Danube Transnational Programme contribution to a better Danube Region

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A stream of cooperation
The Danube Transnational Programme was adopted in 2015. 3 years afterwards, it has already brought visible results for the well-being of the whole Danube Region. The Programme, through its projects and project partners has given answers to specific challenges and needs of the region in a unique way. The Danube Transnational Programme is integrating three different sources of funding: ERDF, IPA and ENI. Bringing pre-accession and neighbourhood countries together with Member States is already a big achievement as together with its complexity – the cooperation of these countries in a structured manner brings not only valuable experience for non-EU countries, but gives a unique opportunity to Member states to cooperate on a macro regional level with countries outside of the EU. This brochure illustrates well how the transnational programme has contributed for a better Danube Region in the field of innovation, social innovation, environment, culture, transport, energy as well as governance.

To understand the importance of Interreg Danube in such a diversely developed region, it is necessary to take a step back and look beyond the project level, which is exactly what this brochure has achieved. This effort voices all the partners and neighbours who have been involved in every step of the programme implementation.

Interreg Danube is recognized within the Region as a platform which connects people, ideas and needs; where nine EU Member and five non-Member States are working together in common areas stemming from research and innovation, welfare and infrastructure to culture and heritage, being an indispensable resource of knowledge and support in every phase, on the national, regional and local level.

It is a great achievement that this programme will continue its journey through future projects defying borders and limitations, offering our citizens better prospects in their own region.

Wishing you many successful projects in the years to come,
While the European Innovation Scoreboard 2018 shows an “improving performance and accelerating progress for Europe”, countries in Eastern Europe are still lagging behind. The Danube Region is therefore characterised by an unbalanced development mainly due to different framework conditions, the availability of human resources and research capacities. This is why the Danube Transnational Programme has committed itself to supporting the Innovation Union flagship initiative of the EU 2020 Strategy by offering funding possibilities to a wide range of innovation projects of broad relevance for the cooperation area.

Such projects cover eco-innovation, including bio- and circular economy, as well as creating new macro-regional strategies for bio-fuels, eco-construction, eco-packaging, hemp usage, phytopharma products, agro-food industry, forest-based manufacturing or urban recycling. Efforts are also being made to ensure knowledge transfer and access to research infrastructure, such as the new Extreme Light Infrastructure, to promote responsible research and innovation among key decision-makers, or to exchange the utilisation of high-speed computing for business administration processes and to protect intellectual property rights.

Research and innovation are also supported by new cluster policies, trying to link existing local cluster policies to macro-regional ones via S3 priorities, or facilitating access to different forms of financing, such as crowdfunding or business acceleration mentorship programmes.

Social innovation is of utmost importance for the Danube Region, since it can provide appropriate responses to some of the key challenges brought about by the current societal changes affecting the area. Massive brain drain, the lack of appropriate entrepreneurial public policies and social services, or the low level of entrepreneurial skills in technological or non-technical areas are only some of the issues tackled by the projects under the Danube Transnational Programme.

Other projects strive to deliver newer and better innovative services, developed with and for the Danube Region's inhabitants, by facilitating the transfer of new technologies in the process of dementia care, or by supporting the emergence of a new generation of research and innovation managers.

The Programme is also supporting the transfer of research results and innovation activities into the real economy as a way of directly tackling societal changes, and it aims to create a regional ecosystem able to support Young Innovators in their effort of transforming revolutionary ideas into successful ventures.
Our rich and diverse environment provides crucial resources and services for the quality of life, but intense human interventions and other risks threaten its fragile system due to over-usage and degradation. The preservation and valorisation of the environment call for integrated and sustainable solutions in the Danube Region.

The Danube and its main tributaries, as a lifeline of the macro-region, are addressed by joint actions to improve water management, flood control and ecological connectivity. To this end, DTP projects are harmonising the flood- and ice forecasting system, identifying solutions for floodplain restoration, managing sediment transport and balance, developing a sediment quality monitoring and assessment system, as well as managing the habitat and repopulation of migratory fish species, or addressing connectivity issues between protected areas along the Danube corridor.

An integrated approach is employed for the Tisa River Basin water management and flood protection, while along the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve corridor, projects improve management practices for protected and adjacent areas, ensure the resilience of riparian forests, and valorise its nature by developing a joint bike tour package. Fragmentation between protected areas along the Sava River and tributaries is tackled by managing invasive alien plant species, while spatial-environmental measures improve connectivity along the European Green Belt corridor.

Steering land usage to safeguard water resources and reduce flood risk is similarly important, just like improving drought monitoring and management for the entire Danube Region.

In the mountainous regions of the Carpathians, the preservation of wildlife corridors is being addressed, while other projects trigger economic development for karst bio-regions, geo-parks, or Natura 2000 sites.

The Danube area displays a large variety of cultures and cultural heritage sites both inestimable for humanity and extremely valuable as tourism destinations. However, sustainable methods of exploitation, as well as appropriate site management and preservation are crucial to reach their full potential through tourism.

Hence the joint initiatives that the Danube Transnational Programme is facilitating to harness the cohesive potential of the Art Nouveau cultural heritage in the Danube Region, to expand existing cultural routes and explore hidden sites with a view to give stories to both visible and invisible cultural heritage, or to create a “Danube Cultural Promenade” that connects all communities along the river, unifying them into a single tourism destination brand, while offering thematic routes and creating premises for a higher number of visitors and longer sojourns in the region.

Similar efforts are being put into developing joint approaches for researching and managing complex (pre)historic landscapes and their integration into sustainable tourism, managing the sustainable usage of the First World War cultural heritage by combining it with cultural tourism, and building on the potential of Jewish cultural heritage of cities.
Transport development in the Danube Region is advancing steadily. Although one may argue that the pace is too slow, some important steps are being made towards improvement. Since transport is a complex sector calling for a multitude of correlated interventions, it couldn’t have been different within the DTP.

Thus, concerted actions are currently being taken to improve waterway infrastructure management along the Danube, to remove administrative barriers presently hindering smooth cargo- and passenger transport on the river, to modernise the Danube fleet especially by looking into possible greening technologies, and to improve the interoperability of maritime and inland waterway transport.

In terms of land transport and in convergence with current European objectives that target more sustainable transport, DTP projects also employ an integrated approach by proposing practical solutions in the field of e-mobility or pedestrian traffic, promoting cycling along touristic routes in the Danube Region, developing multimodal transport schemes at functional urban areas level and multimodal journey planning.

Key aspects such as road safety, integration of ecological corridors in transport infrastructure planning, as well as the preservation of the Danube eco-system through the reduction of pollution caused by transport activities are also being addressed by DTP projects.

In terms of sustainable energy, the Danube Region still has to unlock its great potential and thus achieve its energy security goals. To this end, smart usage and exploitation of existing sources is essential, a fact which was very well understood by the three projects implemented under the Danube Transnational Programme.

Whether they provide a technological and legislative set-up for cross-spanning energy management of buildings, grids and major city infrastructure, or promote the sustainable utilisation of still largely untapped deep geothermal resources in the heating sector, or exploit the potential for green energy in the form of biomass along the Danube in a sustainable way, they all give a helping hand to increasing energy security and efficiency in the region.

These may seem like little drops in the ocean, but times have constantly shown that small steps can produce huge effects if made in the right direction. By committing themselves to deploying smart distribution systems, integrating renewable sources in the heating sector, or creating a biomass supply chain along the Danube, the projects are evidently making significant steps towards ensuring improved energy efficiency and a more secure energy supply for the benefit of the entire Danube Region.

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40 CityWalk  
41 Transdanube.Pearls  
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Among European macro-regions, the Danube Region is the one most characterised by sharp discrepancies in governance systems and performance. Transnational cooperation is therefore imperative in order to create an environment that facilitates private sector growth and inclusive development, delivers valuable services, and earns the trust and confidence of citizens.

The Danube Transnational Programme supports new cooperation models among public institutions, private sector and civil society to effectively tackle common governance bottlenecks. Financed projects address demographic- and migratory challenges such as brain drain\(^{50}\) and labour market integration\(^{51}\) with holistic, cross-sectorial approaches, and promote participatory urban-rural planning processes\(^{52}\). The inclusion of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups is put forward\(^{53}\), and the provision of crucial public services for the Danube functional area – such as the harmonisation of educational schemes for inland navigation\(^{54}\) – is fostered.

Transnational cooperation offers a unique platform for unleashing untapped potentials of the Danube Region by stimulating governance innovation across borders and creating a critical mass of diverse actors interacting around shared societal challenges, which otherwise would remain subject to isolated and fragmented interventions of limited impact.

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