not least important is smart spatial planning and development that reduces the need for transportation in the first place – saving time, money and resources, not to mention emissions and waste.

Strategic actions

In order to support the development of tourism products using sustainable forms of mobility, the following activities should be implemented:

- Analyse basin-wide present and future flows of goods and define the most environmentally compatible ways of meeting these transportation needs.
- Support of the access to tourism destinations along the Danube by means of public transport (train, boat, bus and bike)
- Development of public transport facilities within the tourism destinations (e.g. transportation of bikes)
- Promote green mobility in cities through sharing experience and know-how throughout the basin
- Transnational coordination of sustainable mobility offers e.g. combining bike and boat
- Elaboration of common knowledge base on existing studies/best-practices, analysis of transport offers, gaps and services, study on added-value from sustainable forms of cruise-tourism
- Promote innovation in the sustainable mobility sector.
- Pilot activities on better use and coordination of existing infrastructure and filling of (cross-border) gaps with (pre-/ or pilot-)investment activities on multi-modal transport solutions
- Transfer of experiences from the pilot regions

Flagship projects

2.2.1 Increase the offer of public transport along the Danube – including cross-border connections

Water bound public transport systems are cheap and ecologically sound (if developed and implemented carefully) means of transport and contribute to the reduction of CO₂-emissions and the fragmentation of sensitive areas, e.g. by road construction.

- Improvement of water bound public transport systems in terms of quality, frequency and area coverage. This could also create alternatives to the building of roads in sensitive areas like the Danube Delta.
- Connections between cities along the Danube following the example of Vienna-Bratislava
- Establishment of more ferry connections crossing the border, including feasibility studies for the use of solar driven ferry boats

Objectives: 1, 2, 5

Possible Partners: Danube Competence Centre (DCC), relevant authorities, tourism associations, boat companies, regional and local development associations/agencies.

2.2.2 Increase the accessibility of destinations along the Danube by means of public transport

At the moment tourism access to many destinations along the Danube relates mainly on private cars, as there are no public transport systems in place, no information is available or the quality does not meet the

expectations of the tourists.

- Improvement of public transport systems (busses, trains, but also innovative systems) in terms of quality, frequency and area coverage.
- Improvement of the interconnectivity of different systems, e.g. by commonly developed time tables, common information systems for locals population and tourists (web-based in several languages)
- Including of those information in all marketing activities (print, web, etc.) and the development of incentives (e.g. tourism packages) to create easy access for tourists.

Objectives: 1, 2, 5

Possible Partners: relevant authorities, tourism associations, transport companies, regional and local development associations/agencies.

2.2.3 Innovative ship design

Research and development of tailor made ships for the Danube river system. For centuries, ships have transported people and goods up and down the Danube, facing the challenge of dealing with a dynamic river. Rather than regulating the river to make the river better adjusted to the needs of navigation, ship design can be improved to better deal with the natural conditions of this specific river system. Existing studies on innovative ship design¹⁵ highlight the technical options. The next step is to develop feasibility studies and to build and test prototypes of such ships.

Objectives: 1, 2, 5

Possible Partners: relevant authorities, tourism associations, transport companies, regional and local development associations/agencies.

2.3 Improve the biodiversity of the Danube region as precondition for tourism development

(Sustainable) Tourism relies on natural resources, traditional landscapes and unspoilt areas of high biodiversity. Protected areas, especially biosphere reserves and national parks, are attractions of high relevance. By providing guided nature tours, visitor centres and alike those protected areas contribute to touristic offers with high local benefit.

Resource efficiency is among the flagship initiatives of the EU new economic strategy Europe 2020. In order to break the link between economic growth and environmental degradation the resource efficiency of production and consumption processes must be increased. Consuming fewer resources and producing less waste will save businesses and consumers money as well as benefiting the environment.

Especially waste management in large parts of the Middle and Lower Danube basin is still far from meeting EU standards. Illegal dumping sites leach pollutants into the soil and water system and are an eye sore that makes the development of nature tourism close to impossible. Precious material such as paper and plastic is wasted – often into the water and the reed bed – instead of being recycled. This also creates enormous negative respond by tourists.

Strategic actions

- Monitor the tourism stream and develop carrying capacities
- Create local benefit from biodiversity protection and landscape interpretation

¹⁵ http://assets.panda.org/downloads/iww_danube_ship_design_final_december_2009.pdf

- Support effective management of protected areas, including through networking and capacity building among protected area administrations, e.g. through the existing Danube Network of Protected Areas (Danube Parks).
- Support the protection of species and the protection and restoration of sensitive areas with high biodiversity, particularly where this involves and requires broader, trans-boundary cooperation and coordination
- Set up the infrastructure for waste prevention, reuse and recycling and raise awareness of citizens and businesses on the benefit of reducing and recycling waste.
- Support the implementation of the Programme of Measures of the Danube River Basin Management Plan: The Danube River Basin Management Plan and in particular its Programme of Measures – which have been developed and adopted by 14 Danube governments and the European Commission, including EU member and non-EU member states, and as required by the EU Water Framework Directive – set forward targets for achieving good ecological status of the regional water system in an integrated fashion.

Flagship projects

2.3.1 Tourism monitoring in emerging destinations/sensitive areas, especially the Danube Delta

Develop monitoring methodologies to collect data about tourism statistics, activities, motives etc. especially in the ecological hot-spots such as the Danube Delta. The results of the monitoring should lead to setting up carrying capacities and the development of effective visitor management systems.

Objectives: 1

Possible Partners: relevant authorities, tourism associations, regional and local development associations/agencies, environmental NGOs, protected area authorities.

2.3.2 Education / training for nature and culture guides

The creation of local benefit from biodiversity protection is the best instrument to create awareness of the local population and authorities. Nature and landscape interpretation can create secondary income and contribute to 'green jobs'. Most of the regions along the Middle and Lower Danube lack of qualified nature guides.

Based on existing curricula certified education and training systems should be established:

- that combine nature with (local) culture guiding
- that includes languages training and didactics of landscape interpretation and environmental education
- are developed in international cooperation with common basics and regional-specific modules
- could be implemented and used by protected area and regional authorities as well as contribute to the foundation of SMEs

Objectives: 1, 2

Possible Partners: Danube Competence Centre (DCC), relevant authorities, regional and local development associations/agencies, environmental NGOs, protected area authorities.

2.3.3 Change the land use development to support sustainable regional development and keep attractiveness for tourists

The demographic evolution of the last century changed the land use dramatically: Increasing needs for food

and water resources, constructions, transportation, etc. brought new pressures on the environment. More and more natural ecosystems were replaced by monocultures (agricultural fields, hybrid poplar trees, etc) or construction areas. Transport required more infrastructure, both factors led to fragmentation of habitats, hindered migration, etc.

The Danube strategy could contribute to a change of the land use patterns by

Promoting measures to diminish the impact on natural ecosystems and restore the connectivity of ecosystem network; use landscape planning as a major transdisciplinary and political tool for local strategies.

Avoiding future habitat fragmentation and disruption of migration corridors; the future infrastructure projects should be considered in an integrative way at basin level, due to their interconnectivity; re-establish corridors for migrating species; etc.

Strengthening the implementation of current legislation for protected areas and nature reserves (Natura2000, Ramsar, UNESCO, etc) e.g., by professional park rangers, according to differentiated zones with strict protection/no access, zones for recreation, restricted agriculture, and buffer zones.

Defragment and coordinate the spatial planning across the region and implements combined strategic integration of objectives of different sectors. The Danube Strategy can aim to reconcile social and economic claims for spatial development with the area's ecological and cultural assets, aiming for long-term sustainable development that enhances livelihoods while maintaining or even restoring essential ecosystem goods and services.

Objectives: 1

Possible Partners: relevant authorities, regional and local development associations/agencies, environmental NGOs, protected area authorities.

2.3.4 Halting the loss of biodiversity through enlarging and managing the networks of protected areas

Stopping the loss of biodiversity in the region is not only the precondition for ensuring the provision of ecosystem goods and services today and in the future – it also brings attractiveness for tourism and strengthens resilience of the natural system in the face of climate change. Diverse landscapes with intact wetlands and forests, for example, can buffer the effects of changing precipitation patterns, helping to secure water supplies and mitigate droughts and floods.

Strengthen the protection and management of protected areas is a key instruments for safeguarding biodiversity values and ecosystem services of the region. Activities include networking, exchange of experience, capacity building and training for protected area administrations, e.g. through community involvement and awareness raising related to protected areas; visitor management and tourism development; coordinated management planning, implementation and evaluation; coordinated conservation interventions.

Objectives: 1

Possible Partners: Administration of the Danube Network of Protected Areas (www.danubeparks.org) and the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (<http://www.carpathianparks.org/>); other relevant authorities (agencies, ministries); environmental NGOs and other stakeholders.

2.3.4 Effective protection of ecosystems and key species

Intact ecosystems and the visibility of key species are an important prerequisite for nature based tourism, that provides important parts of the tourism products along the Danube: birdwatchers, boat tourists, nature

photographers, etc. bring up to 80 % of the tourism income to several of the Danube destinations. Some specialised SMEs are directly dependent on the existence of special species (e.g. tour operators offering bird watching or bear and wolf trips).

The following measures (taken from the comments by WWF / NFI, Danube Parks and IAD - International Association for Danube research) and considered important contributions to provide a base for successful sustainable tourism development:

- **Protection and restoration of the Danube floodplains and wetlands:** The Danube has lost 80% of its floodplains and wetlands, and with them the most biologically productive areas as well as essential ecosystem services from flood management to biomass production and water purification. There is realistic potential (in terms of relative costs and other factors) for restoration of up to 600,000 ha of Danube floodplains and wetlands.

The Activities include the prioritisation of floodplain and wetland areas for protection and/or restoration; awareness raising on values of intact floodplains and wetlands; mapping; negotiation with land owners and users; feasibility studies. implementation e.g. removal of dikes and other barriers; development of economic incentives for floodplain restoration by promoting alternative use of transformed floodplains, in particular biomass for energy production and production of insulation material for buildings through know-how transfer, micro credits and the right policy frameworks.

- **Identification and Protection of the Old Growth Forests of the Danube Basin:** The Danube region contains Europe's largest remaining areas of virgin and old growth forest outside of Russia. Although they represent only a small fraction of mostly commercially harvested forest areas, they provide a host of ecosystem goods and services, from biodiversity to carbon sequestration and water management, not to mention tourism and recreation. Many of those areas have uncertain status and are being felled, without regard to their exceptional qualities and value.

The Activities include identification and evaluation of current status of old growth forests in the region; identification and development of measures for preserving old growth areas, from protection to work with owners and managers to identify alternative incomes or compensation; education and awareness raising as well as capacity building.

- **Transnational programmes for the conservation of flagship species:** Based on existing conventions, action plans and international treaties with focus on the conservation of the biodiversity, transnational coordinated programmes for the conservation of selected flagship species for the Danube region should be developed and implemented.

- **Protect bears and other large carnivores:** Secure the populations of European bears and other large carnivores as priority European species and flagship species with relevance for broader conservation aims.

Activities: include transnational scientific research; awareness raising and education for public and selected groups, e.g. tourists, farmers and shepherds; actions to identify and secure key habitats and ecological corridors for large carnivores, e.g. through smart development planning or compensation measures such as eco-bridges for transportation infrastructure; steps to address human-large carnivore conflicts (e.g. investments in bear-proof waste containers, electric fencing for shepherds, etc.). Partners: Relevant national, regional and local authorities; NGOs; scientific institutes; other stakeholders

- **Protecting Danube Sturgeons:** Stabilise populations of Danube sturgeon species, that have been experiencing a steady decline and are now facing extinction. Measures that work toward protecting the critically endangered species will also benefit other fish and send a signal that biodiversity conservation is possible and receives the attention it deserves. Recovering sturgeon populations are also the prerequisite for a revival of lucrative sturgeon fishing and caviar production in the region in the medium to long term.

Activities include restoration of migration corridors and spawning habitats, particularly by developing fish ladders or other forms of bypass over the Iron Gates Dam, which would effectively double the range of the Danube Sturgeon; address illegal fishing of sturgeon and trade in caviar, e.g. by strengthening capacity of enforcement agencies and customs officials; monitor and map sturgeon populations.

Objectives: 1, 2

Possible Partners: Relevant national, regional and local authorities, ICPDR, scientific institutes, Administration of the Danube Network of Protected Areas (www.danubeparks.org) and the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (<http://www.carpathianparks.org>), environmental NGOs and other stakeholders.

2.3.5 Waste and water quality

Waste and visible or smelling water pollution causes direct dissatisfaction by tourists. Polluted destination get very soon a negative image and are cancelled from the list of holiday desires. Pollution very often is not seen in the source area but removed downstream. Intensive trans-boundary cooperation is required as many compounds might be transported by air and water at hundreds of kilometres away from their sources, polluting other countries.

In agreement with the Water Framework Directive, the Joint Program of Measures of the DRBMP emphasize some of the major measures that should be taken at regional scale in order to improve water quality and quantity.

The Danube Strategy should consider an integrative approach of the aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, complementing the measures from the JPM with actions targeting the sediment quality and quantity, limiting the pollutants inflow from the land sources and promoting 'green' measures at catchment scale.

Necessary activities contain the following measures:

- **Solving the problem of plastic waste (bottles) in the Danube Delta.** Both a lack of effective waste collection systems and the reed bed collecting plastic bottles that are brought downstream create high pressure to that area.
- **Upscaling pilot activities for collection and reprocessing of plastic waste in the Upper Tisza area** to a larger area in order to find sustainable, feasible solutions for preventing, collecting and recycling household waste while at the same time creating new jobs and business opportunities
- **Reduce the high loads of nutrient pollution** by the reduction of point sources of pollution; the reduction of diffuse sources of pollution by implementing best agricultural practices ("ecological agriculture – green farming") to reduce the amount of fertilizers and diminish the water abstraction for irrigation (e.g. drip technique); the ban the use of phosphorus in detergents; and the establishment of buffer strips along water courses to retain the nutrients.
- **Reduce the pollution by hazardous substances** by fighting the source rather than the effects (no end-of-pipe-solutions; foster recycling strategies); the treatment of hazardous substances and contaminated sludge with newest technology; the ban of uncontrolled solid waste disposal and the production and use of hazardous substances where necessary; the minimization of the use of agrochemicals (insecticides, pesticides, herbicides, etc.) and promotion of ecological agriculture; and the establishment of cross-border cooperation on risk assessment and accident control.

Objectives: 1, 6

Possible Partners: Relevant national, regional and local authorities, ICPDR, scientific institutes, NGOs and other stakeholders.

2.4 Improve the Sustainable Governance of tourism (and other) policies

Long-term sustainable development of the greater Danube region is predicated on a strong basis of human and social capital – i.e. not only developed human resources, with necessary education and skills, but also the developed social infrastructure capable of effecting efficient decision making and organisation.

Unfortunately, throughout much of the greater Danube region, there is a strong ambivalence and even distrust among local stakeholders in governments, politicians and authorities. There are also continuing difficulties in cooperation between authorities and civil society. At the same time, and with some notable exceptions, civil society in some countries remains relatively weak.

Strategic actions

- Break down the different European strategies (Danube strategy, EU Sustainable Development Strategy, (Sustainable) Tourism Positions¹⁶, etc.) to regional strategies for Sustainable tourism
- Balance the environmental with the economic and social needs
- Invest in human resources, including training and capacity building and improve the local participation in decision making processes.
- Invest in developing social infrastructure, e.g. through supporting “bottom-up”, grassroots capacity building, networking and development.
- Increase access to funding lines

Flagship projects

2.4.1 Regional strategies for Sustainable Tourism / round tables

Existing strategies on European level need to be broken down to concrete regional strategies for the development and implementation of sustainable tourism. Such strategies contain clear targets, measures, priorities and responsible stakeholder for the implementation.

Sustainable tourism strategies are developed under broad local and regional participation. Generally participation raises the awareness regarding the major threats on the natural ecosystems and the feed-back on human health. Participatory processes may increase their support towards implementing adaptive measures.

Objectives: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Possible Partners: Danube Competence Centre (DCC), all relevant authorities, regional and local development associations/agencies, environmental NGOs, protected area authorities; generally all interested stakeholders.

2.4.2 Ease the border crossing

International tourism is per se a border crossing activity. The Danube not only crosses several internal EU borders but also constitutes the border between EU and non-EU countries. This leads to punctual difficulties in the development of cross-border products – e.g. in the Danube Delta between Romania and Ukraine.

The Danube Strategy could contribute to an easier border crossing by

¹⁶ ‚A renewed EU-Tourism Policy: Towards a stronger partnership for European Tourism’, (Communication from the Commission, COM(2006) 134 final, March 2006 and ‚Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European Tourism’, (Communication from the Commission, COM(2007) 621 final, October 2007) and ‚A new framework for the tourism policy in the EU’ (Discussion document, March 2010)

- motivation to open new border crossings for tourists and locals (e.g. between Vilkovo / Ukraine and Periprava / Romania)
- reduction of bureaucratic obstacles for boat companies to get permits for cross-border transport
- motivation of the Danube countries to ease visa formalities (if appropriate)

Objectives: 2

Possible Partners: national authorities

2.4.3 Guidelines for investments and sustainability criteria for European and national funds

In wide parts of the Danube region, income from traditional forms of agriculture is increasingly being complemented by tourism revenues. Supporting this development on the one hand contribute significantly to green job creation, wellbeing of the rural population, as well as the protection of the natural and cultural assets of the whole region. Therefore local and regional investment into ecologically and socially sound high quality tourism is to be promoted.

On the other hand the increasing importance of tourism often leads to uncontrolled and uncoordinated development. Especially the Balkan and CEE countries face punctual heavy investments with a lack of clear guidelines. This situation often leads to counterproductive developments. Also the use of national and international funds is not always set according to clear environmental and sustainability regulations.

A coherent development strategy for the Danube area needs

- clear guidelines for (foreign and domestic) investment that take sustainability issues and environmental protection into account
- sustainability criteria for all relevant European and national funds

Objectives: 1, 2

Possible Partners: national authorities, European institutions

2.4.4 Capacity Building for civil society

Especially in the countries of the Middle and Lower Danube efforts have to be taken into the capacity building of the civil society, both to create awareness for interregional development and identity and to develop the bases for creative use of development options, e.g. the creation of ‘green jobs’, the use of new technologies in transport and energy production, etc.

The following measures could contribute to the capacity building of the civil society:

- **Improvement of languages skills and exchange programmes:** To take part in the development of an cross-border European macro-region people need to understand different cultures and languages. Language courses and the promotion of existing European exchange programmes are important tools to overcome those barriers.
- **Promote the integration of ecological and sustainability education in the teaching system** and enhance knowledge exchange between children, teachers, ecologists and managers; create opportunities for interdisciplinary careers;
- **Information exchange – a Danube newsletter:** A common newsletter for the Danube region could create awareness and contribute to a common ‘Danube identity’.
- **Micro-credits for green business and NGOs engaged in rural development:** Encourage entrepreneurship and development of SME’s in rural areas – empower local stakeholders and foster

vibrant communities, while encouraging future-oriented businesses. Activities include technical assistance, e.g. training in identifying opportunities for 'green business', business development and planning; micro-and soft credit schemes, e.g. in cooperation with commercial lending institution
Partners: Relevant authorities, regional and local development associations/agencies, NGOs focused on rural development.

- **Small grants programmes for NGOs and local communities:** Empower civil society and local communities to actively contribute 'from the bottom up' to achieving objectives of the Danube Strategy. Activities include e.g. support to independent re-granting foundations in disbursing non-bureaucratic small grants to NGOs and local communities for projects related to environment, local development and social issues.

Objectives: 1, 2, 4

Possible Partners: Danube Competence Centre (DCC), all relevant authorities, regional and local development associations/agencies, environmental NGOs, protected area authorities; existing foundations throughout the Danube region that have experience with re-granting for NGOs and communities.