



## The network Danube parks – opportunities for development of trans-border nature tourism

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*Summary: The Danube river forms the foundation of Europe's biological diversity, which is represented by the multiple protected territories Natura 2000 along its stream. The network Danube parks unites partners from eight Danube countries, which has for its goal the long term preservation of the natural heritage, as well as to develop nature trans-border tourism between the countries in the region.*

**Keywords:** network of protected territories, trans-border cooperation, nature tourism.

The Danube river is an interconnected ecosystem. Going through ten countries, the Danube is the most international river in the world. With its diverse habitats, the Danube river forms the foundation of Europe's biological diversity, which is represented by the multiple places "Natura – 2000" by the stream.

The protected territories preserve the most valuable objects and play a key role in the long term preservation of the natural heritage. Despite the different circumstances, all protected territories face similar challenges, which can be solved solely through international cooperation.

This necessity for cooperation is emphasized also by the Strategy of the EU for the Danube region, where in a priority area (6), the biological diversity calls for a wider approach in the preservation of nature by the Danube river.

Already in the 90's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, multiple protected territories are founded and after that a two-sided trans-border cooperation begins, but with the expansion of the EU, new dimensions of this cooperation are observed, namely the Danube protected territories taking a lead role in the preservation of nature. (Law for biological diversity of Bulgaria – 2002).

During 2007, the signed by eight protected territories "Declaration of Tulcha" calls for a more narrow cooperation and initiates the first steps.

During 2009, the financing by ETC (European Territorial Cooperation for South-East Europe) - SEE allowed the creation of the network Danube parks, uniting initially 12 partners of 8 Danube countries.

During the period 2009 – 2010, the network of protected territories by the Danube has managed the common challenges, encouraging the positive exchange of experience, development of trans-border strategies and the beginning of applying of demonstrative pilot projects was marked.

The river dynamics is the basis for preservation of the natural state of the habitats. In the focus of the Danube parks is the river morphology and the restoration of the river, as another important area is the creation of a strong network of habitats with a focus on the management of forests and grasslands, and the preservation of leading species such as the sturgeons and the sea eagle.

The wide territories by the river valley of the Danube river are recognized for "Natura 2000" places and this contributes to their management through creation of systems for monitoring of the Danube.

The ecological education and the nature tourism is of vital importance for the effective and long term preservation of the natural resources, which is the reason for the cooperative building of capacity and the use of brand, built on the basis of the expanding of the horizon. The network Danube parks also develops strategic documents with big importance for

the Danube.

With the introduced pilot projects, supported by a wide range of communication activities, the end result became clear and evident for the people, whose goal is the preservation and development of the ecological system such as the Danube and its corresponding territories.

For work in the specific areas - work groups for morphology, birds, fishes, management of the habitats and organizing of activities are formed with the purpose of the development of nature tourism.

The continuity of the cooperation is ensured by the following internal means of communication:

- developed and applied communications plan
- meeting of work groups from the different Danube parks
- Internet communication
- Internal bulletins
- exchange of experience in the good practices
- educational visits and specific work activities

### **River morphology, restoration and management of the habitats**

The Danube river and its water regime are a key factor for management of the riverside habitats.

The restoration of the river is an issue, which stands primary before all protected territories.

The main goal is the restoration of the hydrological situation and initiation of the natural processes for improvement of the condition of the characteristic habitats.

In the restoration of the river there is participation by experts from the protected territories who visit a set of objects for restoration such as removing of transverse artificial structures in the secondary flows of National park Duna Drava and the bay forests in Slovenia, improving the water regime of these temporary water beds.

The ecological adaptation of the breakwaters in the Hungarian section of the Danube increased the status of the habitats in the valuable island formations.

In the protected landscape Dunajske luly, a restoration of embankments is done for the creation of natural riverbanks.

With the execution of these measures, suitable habitats for the population of the little ringed plover are created.

The activities for the restoration are executed with narrow cooperation of the authorities for management of the water pools, emphasizing the intersection approach of the protected territories in the management.

### **Danube nature tourism**

The protected territories have the main task to preserve the natural heritage not only for ecological purposes, but also to provide these places to the people for relaxation and recrea-



tion.

Furthermore, their goal is to inform and educate its visitors about the value of the natural ecosystems.

The ecological education is an integral part of the nature preservation activities and contributes for a wider support of the programs for preservation of the environment.

At the same time, the protected territories are additionally tourist attractions, which increase the popularity of the destination and provide additional opportunities for income of the local population.

The Danube parks focus the attention on the development of tourist products in regard to boat trips, cooperative activities for creating of capacity and international marketing of the destinations.

In real work environment, experts are being prepared, who better their skills for interpretation in nature and their skills to lead groups and to do excursion servicing in the protected territories.

In the Danube parks, the tourist service experts exchange experience and better the quality of the tourist attractions on the territory of all partners, which is a basis for development of international tourist products and marketing of the destination.

Pilot activities for development of tourist products, marketing and regional cooperation are:

- The buying of boats and bicycles from four partners in

#### References:

1. Strategy of the EU for the Danube region (2011).
2. Directive 79/409 EEC for the protection of wild birds.
3. Directive 92/43 EEC for the protection of the natural habitats of the wild fauna and flora.
4. Law for biological diversity (2002).
5. Georgiev G. National and natural parks and reservations in Bulgaria, publisher "Geya – Libris", 2004.
6. Georgiev G. Bio-geographic specificities of the wet zones in Bulgaria, University publisher SWU "Neofit Rilski", 1999.
7. [www.natura2000bg.org](http://www.natura2000bg.org)

Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania.

- Development of new routes for a round-trip with boat from National park Duna Ipoly and Nature park "Persina"

- Testing of new tourist routes, suggested by partners in Hungary and Bulgaria

- Creating six new trails by partners in Slovakia and Hungary

- Exchange of experience for the creation of trails

- Issuing of tourist guides for visitors of the Danube Delta

- Specially developed internet pages with tourism section, which give detailed information for the landmarks in the regions, as well as an opportunity for transportation and accommodation.

The main accent is on the opportunities that are offered to the territory, such as festivals, water rowing excursions, tourist tours on bicycle and pedestrian routes and observation of the flora and fauna in the Danube parks.

#### Prospects for the Danube parks

The network of protected territories along the Danube river is created with the prospect of a long term platform for cooperation for for the preservation of the nature of the entire Danube and for opportunities for development of the trans-border nature tourism for the people.