

The Growing Relevance of Civil Society

Participation in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region



The 3rd Danube Participation Days took place on November 2nd and 3rd 2016 in Bratislava (Slovakia). Around 210 actors from civil society and government institutions from the entire Danube region got together and discussed the latest developments within the macro-regional context of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR).

Both days were held under the slogan “Working towards Sustainable Development: Civil Society, Local Actors and EU strategies”. Highly experienced speakers like the former EU Commissioner Franz Fischler and State Councilor Gisela Erler from Baden-Württemberg confirmed EU-Commissioner Cretus’ statement and stressed the importance of participation and social innovation along the Danube River.

Georg Mildenerger (Center for Social Investment and Innovation at the Heidelberg University) emphasized that according to the workshop on social innovation, there is need for new inclusive and participatory governance. Only then social innovation is possible in the Danube Region. Georg Mildenerger highlighted that especially civil society organizations and local actors have the great potential to propose and test innovative solutions and approaches because of their strong relationships with citizens and other sectors of society. The workshop on Open Governance indicated the need for viable user-friendly open data on appropriate platforms to increase civil society participation. A day full of work found its highlight with a splendid reception held by the Mayor of Bratislava in the city hall.

During the second day of the event, participation was further discussed from the perspective of regional and local authorities. The Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF) and Priority Area 10 of the EUSDR invited the Council of Danube Cities and Regions (CoDCR), the Urban Platform Danube Region, the Danube Local Actors Platform (D-LAP) and the ARGE Donauländer to an extensive discussion.

The concept of the Participation Days was elaborated in the last five years by Stefan Lütgenau and his team within the Danube Civil Society Forum in close cooperation with the coordination office of the Priority Area 10 (held by the City of Vienna and the Centre for European Perspective in Slovenia). The Priority Area 10 deals with Institutional Capacity Building and Cooperation and it is the responsible arm of the EUSDR for civil society.

The 3rd Danube Participation Days in Bratislava followed the young tradition of the first two Danube Participation Days in Eisenstadt (Austria) in 2014 and Ulm (Germany) in 2015. The Baden-Württemberg Stiftung (Baden-Württemberg Foundation) supports the project for the years from 2016 – 2018 as part of its program *Perspektive Donau*:

Bildung, Kultur und Zivilgesellschaft (Perspective for the Danube region: Education, Culture and Civil Society). Further financial support for the Participation Days 2016 and 2017 comes from the group of the EU Ladder project, the Council of Danube Cities and Regions and the ARGE Donauländer. A partner consortium of Agapedia gGmbH, the coordination office of Priority Area 10 in Vienna, The Center of Social Investment and Innovation of Heidelberg University, the Andrassy University in Budapest, the Civil Society Network EUSDR in Baden-Württemberg and the Civic Participation Forum in Bulgaria is responsible for the content of the Participation Days. The coming Danube Participation Day will be held on October 17th 2017 at the Andrassy University in Budapest. In 2018, the Participation Days will take place in Bulgaria (please check the box below for further information).

Participative governance is important to complement the top-down approach of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and its 3 No’s (no new funding, no new structures, no new legislation). By systematically applying a bottom-up approach, the Participation Days take civil society and local actors on board. Here NGOs from different fields (environment, social issues, advocacy and political activities) meet and exchange



“The current challenges that the EU is facing, as well as their growing complexity, make consent and participation of Civil Society Organisations more important than ever”.

Corina Crețu, EU Commissioner for Regional Policy addressing the 3rd Danube Participation Days in Bratislava



views with responsible local, regional and national authorities. The National Participation Days are strongly supported by the Danube Local Actor Platform (D-LAP) and the coordination office of the Priority Area 10.

The overall results of the Participation Days are promising. For 2017, a total of 8 National Participation Days are planned. They range from Ulm, Eisenstadt, Prague, over Bratislava, Ljubljana and Sofia and all the way to Chisinau and Odessa. Building trust is one of the many significant results of these processes and conversations. The relationship between governments and civil society in post-socialist transition countries is still not filled with mutual appreciation and trust. That fosters growing polarization within their societies and the rise of populist parties.

The Danube Participation Days are the annual civil society participation summits within the EUSDR, taking place one day before the Annual EUSDR Forum. All proceedings were established and documented in close cooperation between the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF) and the coordination office of the Priority Area 10.

Thus, the aim to “fill the strategy with life”, that was declared by Winfried Kretschmann (Prime Minister of Baden-Württemberg) at the official launch of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region in June 2011, remains as important as ever. The Danube Participation Days are a modern tool to contribute to this aim.



Danube Participation Days

On October 17th 2017, the 4th Danube Participation Day will take place at the Andrassy University in Budapest, followed by the annual EUSDR forum on October 18th 2017 in Budapest. Under the title “Paving the Path: Science meets Innovation and Participation”, people from all sectors in the Danube region are invited to participate. Using the academic arena, insights from all 4 EU-macro regions (besides the Danube region, there are EU-macro regions for the Baltic Sea Region, the Adriatic and Ionian Region and the Alpine Region) shall be discussed and an agenda for participation initiated. Places are limited, so please state your desire to participate at : office@foster-europe.org For further information please visit:

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

DATES:

Prague 30/05/2017
Bucarest 22/06/2017
Stuttgart 29/6/2017

Other dates planned:

Chisinau, September 2017
Odessa, September 2017
Eisenstadt, Autumn 2017
Ljubljana, Autumn 2017
Bratislava, Autumn 2017

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