

**ANCHORING
EUROPEAN
INTEGRATION
AND DEMOCRACY THROUGH
PARTICIPATION**

**The Agenda for Participation
in the EU Macro-Regional
Strategies**

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Disclaimer: The Agenda for Participation in the Macro-Regional Strategies and Partnerships for Participation was subject for discussion at the 4th Danube Participation Day 2017 and subsequent National Participation Days. The present document reflects these discussions as well as the results generated within the Participation Partnerships.

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The Macro-Regional Strategies of the European Union: Aims and Challenges

Since 2009, the European Council endorsed four Macro-Regional Strategies: the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) and the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP). These territorial strategies are considered responses to specific needs of functional regions beyond the national and below the European level. Macro-Regional Strategies aim at establishing links between sectoral policies, improving social and economic development through the furthering of better governance, institutional capacities and the roll out of EU funds and policies, thus fostering structural reforms and democratisation in the EU member countries, but also in accession and neighbouring countries. The latter is particularly relevant for the Danube Region as well as for the Adriatic-Ionian Region, where Macro-Regional Strategies are supposed to form an interface between EU Cohesion and EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policies.

Macro-Regional Strategies are based on the principles of no new EU funds, no additional formal EU structures and no new EU legislation ("3 No's"), and are seen as an instrument for optimal use of existing financial resources, better use of existing institutions and better implementation of existing legislation. They aim at better use of all existing financial sources (EU, national, regional, local, private, etc.) better implementation of existing legislation, and better use of existing institutions at all levels. Eventually, Macro-Regional Strategies apply the multi-level governance concept and build, as an element of the reformed EU Cohesion Policy¹, on the place-based approach.

By building up joint transnational capacities, competences and cooperation structures, Macro-Regional Strategies should provide flexible structures that serve as a testing ground for innovative, national as well as transnational policies and initiatives, ultimately strengthening territorial cohesion and furthering better living conditions for its citizens. One of the preconditions for the success of such an ambitious and innovative concept is the active and structured participation of civil society and local actors, linking top-down strategies with bottom-up actions. A EU Macro-Regional Strategy is an instrument of the European Regional Policy but not limited to regional policy only. It "[...] is a policy framework which allows countries located in the same region to jointly tackle and find solutions to problems or to better use the potential they have in common (e.g. pollution, navigability, worldwide business competition, etc.). By doing so, they benefit from strengthened cooperation; with the aim of making their policies more efficient than if they had addressed the issues in isolation."²

The European Commission's report to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of EU Macro-Regional Strategies in 2016³ states that all four strategies could be further developed, notably regarding governance, result-orientation, targeted and purposeful funding and communication as well as cooperation. The European Commission invited the participating countries and regions to mobilise regions, cities, agencies and institutions such as universities, private businesses and civil society organisations to participate in the implementation and development of Macro-Regional Strategies.

In practice however, many local administrations, small and medium-sized cities as well as large parts of civil society organisations are unable to participate and profit from the exchange of knowledge, pilot projects, peer-to-peer learning, and cooperation due to the current regulations of EU funds and programs as well as lacking political engagement, centralist governance and wide spread mistrust in local actors and civil society.

¹ An Agenda for a reformed Cohesion Policy: A place-based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations, Fabrizio Barca 2009

² http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/cooperate/macro_region_strategy/pdf/mrs_factsheet_en.pdf

³ COM(2016) 805 final

The lack of access to sufficient information, counselling and funding impedes their active involvement in the strategies' actions and foils the European Commission's invitation – addressing local actors and civil society – to participate in Macro-Regional Strategies.

In the ongoing planning of the European Cohesion Policy post 2020, representatives from Macro-Regional Strategies, regions, cities and civil society organisations called for the development of easily accessible, needs oriented and manageable funding instruments, small-scale funding, the strengthening of the partnership principle and other formats of participation; in order to foster the involvement of local actors and civil society in the implementation of all Macro-Regional Strategies and these should, according to their aims, provide a tangible benefit to participating regions and their citizens.

Macro-Regional Strategies as well as European Cohesion Policy will only be successful, if the local and regional level as well non-state actors are fully taken on board, thus granting civil society and local actors are granted the flexibility, trust and financial incentives they need to implement the goals of common European interest.

The EUSDR and the Involvement of Civil Society and Local Actors: Structures, Strategies and Projects

The Danube Region defined by the EU strategy encompasses 115 million inhabitants from 14 countries in the mainland of Europe, from Baden-Württemberg to the Republic of Moldova and Western Ukraine, from the richest to the poorest regions of Europe. The EUSDR addresses a wide range of issues. These are divided among 4 thematic pillars and 12 Priority Areas – ranging from transport to security, from qualification to research and competitiveness, from environment to culture and tourism, from energy to the improvement of governance. Each Priority Area is managed by two countries as Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) assisted by a steering committee representing all EUSDR member countries as well as relevant experts and organisations. Each country of the EUSDR has a National Coordinator (NC), who keeps an overview of the implementation of the strategy and its targets of the 12 Priority Areas in their country.

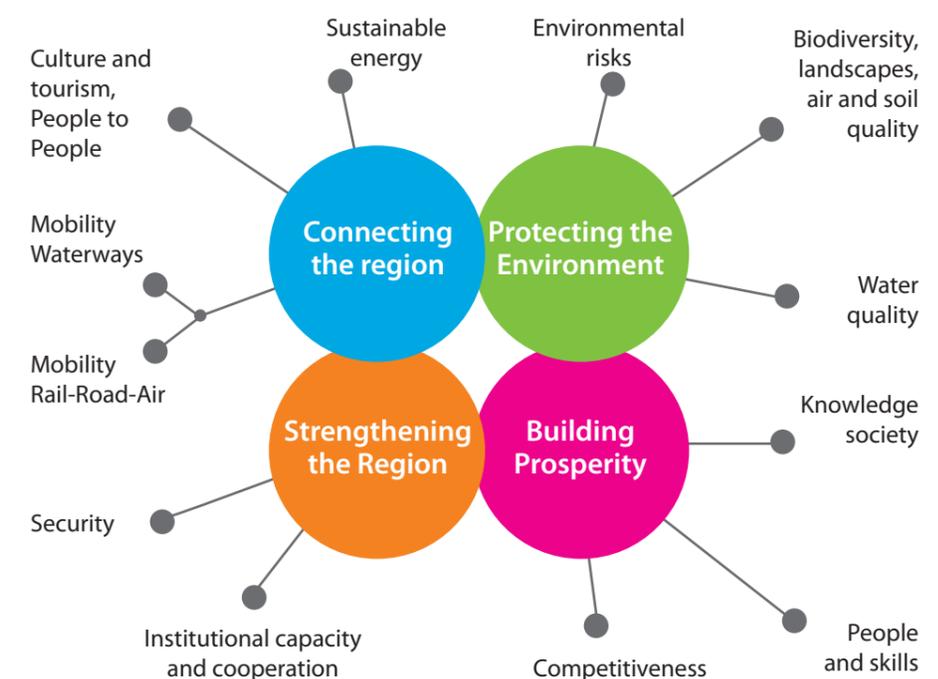


Table: Pillars and Priority Areas, EUSDR: <http://www.danube-region.eu/>

The Danube Region has a heritage of deep political transformation, including post-fascist and communist transition, national separatism, nationalistic conflicts and the foundation of new states. Fostering democracy, rule of law, transnational cooperation and European Integration is therefore essential for the development of the region. Knowledge transfer, exchange of information as well as building institutional capacities are pre-requisites for necessary structural reforms, but also take time and active stakeholders at all levels in order to bear fruit. The involvement of local actors – cities and municipalities, regional administrations, social partners, civil society organisations and academia – in decision-making processes and policy implementation is essential to develop viable solutions for the Danube Region.

Since the beginning of discussions about the EU Strategy for the Danube Region in 2010, Austria, the City of Vienna and the NGO Foster Europe were involved with the European Commission, DG Regional and Urban Affairs, in the consultations and drafting of the EUSDR actions related to cooperation and local development. The discussion about pre-conditions of successful macro-regional development resulted in the recognition of the important role of local actors in the implementation of regional development in the EUSDR Action Plan. In June 2014, at the third EUSDR Annual Forum in Vienna and the first Danube Participation Day in Eisenstadt (AT), high-level representatives from the EU recognised the central role of local actors for the implementation of the EUSDR targets. At the 4th EUSDR Annual Forum in Ulm (DE), the Ministers in charge of EU Funds, European Affairs or European Integration from the Danube Region as well as the European Commissioner for Regional Policy reiterated the necessity to involve key implementers of Macro-Regional Strategies through alignment of funds and a more coordinated use of all possible funding sources at national, regional or local level.⁴

This would implement the key principles of EU Regional and Cohesion Policy. On the ground and in daily procedures, it can be found in the recommendations of the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and 'Doing Less, More Efficiently', chaired by First Vice-President Timmermans. One of the three tasks of the group was the identification of ways to better involve regional and local authorities in the preparation and the follow up of EU policies.

The report restated these standards in its recommendations and called on Member States to live up to these principles: "The Task Force strongly recommends that Member States follow the guidance the Commission has given on encouraging greater participation and ownership of the country-specific recommendations in light of the fact that the Union's financial programmes increasingly support the Member States' economic reforms that may have implications for all levels of governance in a Member State. This should go beyond the national administrations and include local and regional authorities, the social partners, and civil society generally."

This statement is underpinned by the proposal of the Commission⁵ to focus on the policy objective of a Europe closer to the Citizens.

The view that the involvement of regional and local actors as well as civil society must be strengthened and deepened is shared by the European Economic and Social Committee⁶ and is a long-standing demand from the Committee of Region.

EUSDR Priority Area 10 "Institutional Capacity and Cooperation"

Priority Area 10 "Institutional Capacity and Cooperation" (PA10) is one of 12 Priority Areas in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and linked to the pillar "Strengthening the Danube Region". Priority Area 10 addresses institutional capacity building at local, regional and national level, supports the involvement of

⁴ Joint Statement of Ulm on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

⁵ COM/2018/375 final - 2018/0196 (COD)

⁶ SOC/563-EESC-2017-01953-00-01-ac-tra, Financing of civil society organisations by the EU, 2017

civil society in public governance, assists local development and better spending and, therefore, is considered to be a transversal Priority Area. Priority Area 10 is coordinated jointly by the City of Vienna and the Centre for European Perspective on behalf of Slovenia. It serves as an information and communication hub for local, regional, national and European stakeholders working in the field of institutional capacity building, participative governance and spatial development. Priority Area 10 supports policy and project development, stakeholder relations, policy dialogue, and capitalisation in the Danube Region and has implemented a series of pilot projects for the European Commission proposing information, counselling and alternative financing to project promoters in the region.

In the field of participatory governance, Priority Area 10 developed a set of measures and activities in cooperation with partners in order to further the participation of civil society and local actors within the EUSDR governance, and in the design and implementation of EU programmes and funds.

These included the support of the foundation of the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF), the establishment of the Danube Local Actors Platform (D-LAP), the implementation and roll-out of Danube Participation Days and – so far – 17 National Participation Days as well as a series of conferences and projects aiming at increasing participation in the Danube Region and the elaboration of the Agenda for Participation in 2017.

www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/

The Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF)

The Danube Basin NGO Project by Foster Europe convened and consulted with a broad and diverse group of NGOs in the Danube region. The project resulted in the launch of a website that provided information for civil society in the Danube Region. Additionally, the Danube Basin NGO Project drew a roadmap for participation in the EUSDR. Developing the "Guiding Principles of Civil Society in the Danube Region" eventually led in 2011 to the foundation and establishment of the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF) on the very day the EUSDR was officially launched in Budapest. This related to the actions of Priority Area 10 "Institutional Capacity and Cooperation" in the EUSDR Action Plan. The DCSF serves as an umbrella organisation for the representation of civil society interests in the macro-region and is a platform for dialogue and networking amongst civil society organisations.

EUSDR Priority Area 10 Action

"To establish a Danube Civil Society Forum"

The DCSF today represents over 40 NGO Networks and NGOs in the Danube Region and reaches out to far more organisations that are active in macro-regional cooperation. The DCSF closely works with Priority Area 10, developing instruments and measures to further and ensure the involvement and participation of civil society and local actors in the governance of the EUSDR and its member countries. The DCSF also encourages participation of civil society in (macro-) regional development in the Danube Region. Additionally, the DCSF transfers its know-how to other macro-regions in order to support partners to enhance civil society participation in all Macro-Regional Strategies. The DCSF is open to new members.

<http://dcsf.danubestrategy.eu/>

The Danube Local Actors Platform

EUSDR Priority Area 10 Action

“To improve the trust of citizens and stakeholders in political authorities”

“To ensure sufficient information flow and exchange at all levels”

In 2014, Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” launched the Danube Local Actors Platform (D-LAP) for civil society and local actors in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. The Danube Local Actors Platform of Priority Area 10 provides a large, open and inclusive space for structured exchange and cooperation for over a hundred local actors and relevant institutions in the Danube Region such as civil society organisations, cities, regions, ministries, research institutions, and international organisations. It links these stakeholders to other Priority Areas of the EUSDR, National Coordinators, national Ministries and the European Commission, providing information and focussed policy recommendations to all levels of the governance system of the EUSDR. The members of the Danube Local Actors Platform regularly meet to prepare the annual Danube Participation Day and National Participation Days, and to discuss relevant projects and initiatives, identifying synergies and transnational areas of intervention. The cooperation that has been developing between member states, regions, cities, social partners, local actors and civil society organisations has proven fruitful for the Macro-Regional Strategies and its projects, and was lauded by the European Parliament as an innovative instrument in the Macro-Regional Strategies. The know-how and experience of civil society organisations and local actors related to their engagement in regional development was gathered and reflected in the Agenda for Participation.

www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/danube-local-actors-platform

The Pilot Projects of Priority Area 10

EUSDR Priority Area 10 Actions

“To review bottlenecks relating to the low absorption rate of EU funds and to ensure better coordination of funding.”

“To examine the feasibility of Danube Investment framework.”

“To support the development of local financial products for business and community development.”

According to the EUSDR Action Plan, the implementation and use of alternative funding structures, better matchmaking between funding instruments and project promoters, or capacity building for improved access to Cohesion Policy programmes, were supposed to increase absorption rates and encourage project implementation in the Danube Region.

Against this background, Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” implemented pilot projects under the umbrella of the Danube Investment Framework, financed by the European Commission and the City of Vienna. Priority Area 10 implemented the following projects:

- **START I & II**

The Seed Money Facility *START Danube Region Project Fund* responded to the need for small-scale funding in order to lower the hurdle for engaged civil society organisations and local actors in regional development. The simple implementation structure and grant scheme of the initiative facilitated access to funding for relevant project ideas in the region and helped over 200 project promoters to gain experience in EU funding as well as intercultural project management, and to realise their project ideas.

- **Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects (TAF-DRP)**

The TAF-DRP was an EU grant scheme to develop project ideas relevant to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, into “bankable/fundable” project concepts and, thus addressed the lack of capacity in project development at the transnational/macro-regional level.

- **Danube Financing Dialogue (DFD)**

Priority Area 10 organised five Danube Financing Dialogues in order to facilitate the matchmaking between banks, funding programmes and project promoters as well as entrepreneurs from the Danube Region. The lessons learnt from the DFD platform were reflected in the development of a new format – the Donors’ Conference Framework.

- **Danube Project Support Toolkit**

The Danube Project Support (DPS) Toolkit offers guidance for organisations who plan to establish their own project-support instrument, or who wish to revise an existing one. The Toolkit was initiated in order to allow for a transfer of lessons learnt from different project support initiatives and to foster capacity building.

- **Danube Strategic Project Fund (DSPF)**

The Danube Strategic Project Fund is a facility aiming at supporting the implementation of transnational strategic projects aligned with the objective of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), with a specific added value at the interfaces between Cohesion and Enlargement/Neighbourhood Policy.

- **EuroAccess funding database**

EuroAccess is a central online information point on EU funding opportunities in the Macro-Regions. It collects and disseminates data of more than 200 EU funding programmes that operate within the geographical scope of the Macro-Regions. EuroAccess has supported project ideas in the Danube Region since 2016. Due to the success of the pilot initiative, it was expanded to all four Macro-Regions.

The pilot projects showed that many (potential) project promoters in the Danube Region clearly benefit from simplified programme structures, capacity building in transnational project management as well as increased outreach regarding funding information.

However, even though the pilot projects were deemed as successful, specifically furthering projects of NGOs and local actors as well as helping these stakeholders to keep informed about project financing and partners, funding was discontinued after the end of the pilot phase. New funding formats for small projects in the main funding instrument for the region, the Danube Transnational Programme, have recently been developed, but implementation is still difficult due to the rules of ETC programmes.

Additionally, the problematic aspects of European as well as national funding for an important number of relevant stakeholders have been brought up in many position papers from Macro-Regional Strategies, regions and city organisations in the on-going discussion about the period of EU Cohesion Policy post 2021–2027. Decentralisation, simplification, improved alignment of funds, facilitated access to funding as well as participation and empowerment of local actors in the development and rollout of national and macro-regional programs are amongst the reforms that could help to put European Cohesion Policy on the ground. This is of particular importance for civil society and local actors, especially – but not only – in countries with low levels of cohesion. However, the implementation of tailor-made instruments, e.g. easily accessible and administrable small project funds and seed money, is crucial in all Macro-Regional Strategies’ member states. To unfold the full potential of regional and macro-regional development, it is fundamental to re-introduce a culture of mutual trust, instead of furthering an environment of disproportionate control and mistrust.

www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/projects

National Participation Days

EUSDR Priority Area 10 Action

“To improve the trust of citizens and stakeholders in political authorities”

“To ensure sufficient information flow and exchange at all levels”

Trust between civil society organisations and public authorities is crucial for successful regional development. Transparency and regular communication are prerequisites to build trust. However, many countries and regions in the Danube Region are still lagging behind in introducing platforms of regular exchange between public and private stakeholders in order to further cooperation.

Thus, the implementation of National Participation Days is embedded in the following target of Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation”:

“80% of participating countries involve the national, regional and local authorities and CSOs through annual national EUSDR Hearing.”

National Participation Days – or national EUSDR hearings – gather actively involved and interested stakeholders of the Macro-Regional Strategies at national (and regional) level. The National Participation Days specifically address civil society organisations and networks, local actors including academia, local and regional public authorities as well as national institutions and experts active in macro-regional governance. The National Participation Day should also be open to interested stakeholders from abroad such as representatives from PACs, academia, international or interregional organisations (CoDCR, DCSF, RCC, NALAS, CEI, etc.). The National Participation Day is the national platform in the structured civil society dialogue of the EUSDR and provides the link between the national public actors (ministries, national agencies, NCP, PACs, etc.) and further stakeholders active macro-regional development in the country. It gives stakeholders the possibility to meet and exchange information in view of possible cooperation at macro-regional level, to inform about ongoing projects, calls or other possible financing programmes or instruments in the EUSDR between the supra-national activities of the EUSDR, at the Annual Fora and the annual Danube Participation Days. This contributes to a capacity building of multi-sectoral and multi-level, trans-regional, trans-national cooperation for local, regional and national stakeholders. The National Participation Day should raise the level of national coordination, participation and knowledge on the national perspective within the EUSDR, raise awareness at national level and motivate possibly interested actors to join the strategy and become active stakeholders in regional development. The format is supposed to provide a platform to mediate between national, regional and local perspectives and goals for macro-regional cooperation and the needs of project promoters and other stakeholders to actually contribute and implement them.

www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/national-participation-day

<https://dcsf.danubestrategy.eu/national-participation-days>

The Danube Participation Day

The concept of the Participation Days in the EUSDR is based on Art. 11. TEU, committing the EU institutions to “give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views” and to “maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society.”⁷

⁷ Consolidated Version of Treaty on EU

Danube Participation Days have been developed by the DCSF, representatives of organised civil society and local stakeholders, supported by Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation”. The Danube Participation Days, linked to the EUSDR Annual Fora, serve as the main meeting of civil society in the framework of the EUSDR and, since 2014, are organised every year as side-events to the EUSDR Annual Fora. The Danube Participation Day is jointly organised by the DCSF, Priority Area 10 in consultation with the Danube Local Actors Platform and in close coordination with the hosting country, the hosting city and the civil society organisations in the hosting country. The Danube Participation Day is open to all stakeholders from civil society and local actors as well as related international and European organisations and institutions and provides civil society and local actors with opportunities to connect and get involved in the implementation of the EUSDR. It reflects the debates and results of the National Participation Days and serves as a lighthouse of participation in the EUSDR governance structure. Since 2014, the Danube Participation Days grew in terms of participants and kept a broad thematic scope related to its core aim: enhancing the participation of local actors at all levels in the Danube Region.

In May 2017, Priority Area 10 commissioned the review of the National and Danube Participation Day events.

A majority of participants (66%) agreed that the Danube Participation Days are meeting their needs and expectations, clearly showing the importance and the need for a structured participative approach to the EUSDR at all levels. While confirming the overall orientation of the activities in the EUSDR, stakeholders voiced their need for better support of project development, adapted funding and regular exchange. The EUSDR stakeholders reiterated that there is a greater need of support and involvement by the European Institutions.

Although the Participation Days and its organisers seek to meet these expectations, it is clear that the proposals and recommendations of the involved stakeholders go far beyond the format and its current capacities.

Funding of the Danube Participation Days has been difficult. However, the Austrian, Baden-Württemberg, Slovak and Bulgarian Presidencies as well as some Priority Areas, capital cities of the EUSDR member states, different EU financed projects have been contributing. From 2016 – 2018 the Baden-Württemberg foundation is financing partner of the events; other funding is national, or derives from Priority Area 10 technical assistance and Foster Europe. However, although more and more countries of the Danube Region organise National Participation Days, political and administrative support for civil society activities, especially at the transnational or macro-regional level is still lagging behind.

The format of the Danube Participation Day, considered as innovative and successful in the report on Macro-Regional Strategies from the European Parliament in 2015, was adopted by the EUSBR and the EUSALP in 2017.

www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/danube-participation-day
<https://dcsf.danubestrategy.eu/danube-participation-days>

The Agenda for Participation in the Macro-Regional Strategies

In 2001, the Commission’s White Book on European Governance stated that “[...] here needs to be a stronger interaction with regional and local governments and civil society” and emphasised the “non-exclusive vision” as key for the new and better European governance. In the subsequent communication from the Commission towards a reinforced culture of consultation and dialogue – General principles and minimum standards for consultation of interested parties the Commission made clear “[...] civil society organisations play an important role as facilitators of a broad policy dialogue. For this reason, the White Paper on European Governance stressed the importance of involving these organisations in its consultation processes. [...] Belonging to an association is another way for citizens to participate actively, in addition to involvement in political parties or through elections.”

The Commission reiterated the importance of participation of civil society in EU policies. Other than interest groups, civil society does not just give another opinion into a broader lobby and or consultation process. Civil society is a facilitator of a broad policy dialogue. Civil society participation enhances the quality of democratic processes in the EU (and its Member States) and its participation is one element next to democratic election in active citizens. It has repeatedly been stressed, as in the Commission's 2016 report on the implementation of EU Macro-Regional Strategies⁸ that a stronger involvement of civil society through consultative networks and platforms, leading to the institutionalised cooperation at all levels between the political level, administration, local actors, civil society and the social partners is a pre-condition to true European integration. While this is of relevance for all countries participating in Macro-Regional Strategies, some have made significant progress in establishing structural participation, while others are just starting the process.

Since the Eisenstadt Declaration in 2014, the Danube Local Actors Platform and the DCSF, in cooperation with macro-regional partners, have continuously documented their aims, demands, instruments and actions in a rolling document, which became the Agenda for Participation in the Macro-Regional Strategies in 2017. The Agenda for Participation supports the aims of Macro-Regional Strategies and European integration by furthering the structured and transparent participation of local actors and civil society, thus helping to implement the principles of the Treaty of Lisbon (Article 11, TEU).

According to the experience of macro-regional stakeholders, successful Macro-Regional Strategies would benefit from the following developments:

- Active political support and ownership for effective top-down implementation;
- Stronger and institutionalised participation of local actors and civil society organisations at all governance levels in order to enable a sustainable bottom-up approach;
- Acknowledgment of the place-based approach as a key aspect of functional regions and regional development (not only in Director-Generals and ministries responsible for regional development, but also in line DGs and line ministries);
- Funding and furthering of institutional capacity wherever needed;
- The inclusion of Macro-Regional Strategies into a revised delegated regulation for the European Code of Conduct on Partnerships (ECCP);
- Promoting the development and implementation of European funds adapted to the needs of civil society and local actors in the on-going planning of the EU Cohesion Policy 2021-2027, specifically the development of easily accessible and manageable funding instruments for smaller projects, which would strengthen the involvement of local actors and civil society in the development of all Macro-Regional Strategies;
- Improving the knowledge base in macro-regions through:
 - Furthering the sharing of best practices and cooperation between civil society and local actors as well as between the Macro-Regional Strategies in joint frameworks and platforms;
 - The regular implementation of national and macro-regional hearings (Participation Days) as structured dialogues between all stakeholders;
 - The development of new formats of cooperation between the key decision-makers/ implementers and civil society together with local actors;
- The mobilisation of media and the larger public as well as opinion leaders and the political level;
- Encouraging, via the Macro-Regional Strategies governance, a notable change in the member countries' political and administrative culture, furthered top-down by adequate leverage through EU funding and political support and bottom-up by the strengthening of civil society and local actors.

⁸ COM(2016) 805 final

Against this background, the Agenda for Participation aims at furthering the following four objectives:

- **Promoting involvement of civil society and local actors (in Macro-Regional Strategies)** 

The objective addresses processes that include civil society organisations, local actors and/or citizens in the decision-making or implementation of activities
- **Promoting the development and implementation of suitable (and simplified) EU funding** 

The objective addresses inclusive decision-making processes on funding as well as the implementation of funding structures that take into account the capacities and framework conditions of civil society and local actors in the macro-region.
- **Improving the knowledge base in macro-regions** 

The objective addresses measures of sharing good and best practices, establishing dialogue between stakeholders, and developing new formats of cooperation between state and non-state actors.
- **Changing administrative culture and modes of cooperation** 

The objective addresses the implementation of participatory administrative decision-making processes and the application of participatory methods in policy implementation.

Priority Area 10 and the DCSF invite member states and regions of Macro-Regional Strategies as well as EU institutions and decision-makers to join the roll out of the comprehensive set of instruments and processes moving participation in macro-regions from a chain of singular and local events to an ongoing process of dialogue and cooperation between state and non-state actors.

www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/agenda-for-participation
www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/files/255

The Macro-Regional Participation Partnerships

Based on the Agenda for Participation, thematic Participation Partnerships were launched at the fourth Danube Participation Day in Budapest in 2017. The Participation Partnerships are transnational, open thematic working groups discussing challenges, needs and opportunities in a specific policy area, collecting information and know-how on good practices and developing new ideas for initiatives. Thus the Partnerships are focusing the work of the Danube Local Actors Platform. The members of the partnership are local actors, organised civil society, representatives from the administrative and the political level from the Macro-Regional Strategies' member states as well as experts from international and European organisations, institutions, and academia, most are members of the DCSF and/or the Danube Local Actors Platform, which are coordinating and documenting their work. Activities consist in the development of pilot projects and cooperation, the organisation of events and round tables, the exchange and dissemination of information, and the involvement of new groups of stakeholders. Each Participation Partnership is coordinated by a lead partner, who is able to ensure continuity, communication and networking for the implementation of the Partnership as well as reporting to the DCSF and the Danube Local Actors Platform.

Participation Partnerships share the objectives defined in the Agenda for Participation:

- Promoting involvement of civil society and local actors (in Macro-Regional Strategies);
- Promoting the development and implementation of suitable (and simplified) EU funding;
- Improving the knowledge base in macro-regions (through sharing best practises, establishing a dialogue between stakeholders, and developing new formats of cooperation);
- Changing administrative culture and modes of cooperation.

The Participation Partnerships work along the following themes:

- Participation: A research perspective;
- Building Macro-Regional Strategies on participative local and multi-level governance: Turning to key virtues of Regional Policy;
- Participation as a key factor for social innovation and sustainable development;
- Designing 2020+ with local actors and Macro-Regional Strategies;
- Empowering Roma and vulnerable groups through participation;
- Participation against Trafficking in Human Beings.

www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/participation-partnerships

Participation: A Research Perspective

Lead Partner: Geodetic Institute Slovenia

Representatives from academia, civil society and public administration identified two current shortcomings regarding participatory governance and research. First, the stakeholders observe a lack of involvement of researchers and their results in specific policy areas as well as of civil society in public decision-making. There is insufficient information flow between researchers and public decision-makers. At the same time, representatives from academia often seem to 'speak a different language' that does not seem appropriate for participatory governance processes. Also, there is no or hardly any legal basis to foster participation of researchers and citizens for better governance and hardly any know-how on new formats and methods for participation of researchers and citizens. The second observation refers to research on or through participation. There is a general perception that there is a need for research to reflect upon and examine participatory governance and its outcomes. Additionally, the stakeholders observed a trend towards citizen science, putting participation in the centre of research.

Needs and Opportunities

Following the assessment of the state of play, the participants of the partnership called for the development and implementation of new formats of participatory governance that include researchers and citizens in order to ensure evidence-based decision-making. A platform that gathers information, data and analyses of participatory governance could support its comprehensive implementation and improvement in the Danube Region. Likewise, the use of e-services is considered to be useful in order to maintain the information flow between public authorities, citizens and researchers. In regard to participatory research or citizens' science, fostering exchange and capitalisation supports progress in the research field and methodology.

Examples of Good Practice

Attractive Danube

Attractive Danube is a transnational project funded by the Danube Transnational Programme 2014-2020. The starting point for the project is the assumption that each territory has its own set of specific capitals and assets, which can make it competitive in comparison to other territories. Through good governance, policies can create conditions for maximising the potentials of territorial assets and capitals for development, thus increasing the attractiveness of territories for its residents, visitors and businesses. The main project objective is to strengthen multi-level and transnational governance and institutional capacities of policy planners involved in territorial development, by establishing a permanent common transnational platform for monitoring territorial attractiveness.



www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/attractive-danube

Workshop "Gathering evidence for participatory governance"



At the 6th EUSDR Annual Forum in 2017, the projects under Thematic Pole (TP) 11 – "Participatory Governance" of the Danube Transnational Programme's Capitalisation Strategy discussed the joint common thematic point "Gathering Evidence for Participatory Governance" together with experts and further project promoters. The three projects that were discussed at the workshop, represented different perspectives of the link between research and participation: Participation as a method to collect data (Attractive Danube); research as a pre-requisite for developing participatory governance (AgriGo4Cities); and research to measure progress in participation and inclusion (RARE). One of the conclusions of the discussion was the need to establish indicators for measuring the participatory approach for better governance.

Building MRS on Participative Local and Multi-level Governance: Turning to Key Virtues of Regional Policy

Lead Partner: Foster Europe, Foundation for strong European Regions

The group emphasized in its discussions the fact that Macro-Regional Strategies follow – by definition – the approach of multi-level governance (MLG) and therefore, at least theoretically, have to be designed and implemented in an inclusive, participative approach built on the EU principles of subsidiarity and participation (Art.5, 6 and 11 TEU). It was clear to all members that an on-going (learning) process on all levels and by all actors would contribute to a better realisation of the MLG concepts. The potential MRS offer with its MLG concepts of inclusiveness, subsidiarity and participation is not fully tapped yet.

Macro-Regional Strategies and MLG differ substantially from the traditional model of governance in a Unitarian state. MLG and even more MRS are new models of governance that often lie in the hands of civil servants and a governance system that was built up in an unitarian style. Next to this, a number of participating states in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region follow a more centralist model of governance, or have even enforced centralist features. This leads to the fact that the sub-national levels are lacking competences, experience and staff to fully play their part in the MLG system.

Although the group acknowledges a constantly growing competence and knowledge in the system, tailor-made capacity building for regional, local and non-state actors as well as for members of the MRS bodies would help to close the gap between claim and truth in the implementation of Macro-Regional Strategies. As the problems described above are shared among the four MRS in action, a joint-capacity building endeavour overarching all Macro-Regional Strategies is advisable. The local levels as well as civil society are involved in Macro-Regional Strategies as representatives of one of the levels of the MLG approach and at the same time as key implementers of region policy in the EU. The working group saw local actors and civil society as stakeholders and addressees of MRS at the same time. More than 70% of all projects in EU regional policy, especially in the framework of MRS, lie in the hands of local actors and civil society.

Macro-Regional Strategies and MLG are tools of European Policy and governance. They demand a European dimension of thinking, planning and executing from the very beginning of any governance process. MLG and Macro-Regional Strategies are thus key factors to break down the idea of European integration and cooperation to a local and regional level, to train a broad group of people in European affairs and contribute at the same time to a growing European awareness and identity.

Needs and Opportunities

Although the EU Regional Policy with its Macro-Regional Strategies is labelled by its multi-level government character and based on the place-based approach, as well as the principle of subsidiarity and the principle of participation, it became clear of the past years of implementation of Macro-Regional Strategies, that the current regime is partly falling short of its key principles and standards. More can and must be done to consult and actively involve local actors and civil society in order to adhere to the standards of EU (regional) policy and in order to make Cohesion Policy in general and MRS especially a success.

The revision of the EUSDR currently under way and the renewed cohesion and regional policy of the EU under the impact of the Brexit have to heal the existing diverge of claim and truth as one of the open wounds of Macro-Regional Strategies. The Working groups see strong local and civil society actors' participation as a pre-requisite for the functioning of MLG and therefore the functioning of Macro-Regional Strategies. The reform and quality intensification in Macro-Regional Strategies have to build on strong local level and civil society participation in a fully fledged MLG environment. This has to be backed by a dedicated Capacity Building effort open to all levels of MLG and Macro-Regional Strategies and by an on-going practise of open, transparent and regular participation in a clear structure.

Examples of Good Practice

International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR)

ICPDR's Danube River Basin Management Plan – Update 2015 (DRBM Plan) and the 1st Danube Flood Risk Management Plan (DFRM Plan).



<https://www.icpdr.org/main/management-plans-danube-river-basin-published>

Council of Europe: Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process (2009)



Upon a recommendation of the Council of Europe's Forum for the Future of Democracy, the Conference of INGOs drafted a Code of Good Practice on Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process. The principal objective of the Code of Good Practice is the definition of a set of European principles and guidelines for NGO participation in decision-making processes that are to be implemented at local and national level in Council of Europe Member States.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/civil-participation> & Promotion and implementation strategy for the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the decision making Process (2009)

The Conference of INGO at its 2009 spring session had asked Cyril Ritchie, the Rapporteur on the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision Making Process "to develop a draft for a strategy to raise awareness among the stakeholders and promote the participation of NGOs in decision-making in European countries through the Code of Good Practice." In June 2009, this draft was presented and discussed by the Civil Society and Democracy Committee.

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016802eee48>

Financing of Civil Society Organisations by the EU

Beside a detailed diagnosis of the situation and role of civil society organisations, the EESC presents 26 recommendations for better civil dialogue and access to resources, including ideas for the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework.



<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/financing-civil-society-organisations-eu>

Partnership for Good Governance (PGG): "Strengthening institutional frameworks for local governance" (2014)

The Council of Europe and the European Union developed the Partnership for Good Governance for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus, for the period covering 2015-2017.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/european-union-council-of-europe-partnership-for-good-governance>

Guidelines for Civil Participation in Political Decision-Making (2017)



On 27 September 2017, the Committee of Ministers adopted guidelines aimed at promoting civil participation in political decision-making in the Council of Europe's 47 member states.

At a time when democracy is challenged by diminishing trust of people towards politicians and elites in general, one of the prerequisites for guaranteeing democratic security is to ensure the participation of all individuals and societal groups in political processes and decision-making.

The new guidelines together with other existing texts such as Recommendation (2007)14 on the legal status of non-governmental organisations in Europe and the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process, now form a solid basis for governments and civil society to work together to strengthen democracy.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/civil-society/guidelines>

The Danube Participation Days (EUSDR)



The Danube Participation Days convenes decision makers, actors, stakeholders and addressees from all levels and policy fields connected to the Danube Strategy. The DPD emphasises the importance of Civil Society and local actors in the EUSDR and their transparent and regular inclusion in the opinion building, concerning the EUSDR and into their implementation.

<https://dcsf.danubestrategy.eu/danube-participation-days>

Participation as Key Factor for Social Innovation and Sustainable Development

Lead Partner: Agapedia Foundation

The Danube Region faces multiple common challenges that require a break with conventional approaches, such as increasing populism in public politics, emigration and brain drain, corruption, lack of skilled employees and unemployment, as well as education quality. These challenges need innovative, co-creative and trans-sectoral approaches in order to ensure viable long-term concepts that are supported top-down and can be implemented bottom-up. The concept of social innovation may provide a framework to embrace socio-economic and political diversity in order to address challenges defined within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and to establish sustainable development.

However, structural challenges like lacking empowerment of relevant stakeholders and the often-missing dialogue between local, regional and national representatives as well as the under-developed connection between civil society (organisations) and academia, constitute hurdles for social innovation. Individual challenges such as the lack of foreign language skills pose additional challenges to concrete transnational cooperation for social innovation. At the same time, the discussion about innovative methods and solutions often stays at a theoretical stage without being operationalised.

Needs and Opportunities

The participants of the partnership clearly identified a need to change the mind-set of stakeholders in the Danube Region in order to foster critical, out of the box thinking that leads to innovative and sustainable approaches to administrative and socio-economic challenges. Education is considered to play a crucial role in strengthening critical thinking and empowering stakeholders. The latter also matters in regard to increasing the ownership of stakeholders to tackle macro-regional challenges. Also, the diversity of stakeholders in the Danube Region is seen as a great asset for innovation.

Additionally, stable and durable governance structures within the Macro-Regional Strategies may provide the necessary framework to support project promoters and decision-makers to implement social innovation.

Examples of Good Practice

Innovation Lab

With the Innovation Lab, the Agapedia Foundation developed in cooperation with its partners a project idea for a structural format for processes, according to the model of Volker Then. The project aims at creating a better representation of reality and public policy through dialogue formats and education, creating opportunities through dual education, developing a new knowledge infrastructure, using natural and cultural resources for social innovation, and at initiating systemic change through education. The Innovation Lab addresses youth and dual education. The project concept was submitted to the Seed Money Facility of the Danube Transnational Programme.



Demographic Lab Net

The Demographic Lab Net is a project idea addressing challenges in public service provision due to demographic developments in the Danube Region. The initiative aims at applying a social innovation approach in order to develop quality health care services. The Demographic Lab Net project is planned to be submitted to the Danube Transnational Programme. The lead partner is Diakonie Baden.



Creative Danube

The Creative Danube project is based on the experiences of the Danube Region network, which has been established since 2012. The project furthers the exchange of young people in the Danube Region in order to sustainably establish social innovation. The topics of culture, education and participation are the focus of the two planned multi-day youth exchanges in Ellwangen, Baden-Württemberg and Plovdiv, Bulgaria.



Designing 2020+ with Local Actors and Macro-Regional Strategies

Lead Partner: Priority Area Coordination 10 "Institutional Capacity and Cooperation"

The "Partnership Principle" is one of the key principles of EU fund management. It aims at fostering the cooperation between public authorities at all levels and private stakeholders (e.g. social partners, NGOs, SMEs, research institutions etc.) in order to ensure transparency and needs-based programme planning and implementation. However, both representatives from civil society organisations and national/regional public administrations identified challenges related to joint regional planning for the post 2020 programme period. Currently, stakeholders have identified several challenges for participatory planning, such as scarce financial and personnel resources of civil society organisations, frustration of civil society organisations and local actors created through lack of trust and/or lack of involvement through public authorities in the planning process, and the perception that different stakeholders do not speak 'the same language'. Additionally, different access to funding for EU member countries and non-EU member countries might impair macro-regional planning.

Needs and Opportunities

Based on the main challenges listed above and on the experience of macro-regional stakeholders, local actors, civil society organisations and public authorities identified a need to establish mutual trust, to participate at all levels in order to increase the viability and ownership of decisions, to map stakeholders that are actively committing to regional development, to establish transparent consultation processes, to increase network activities, and to use technical assistance for capacity building.

Examples of Good Practice

National Participation Day Framework

National Participation Days (National EUSDR Hearings) are (regular) meetings of public and private stakeholders active or interested in the implementation of regional development in the Danube Region. The National Participation Day Framework offers the opportunity to gather representatives from civil society, public administration, research, politics, business, and EUSDR governance, in order to discuss perspectives and potential of (macro-) regional development and to exchange opportunities to engage. (See also section on NPD.)



www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/national-participation-day

Citizen Participation Forum – Capacity Building & Representation of Interest

Prior to the programming of the European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020, the Citizen Participation Forum (CPF) convinced the Deputy Prime Minister for EU funds in Bulgaria, to involve civil society organisations in the planning procedure. Against this background, the CPF developed a unified methodology and instructions for CPF representatives in the Ministerial thematic working groups, including instructions on how to participate in the working groups, how to share information and report within the network, and how to elaborate positions among CPF members. The CPF provided training on planning, civic participation in the planning process, civil society-government partnership and networks for large-scale initiatives for the CPF representatives, CPF regional coordinators, other CPF members, local authorities and citizens. Finally, the CPF managed to improve mutual trust between organised civil society and public authorities, to implement viable funding priorities based on broad consultation, to involve civil society in Programme Monitoring Committees, to programme around EUR 10 million for civil society in the Operational Programme for Good Governance, and to budget EUR 1 million for civil society initiatives in the state budget. The CPF continues to share its know-how and experience within a working seminar in the course of the 5th Danube Participation Day in Sofia (BG) funded by the Central European Initiative (CEI).



Meeting of the ESF Network Danube Region

The ESF Network Danube Region is a network of Managing Authorities of the European Social Fund located in the Danube Region, and representatives from the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (Priority Area 9 "People and Skills" and Priority Area 10 "Institutional Capacity and Cooperation, in order to support transnational cooperation and exchange within the ESF Operational Programmes in the Danube Region. In 2018, the ESF Network Danube Region invited programme beneficiaries (e.g. labour market agencies, NGOs, etc.) in order to discuss the future of transnational cooperation in the European Social Fund (2021-2027) and to develop joint positions.



www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/esf-network-danube-region

LEADER/Community-led Local Development (CLLD)

LEADER is a local development method, which has been used for 20 years to engage local actors in the design and delivery of strategies, decision-making and resource allocation for the development of their rural areas. It is implemented by so-called Local Action Groups (LAGs), bringing together public, private and civil-society stakeholders in a particular area. In the rural development context, LEADER is implemented under the national and regional Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) of each EU Member State, co-financed from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). In the current funding period, CLLD was extended to the EMFF, ERDF, and the ESF. The joint planning under LEADER/CLLD facilitated the concentration of the budget from European, national and regional sources, the increase of ownership in the region, and participation of civil society. LEADER regions such as Südliches Waldviertel – Nibelungengau showed that the close coordination between stakeholders led to more projects and results for regional development. In addition, the cooperation between different regions resulted in higher performance, compared to previous periods with fewer bottom-ups and participatory programming procedures.



Empowering Roma and Vulnerable Groups through Participation

Lead Partner: Priority Area Coordination 9 "People and Skills"

Participation of vulnerable groups in public governance is crucial to empower them and shape their social and political capital. Roma are the largest ethnic minority in the Danube Region. In many regions of the Danube Region, Roma still have less access to education, the labour market or social and health services and are confronted with antigypsism. At the same time, many Roma organisations often lack the financial resources or know-how to engage actively in political processes or transnational cooperation and exchange. This turns out to be particularly important in view of the discussion about the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 and the implementation of suitable and simplified EU funding for Roma inclusion. Additionally, the language barrier poses a challenge to macro-regional know-how transfer between Roma organisations.

Needs and Opportunities

The participants of the partnership voiced a clear demand for intensifying cooperation. In this regard, Roma organisations suggest establishing transnational platforms for exchange in order to foster empowerment of Roma groups and provide funding information for organisations. However, there is also a necessity to take into account the language barrier (e.g. need to provide translators in meetings or translation of meeting documents and papers) thus challenging transnational cooperation. At the same time, bringing together different existing networks and initiatives for Roma empowerment, is an important step in order to reinforce participation and empowerment of Roma in the Danube Region.

Examples of Good Practice

EUROCITIES Report "Mapping the situation of Roma in cities"

EUROCITIES has conducted a mapping study in 23 large cities in Europe, which have big Roma populations. The findings from the mapping study are presented in a comprehensive report that reveals the situation of Roma inclusion at local level. The report examines the challenges that Roma face in cities with regards to their access to employment, housing, healthcare, education and basic services. The report also explores how cities respond to these challenges, what initiatives they put in place, how they engage with Roma and what support they need to be able to further Roma inclusion.



www.eurocities.eu/eurocities/documents/EUROCITIES-report-maps-the-situation-of-Roma-in-cities-in-Europe-WSP0-AS8CQ2

RARE – Changing Discourses, Changing Practices

The project RARE aims to enhance the capacities of and cooperation among actors having a stake in the labour market participation of the Roma, in order to better exploit their economic potential. RARE Partners will define the prerequisites of effective institutional cooperation, elaborate and test innovative intervention models for labour market inclusion and will develop convincing economic argumentation for such interventions. The leveraging of know-how acquired in RARE will be facilitated by persuasive and easily digestible presentation of knowledge, facilitated through sensitisation activities and transnational and national networks of stakeholders.



www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/rare

Priority Area 9 "People and Skills" Workshop Roma Inclusion & Funding

Priority Area 9 "People and Skills" organise a workshop on promoting the involvement of civil society and local actors in the Danube Region. The workshop aims at continuing the discussion from the 4th



Danube Participation Day in Budapest and to share experiences and know-how on Roma empowerment. The workshop also provides information on funding possibilities in cooperation with Priority Area 10 "Institutional Capacity and Cooperation".

www.peopleandskills-danuberegion.eu/

Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion (LERI)

LERI is a qualitative action research project under Fundamental Rights Agency's multi-annual Roma Programme. It was developed in response to the European Commission's Communication on an EU Framework for National Roma integration strategies up to 2020. LERI brings together local authorities and residents, in particular Roma, to investigate how they can best be involved in Roma integration actions, and identify which aspects of these actions work, which do not, and why. The aim of the project is to facilitate the engagement of all local stakeholders, including Roma, in joint efforts to enable Roma inclusion. The experience gained and the lessons learned during the process will help improve the design, implementation and monitoring of Roma integration policies and actions at the local level.



<http://fra.europa.eu/en/project/2013/multi-annual-roma-programme/local-engagement>

Participation Partnership against Trafficking in Human Beings

Lead Partner: Priority Area Coordination 10 "Institutional Capacity and Cooperation"

Fighting trafficking in human beings involves a great variety of players such as law enforcement, national authorities, city administrations, and civil society: Legal structures and political agreements primarily address national authorities and law enforcement. Yet, cities, municipalities and NGOs active in victim protection often are closest to both, victims and suspects. In the majority of Member States of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), practical assistance for victims is provided by NGOs. At the same time, close cooperation between NGOs and law enforcement might be crucial for the prosecution of traffickers and to collect valid data. However, in many countries of the Danube Region, the lack of capacities, resources or know-how at the local level, as well as the lack of cooperation structures between different stakeholder groups, hampers a comprehensive approach to fighting trafficking human beings.

Needs and Opportunities

Regarding the linkage between national and local authorities as well as between state and non-state actors, fighting trafficking in human beings requires building mutual trust and understanding between the relevant stakeholders. This serves as a prerequisite to establishing sustainable cooperation structures. Additionally, public authorities and civil society call for building stronger capacities, such as acquiring expertise in the thematic field or learning how to institutionalise cooperation.

Cooperation in the Danube Region also offers the opportunity for a more holistic approach in fighting and preventing trafficking in human beings, since the Danube Region encompasses countries of origin and countries of destination of victims of human trafficking.

Examples of Good Practice

Danube Cities Against Human Trafficking (D-CAHT)



The D-CAHT initiative was launched by Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity” and aimed at gathering stakeholders from national, local public authorities, law enforcement, civil society organisations and international experts, in order to foster exchange of know-how and networking. After a series of international workshops in cooperation with the Regional Implementation Initiative (RII) and the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) that started on 2016, the Coordination of Priority Area 10 organised two D-CAHT Round Tables in Vienna and Ljubljana focusing on stakeholder cooperation, examples on institutionalised cooperation, granting victim rights and tackling labour exploitation. The stakeholder exchange will be continued on the initiative of further partners.

www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/danube-cities-against-human-trafficking

Guidelines for Municipalities “Stepping up local action against trafficking in human being”



Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” drafted Guidelines for Municipalities in the Danube Region to step up local action against trafficking in human beings. The guidelines are based on the findings of the STROM project and provide basic information and valuable tools for cities and municipalities in the fight against human trafficking. The guidelines are considered work-in-progress and shall be complemented with further good practices from the Danube Region.

www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/files/231

Memorandum of Cooperation between Civil Society and Law Enforcement



In Ljubljana, civil society has a central role in service provision for victims of trafficking in human beings. Organisations such as the Society Ključ – Centre for Fight Against Trafficking in Human Beings – provide shelter and reintegration programmes to victims with encouraging success. Additionally, Society Ključ works together with law enforcement confirmed through a Memorandum of Cooperation. The police nominated contact persons, who have special training on detecting and fighting trafficking in human beings. These contact persons can be contacted, if criminal activities related to trafficking in human beings are observed. Following this notification, investigators carry out investigations and intervene if deemed necessary.

Local GRETA Working Group



In 2015, Vienna established a human rights office that raises awareness on human rights issues in city policies and coordinates human rights initiatives within the city. In this function, the Human Rights Office in Vienna established a standing working group based on the expert group of the Council of Europe against trafficking in human beings (GRETA) that includes representatives from public administration, civil society and research in Vienna. The working group facilitates cooperation among different administrative levels, because even though potential victims' cases are dealt with at the federal level, Vienna has been going through greater efforts to offer support because the city acknowledged the trend that many victims will be trafficked to the capital. At the same time, the working group offers a platform for informal discussion that supports sustainable problem solving and flow of information.

Annex 1

EUSDR Participation Days 2014 – 2019:

- 1st Danube Participation Day, Eisenstadt, Austria (25 June 2014)
- 2nd Danube Participation Day, Ulm, Germany (28 October 2015)
- 3rd Danube Participation Days, Bratislava, Slovakia (2-3 November 2016)
- 4th Danube Participation Day, Budapest, Hungary (17 October 2017)
- 5th Danube Participation Day, Sofia, Bulgaria (17 October 2018)
- 6th Danube Participation Day, Bucharest, Romania (2019)

National Participation Days 2014 – 2019:

- 1st National Participation Day Ukraine (22 April 2014)
- 1st National Participation Day Austria (13 Mai 2015)
- 1st National Hearing Day Serbia (20 October 2015)
- 1st National Participation Day Bulgaria (17-18 March 2016)
- 2nd National Participation Day Austria (9 September 2016)
- 1st National Participation Day Moldova (22 September 2016)
- 1st National Participation Day Slovakia (21 October 2016)
- 2nd National Hearing Day Serbia (24 March 2017)
- 1st National Participation Day Czech Republic (30 May 2017)
- 2nd National Participation Day Bulgaria (16 May 2017)
- 1st National Participation Day Baden-Württemberg (29 July 2017)
- 2nd National Participation Day Ukraine (6 September 2017)
- 2nd National Participation Day and Financial Dialogue Moldova (26-27 October 2017)
- 3rd National Participation Day Moldova (18 September 2018)
- 3rd National Participation Day Ukraine and Danube Financial and Capacity Building Dialogue (3 October 2018)
- 3rd National Hearing Day Serbia (12 October 2018)
- 2nd National Participation Day Czech Republic 2018 (13 November 2018)
- 1st National Participation Day Slovenia (Autumn 2018)
- 2nd National Participation Day Slovakia (March 2019)

www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu & www.danubestrategy.eu

The Danube Region Rolling Document on Participation in the Danube Strategy

Since the first Danube Participation Day 2014 in Eisenstadt, the Danube Local Actors Platform and the participants of the Danube Participation Day have adopted each year a declaration on the state of play and the challenges of civil society and local actors in the EU Strategy for the Danube region (EUSDR), which were presented to the annual forum of the EUSDR and to relevant stakeholders of the strategy. The declaration serves as a guideline and road map for intensified participation and the work of the Danube Local Actors Platform.

2014 Eisenstadt Declaration on Participation in the EUSDR

The European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) has been elaborated to address common challenges and provide comprehensive development in the Danube Region. The EUSDR, as an integrated framework attempts to develop improved solutions by a “concrete process on the ground” that is operated by clear strategic visions, concrete concepts and projects. Thus, “by 2020, all citizens of the Region should enjoy better prospects of higher education, employment and prosperity in their own home area. The Strategy should make the Danube Region a truly 21st century region, secure and confident, and one of the most attractive in Europe”⁹.

In this context, the participants of the 1st Participation Day of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region have discussed opportunities for enhanced participation of local- regional actors and civil society in the EUSDR implementation.

We believe that the commitment of the civil society and local actors is essential for an effective and successful EUSDR. It is essential to support the EUSDR in its strategic visions as well as in its day-to-day implementation.

Convinced that civil society and local actors play a crucial role in a successful EU Strategy for the Danube Region, the participants of the 1st Participation Day of the EUSDR therefore declare the following:

We believe that the EUSDR needs a clear strategic vision and a strong political commitment, which the projects associated with the EUSDR currently do not provide.

In our vision, the EUSDR is a Macro-Regional Strategy that is building and fostering democracy, good governance and the well-being of the citizens it is preserving the natural and cultural heritage and is developing the rich and diverse cultural and economic activities in the Danube Region.

The EUSDR is a multi-national strategy comprising EU member states as well as (potential) candidate states and countries of the European Neighbourhood. It should reach for the standards of participation, transparency and subsidiarity as laid down in the European Union’s primary law.

Building, fostering and devolving democracy as well as applying the principle of subsidiarity is a joint task and responsibility for state and non-state actors at all levels of the EUSDR: local, regional, national and macro-regional in all participating states and the European Union.

The introduction of an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society is a precondition for a modern and strong democratic Danube Region.

These ambitious aims, validated by the principles recognised in the Treaties mentioned above, cannot be reached without innovative and transparent structures, both top-down and bottom-up, supporting the dialogue and consultation of all participating actors, thus enhancing EUSDR visibility and improving the citizen’s ownership of the Strategy.

In order to facilitate the full implementation of enhanced participation, we call for the implementation of the principles of transparency, subsidiarity and improved governance through the following measures:

- Organisation of regular hearings by NCPs and PACs at the level of the national platforms of the EUSDR with local communities/municipalities and civil society.
- The High Level Group meetings shall reflect the positions formulated at these hearings in close cooperation with local-, state- and non-state actors.
- Development of a “EUSDR Road Map to Democracy and Participation” involving all actors at local, regional, national and macro-regional level, from all participating states and the EU in the interim period before the 4th Annual Forum in 2015.
- Stronger and equitable involvement of civil society stakeholders in the EUSDR Annual Fora, which represent the main platform for an official and public dialogue, incorporating local actors and civil society as an integral part of the EUSDR. This includes preliminary consultation of local actors in the preparatory work for the Annual Fora.
- Financing of electronic information tools and adequate person-power to share information on EU programmes, projects and funding as well as EUSDR activities in a transparent and timely way within the civil society organisations of the EUSDR.
- Financing and Establishment of a Civil Society Platform, which shall provide focussed policy recommendations to all levels of the governance system of the EUSDR and thereby it delivers a simple and reliable mechanism of transparent exchange and structured dialogue with the civil society. Moreover, the Civil Society Platform may serve as the main gateway to gear civil society and non-governmental organisations towards the Priority Areas of the EUSDR, National Contact Points and the European Commission and thereby make them familiar with and integrate into the macro-regional approach.
- Systematic allocation of funds, especially by the participating states to build up and maintain the above mentioned participatory structures. This also needs comprehensive coordination and continuous discussions between the participating states.
- A future revision process of the EUSDR must be conducted in an open, transparent, and participative way.

We invite all stakeholders of the EUSDR to start the consultation for the “EUSDR Road Map to Democracy and Participation” forthwith.

We invite all participating states and regions to hold their first national/regional hearings in due time before the 4th Annual Forum of the EUSDR in 2015.

2015 Ulm Resolution: Promoting Transparency and Participation through Multilevel Governance

Following the 1st Participation Day and the Eisenstadt Declaration of 25 June 2014, the overall approach for civil society involvement in the EUSDR is twofold:

- Civil society, social partner and local actors involvement in the governance of the EUSDR;
- Strengthening civil society, European citizenship, social partners and civic engagement throughout the Danube Region.

⁹ COM (2010) 715 final, p.3

Civil society involvement within the framework of the EUSDR implementation should first and foremost:

- Improve conditions for civic participation and encourage participation at EU, the macro-regional, and the national/regional level;
- Communicate the EUSDR to the citizens.

A potential revision of the EUSDR Action Plan should be used as an opportunity to better enshrine the European principles of participation, transparency and subsidiarity by ensuring minimum standards of civil society involvement in the EUSDR.

Within the current governance of the EUSDR, civil society involvement matters especially with regard to multi-level governance and project development¹⁰. Currently, the D-LAP implements three actions of the Action Plan¹¹:

- To improve the trust of citizens and stakeholders in political authorities;
- To establish a Danube Civil Society Forum;
- To ensure sufficient information flow and exchange at all levels.

With the Danube Civil Society Forum already being set up and continuously growing in terms of members and capability, a revision of the existing EUSDR Action Plan should regroup those actions which are already being implemented by PA10 through the D-LAP and its partners. In particular:

Make civil society participation an integrated part of the EUSDR governance, on the basis of:

- the Participation Day for local actors and CSOs as an integrated part of each Annual Forum of the EUSDR;
- the National Participation Days organised by National Coordinators in cooperation with Priority Area 10 and the DCSF for transparent and regular exchange with non-state EUSDR stakeholders, especially for civil society and local actors, thus developing their respective political culture of participation;
- the participative structures and interfaces to organisation of the civil society for each of the Priority Areas of the EUSDR;
- the parliamentary dimension of the EUSDR through involvement of the EP as well as national and regional parliaments;
- a strong link and exchange of experience with other Macro-Regional Strategies and research on Macro-Regional Strategies;
- the European bodies dealing with the topic, e.g. EU Institutions (especially the EESC) or regional institutions in the Danube Region;
- the capacity building in the Danube Region, in cooperation with the PA10 Danube Capacity Platform (D-CAP), in order to enable institutional memory, capacity to participate on regional, national, macro-regional, and supranational levels (e.g. public consultation processes for policies and programmes), sustain bottom-up processes for self-organisation of civil society in a macro-regional context, and project development.

2015 Ulm Declaration on the Refugee Crisis in Europe

The refugee crisis in Europe and the Mediterranean represents a defining moment for the European Union and its values of solidarity, human rights, equality and diversity. This is especially true for the Danube Region, which shares a common heritage of conflict, flight, eviction and transformation and is now hit by direct effects of war and persecution in the Middle East, putting even more stress on those countries still reeling from transformation, the economic crisis and natural disasters.

¹⁰ Cf. Council conclusions on the governance of Macro-Regional Strategies of 21 October 2014, 16207/14

¹¹ SEC (2010) 1489 final

The last months have shown that civil society organisations everywhere in the Danube Region have been the first to intervene and the backbone of activities assisting those fleeing persecution, conflict and war, facilitating their acceptance, transit and integration among our communities. They have shown that it is possible to resist populist tendencies and pressures, to resist reopening old historical rifts, dividing the Danube Region, dividing our populations, and lose the chance to build a shared, peaceful and prosperous Danube Region. In this sense, the refugee crisis could also be an opportunity for the Danube Region to make a step further in its endeavour to become a truly European Region.

European, national and regional institutions should learn from the actual crisis that they must include Civil Society in their governance and decision making process at all levels, in a structured and comprehensive way that will ensure long-term and sustainable solutions, backed by their citizens.

2016 Bratislava Declaration on funding for empowered civil society and local actors

In the context of the financial, economic, political and social crisis shaking up the foundations of the European Union, declining trust in political systems at the European, the national and the local level, hampering a stable and sustainable social and economic development, is evident and its consequences are dramatic.

Civil society empowered local actors, as well as cities and regions, are key partners for the stabilisation and development of the European Project as well as the Danube macro-region. They can make an important difference in finding solutions for common national or transnational challenges, if they are included in the governance at all administrative levels in the Danube Region.

The stronger involvement of civil society through consultative networks and platforms has repeatedly been stressed, as in the Commission's report to the European Parliament¹² on the development of Macro-Regional Strategies. While this is of relevance for all member countries of the strategy, some have made significant progress in establishing structural participation, while others are just starting the process. It is therefore essential to further the exchange at all levels on the practical implementation of participative governance. This has been furthered in the Danube Region by both National Participation Days and the annual EUSDR Danube Participation Day, held back-to-back with the Annual Forum, where Local Actors of the whole Region have an opportunity to meet and exchange and develop ideas and projects.

However, European programmes and ESI-funds are not suitable for the financing of such smaller projects, events and cooperation, and are therefore unable to enhance the implementation of Macro-Regional Strategies on the ground by a relevant group of its stakeholders, civil society and local actors.

We therefore call on the Member Countries of the EUSDR, the respective presidencies, the high level group, the European Commission and the European Parliament:

- to ensure and support the organisation of the EUSDR Participation Day as well as of National Participation Days;
- to consider the importance of small project funding instruments in the starting discussions on the next European cohesion policy, thus showing their willingness to truly engage, in the spirit of the European treaties, in new ways of governance for the benefit of the Danube Region and promote the idea of active citizenship.

¹² COM (2016)805 final



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