

1 Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve 2 Srebarna Nature Reserve 3 Kalimok-Brushlen Protected Site 4 Rusenski Lom Nature Park  
5 Persina Nature Park 6 Djerdap National Park 7 Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve 8 Kopački rit Nature Park  
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# STRATEGIC POSITION OF DANUBE PARKS

## FOR TOURISM, ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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# DANUBE PARKS

network of protected areas

**Title:**

Strategic Position of DANUBEPARKS (Danube River Network of Protected Areas) for Tourism, Environmental Education and Regional Development

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## SECTION I - STRATEGIC POSITION

### Preface

#### **The Danube River as a part of the Danube basin**

Flowing 2,860 km from the Black Forest to the Black Sea, the Danube is Europe's second largest river, and the only major river which flows west to east, from Central to Eastern Europe. It is one of the most international rivers in the world, draining all or part of the territories of 14 countries, including EU member states, accession countries in the Western Balkans, as well as the neighbouring countries of Ukraine and Moldova.

Geographically the region is diverse, including not only the immediate river and lowlands, but also, for example, the major part of the Carpathian Mountains. It contains a large share of Europe's remaining natural wealth, including its last great wilderness areas as well as rich cultural landscapes that have been shaped over centuries of human cultivation. It is home to over half of the European populations of bears, wolves and lynx, as well as the greatest remaining stands of old growth forests outside of Russia. At the end of the river the Danube delta includes 30 different ecosystems, among them the world's largest compact reed bed area and one of Europe's most important bird sanctuaries.

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

The newly adopted EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)<sup>1</sup> wants to boost and coordinate the development of the Danube region. "To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts" is one of the priority areas in the section "Connecting the Danube Region". The implementation of the EUSDR will be the leading EU challenge in this European macroeconomic region over the next decade – and beyond.

#### **Tourism along the Danube River**

So far there is really no common tourism development and marketing approach throughout the Danube countries which puts the river at the forefront; the exceptions are the Upper-Danube countries of Germany and Austria, where focused marketing structures have been developed in recent years. This more regional approach might change to an international view with the implementation of the above-mentioned EU Danube Strategy.

Due to this lack of specialized Danube tourism, this paper also lacks concrete data as a basis for its analyses and forecasts. No statistics are available about numbers, motives and activities of the Danube tourists.

Currently, Danube tourism stands mainly for cities and culture (such as Vienna, Budapest and Belgrade), cruising and –more in the upper part – cycling and hiking tourism. There is a special importance in providing leisure and relaxation facilities, especially for those Protected Areas (PAs) near medium and larger cities along the Danube. Day tourists create rather high pressure on the PAs.

The Upper Danube countries of Germany and Austria in particular have already developed specialised Danube marketing and a rather new but successful focus on hiking tourism along

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<sup>1</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/cooperation/danube/documents/communication/com2010\\_715\\_danube\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/documents/communication/com2010_715_danube_en.pdf)

the Danube (Welterbesteig in Lower Austria<sup>2</sup> and the Donausteig in Bavaria and Upper Austria<sup>3</sup>). Branding in the other parts of the Danube is rather low.

Hunting and fishing tourism is of relative importance for several areas along the Danube, including some of the PAs that gain important income from these forms of tourism. Birdwatching tourism (the main motive for travellers to the Danube delta) is still to be developed further in other parts of the Danube.

What's missing, especially along the Middle and Lower Danube, is tourism related infrastructure on the one hand. But product development has so far also ignored to a large extent the existing potential: the cultural diversity, different ethnic groups with their traditions and also the large natural heritage.

Cruising is becoming more and more important, with a tremendous increase forecast in the number of boats and new regional cruise operators starting to operate, (including the eastern parts). Although the current programmes successfully target mainly elderly people, some traditional operators are trying new programmes to reach a younger, audience. But cruise tourism still lacks synergies for regional development: only stopping at the larger harbours, cruise ships create hardly any benefit for the hinterland, and the intense programme often leaves no time for deeper insights into local culture or nature.

Holidays that combine nature and regional culture are one of the identified overall European trends, so nature related tourism offers along the Danube (best in combination with authentic culture) will also find a steadily growing target group. Some PAs might use this trend with, for example, specialised bird-watching offers, others could rather focus on their nature and landscape interpretation offers.

But areas with high biological sensitivity, such as the Danube delta, are not only important bird-watching destinations but also targets for speculation and investment plans, for example in hotels and tourism infrastructure, often not effectively regulated by national laws.

### **Tourism and PAs**

The mentioned diversity of the wider Danube basin in general is also reflected in the PAs directly along the Danube River, their different distances to large cities and conurbations and the importance that tourism and day-visitors play in the local economy – as well as to the amount of problems created by the pressure of tourism.

The development and control of tourism is generally seen as part of the wise management of the Danube PAs and the promotion of sustainable development (as mentioned generally in the aims of the network in the Declaration of Tulcea based on the principles of the Ramsar Convention and the Convention and Co-operation for the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Danube River (Sofia, 1994) and – specifically for tourism – in the declaration of Vienna.)

It is generally recognised that the PAs have a major role in nature education, both through formal and informal education methods.

PAs in the upper part of the Danube focus more on hikers and canoe or kayak tourists, whereas cycling as an important activity in PAs could be found in nearly all areas along the Danube. A few areas state problematic impacts from tourists doing rock climbing, caving and even motor-cross. Mushrooming and berry picking are seen as less intensive and impacting as existing hunting and fishing tourism.

Nature excursions and camps (for children) are widely spread, but only a few PAs also offer cultural excursions. Most of the PAs focus their activities and offers on the summertime; hardly any winter offers exist, mainly due to a lack of demand on the consumers' side.

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<sup>2</sup>[www.welterbesteig.com](http://www.welterbesteig.com)

<sup>3</sup>[www.donausteig.at](http://www.donausteig.at)

However, some PAs have extended their traditional role and currently they have added to the learning experience about nature and biodiversity – being their core task, a more holistic view in terms of the environment in general. There are an increasing number of education programmes and interpretation infrastructures in some PAs, offering information about environmental issues, such as: waste water, air pollution, climate change, land use, etc. Therefore, we can state that most PAs provide good examples in educating about the environment and sustainability at the global level. In other words, PAs are often educating not only about nature from the PA, but they are going beyond their borders in terms of their educational role on sustainability.

In recent years, many PAs have changed their policy to a more stakeholder oriented management, as far as it is possible due to their existing legal frameworks and existing structures. Generally, PAs are becoming more active players in the sustainable development of the overall regions. In this respect we see environmental education, tourism and (sustainable) regional development very much interlinked.

Financial frameworks and possibilities for PAs are very diverse: some PAs and their managing (forest) administrations need to earn money for nature protection measures themselves, for example by offering educational activities or others such as hunting; other PAs are not allowed to earn money for their budget by, for example, excursion offers.

This strategic position of DANUBEPARKS takes all those different approaches into account and tries to create both an overall general view to sustainable tourism development and environmental education in PAs along the Danube and, on the other hand, draws concrete measures for future activities of the network. Concrete tourism strategies that deal with specific regional or national circumstances and challenges are developed by the members of the network for their own PA.

## **Position of DANUBEPARKS towards tourism**

Nature tourism in PAs is an inherent part of the tourism offers of the Danube region and has an important economic role in many regions. Its potential pressure could put some burden on PAs that is difficult to combine with their protection aims, which is especially true for PAs near larger cities and conurbations where the areas are also used for leisure purposes.

Nevertheless, nature-related tourism is a key element in fulfilling the educational mission of PAs as well as an essential tool for raising public awareness and gaining acceptance for conservation. The existence of PAs contributes to the image and Unique Selling Proposition (USP) of a destination. (Nature) tourism offers can provide important sources of direct and indirect income for the destinations, especially because many PAs are located in less developed regions.

All offers and forms of tourism should aim at the implementation of the principles of sustainability.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>**Sustainable Development** is defined as “A Development that fulfils the needs of our generation without restricting the possibility of the next generation to fulfil their own needs” (Brundlandt, 1987).

**Sustainability in tourism** (“Sustainable Tourism”) refers to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance established between these three dimensions.

Thus, sustainable tourism should:

- Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.
- Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.

DANUBEPARKS welcomes all forms of sustainable tourism along the Danube, especially non-motorized, ecologically-sound activities, such as cycling, nature excursions, etc. PAs should be enabled to implement feasible and sound monitoring and guiding instruments to monitor tourism flows. Carrying capacities should be defined for all parts of the PAs and their surrounding, indicating differences within the areas according to the sensitivity and level of protection. Visitor management should offer activities and guide tourists and guests to places where they don't harm the environment. Monitoring should control the effectiveness of the visitor management measures.

Wherever possible, tourists and day-visitors should be motivated and enabled to access the destination and the PAs by means of public and environmentally-friendly transport, such as bicycles, trains, buses and boats; private cars will be encouraged to park outside the core areas or the PA borders.

DANUBEPARKS stands for a three-fold position towards tourism and recreation: the PAs have to be generally accessible for recreational and tourism purposes that do not harm the aim of biodiversity and nature protection. PAs play an important active role in providing means for education through tourism and recreation (e.g. visitor centres, guided tours, trails, workshops, etc.). Thirdly, PAs are important and competent partners for overall sustainable regional development.

Tourism activities have to contribute to the protection aims of PAs, be ecologically and socially sound in general, take local and regional cultural resources into account, and contribute to the benefit of the region and its inhabitants. Nature conservation policies of the PA and its surrounding region should always be integrated into the tourism development strategies as well as tourism and recreation programmes. This also means that tourism development in general, or the implementation of specific forms of tourism, should not be a reason against the enforcement of existing protection laws or against putting an area under stricter protection.

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

PA administrations should, whenever possible, stimulate regional development and cooperate with local businesses. Prerequisite for this is that the PA administrations do not need to finance nature protection measures from their own profits made from using the resources of the PA, and that the local service providers are able to provide information and education integrated in their tourism offers and respect, as well as explain, protection regulations to the visitors.

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- Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.
  - Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary. Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.

Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices therefore are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. (UNWTO 2004; Baumgartner 2010).

In this respect DANUBEPARKS also promotes and motivates the development of cross-border cooperation between its members (and PAs that are not yet members) in the development and implementation of common tourism and education offers and strategies.

DANUBEPARKS stands for a regional multi-stakeholder-approach that brings different players together (local and regional authorities, PA administration, science, NGOs, etc.) and enables sustainable regional development processes. DANUBEPARKS supports its members in the contribution to and – if wished – stimulation of such processes.

### **Position of DANUBEPARKS towards environmental education related to tourism and recreation**

Most of the PAs have a mandate to develop education programmes for communities around or within their boundaries. Children and youth are usually one of the targeted segments of local populations. The PA staff is often involved in organising additional educational programmes in schools or “offering” the PA as an “outdoor lab” for formal education. Therefore, the PA itself and its administration frequently play an important role in regional proposals for outdoor and indoor nature and local culture learning experiences based on education programmes offered by the PA administration for local communities.

Different local groups (e.g. families, peers, etc.) and individuals enjoy PA during their leisure time, too. Their recreation experience of either more dynamic activities (e.g. hiking, running, canoeing) or more relaxing activities (e.g. walking, picnicking) can often be enriched by the information and interpretation infrastructure or programmes offered by the PA administration. Moreover, education can be part of the tourism offer related to the PA for non-local people who travel to PAs for a holiday experience. Education components related to tourism can play a crucial role in improving the tourism quality in the PA region and increasing the profile of the whole network.

In this respect, DANUBEPARKS promotes an education approach that offers cross-border cooperation between its members and utilises tourism as a tool for education. The tourism products offered by the PAs should have authentic nature experience and education as the final goal. It is recommended that PAs consider tourism as a tool for education and not a pure business that could eventually be in competition with local private businesses. Although there are different approaches related to tourism and education in various PAs (e.g. the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Administration does not offer any commercial tourism programmes, however they offer an extended educational programmes for local communities with free access, while Donau-Auen National Park offers extensive quality tourism with a participation fee), the general approach would be that:

- Tourism, recreation opportunities and educational indoor or outdoor programmes represent one of the important tools for educating both guests and local communities;
- Education offers bring a unitary experience for guests and increase the profile of the whole network and every single partner;
- Cross-border cooperation, which leads to both cross-border tourism and education offers, brings added value to those experiences.

Under these assumptions, education remains a high priority topic that should be assisted and upgraded in each tourism related activity performed by the PA. Additionally, the PAs should provide assistance to local businesses in order to develop and increase the quality of their tourism offer through an education component targeted to their guests. This could lead to cooperation, shared tasks and finally to win-win-situations for both the tourism businesses and the PAs.



## **Aims of DANUBEPARKS related to tourism and environmental education**

DANUBEPARKS can position itself as a network that offers a good example of integrating PAs into sustainable regional development. However, DANUBEPARKS as a network is not a directly involved stakeholder in the development, implementation and monitoring of tourism. Still, it can fulfil several tasks in communication, capacity building and cooperation towards and between its members. Furthermore, DANUBEPARKS could represent common ideas and aims of the members in the field of tourism towards international institutions and other networks and stakeholders:

- Assist sustainable development of tourism along the Danube river and its hinterland, integrating PAs into green tourism destinations by providing models, expertise and access to markets for PAs and their stakeholders (e.g. extending the time/days spent by guests in the region);
- Support its members in discussions on local, regional and national levels regarding nature protection and nature tourism development;
- Contribute to capacity building and qualifications of its members, for example by the development of standards for guiding or organising training programmes;
- Support building up the abilities of the members to follow and contribute to regional tourism strategy development processes and the general sustainable development of their destination;
- Awareness raising for sustainable tourism in PAs;
- Support the development, marketing and promotion of sustainable nature tourism offers, for example by the development of common branding for tourist and visitor information, the establishment of cooperation with relevant institutions (e.g. Danube Competence Centre for development, the Danube Tourist Commission for promotion);
- Cooperate in the definition and communication of common products (in tourism and environmental education), for example by defining common quality criteria and branding;
- Influence the implementation and future development of public policies, for example by contributing to the implementation of the Danube Strategy;
- Contribute to the international discussion on using the Danube as a major element for branding nature tourism along the river and integrating it into the EU Danube Strategy with a special nature tourism brand.

Overall, DANUBEPARKS should become a promoter of green development through sustainable tourism along the Danube. Each PA can play a twofold role:

1. A catalyst for sustainable regional development, where nature conservation can really stimulate green development;
2. A strong cell of the network of PAs along the Danube, enforcing its conservation and sustainable development role.

## SECTION II - ACTION PLAN

### Perspective on tourism and recreation

From the point of view of a PA, tourism and recreation can be analysed from three different perspectives:

- Recreation perspective when basically there is free access to recreation and education infrastructure for visitors and local people, when generally no fee is charged. The main responsibility to manage and maintain the recreation facilities, as well as the natural resources, stays with the PA administration. The main objective of the PA administration is to create the best chance to provide a high quality outdoor and learning experience to the visitors of the PA, with minimum impact on nature;
- Education through tourism and recreation when there is an activity product developed either directly by the PA administration or in partnership with local tourism services. Under this perspective, the tourism product has as its main objective to offer guests an educational experience related to the PA. It can have a commercial approach, charging a participation fee that can cover part of the costs; however profit-making is never the primary goal;
- Regional development when the three main actors (PA administration, businesses and regional/local administration) participate in a partnership where regional sustainable development through tourism is the main objective. Under this perspective, a large proportion of the income generated by the tourism activities is recommended to remain at the local level and part of it to be returned for nature conservation projects.

The three perspectives basically integrate with each other. In terms of who is responsible, the PA administration has a different degree of involvement: from direct responsibility and implementation role for recreation and education components, towards co-sharing responsibility and coordination in the case of regional development.

When looking at the DANUBEPARKS network, all three perspectives are important. However, DANUBEPARKS is meant to bring a new dimension to any of the three perspectives. This new dimension is called ***Danube as a whole***. So, the DANUBEPARKS network has an objective to bring the message across to visitors and local people that each PA is part of a much larger ecosystem depending on the Danube (and its tributaries) and it is part of a cultural, economical and even institutional re-discovered identity. Furthermore, DANUBEPARKS would like to foster sustainable development at each PA region in such a way that the whole Danube region has a better chance for green development where nature conservation is on the public agenda.

### Action planning

The current report produces an action plan for the whole network. This plan should not be mixed and substituted with the necessary action plans of each PA in terms of recreation, tourism and education.

An action plan is required in order to give more specific direction to the DANUBEPARKS network, bringing into practice the general aims regarding tourism, environmental education and regional development.

The actions have been grouped under four main categories:

- Information, interpretation and education;
- Regional development, networking and common marketing;
- Capacity building and coordination;
- Representation.

#### **A. Information, interpretation and education**

This category covers actions that are mainly under each PA responsibility but could bring a new dimension of communicating with visitors and local people about the whole Danube region in terms of natural, cultural, historical and institutional components. The main aim for DANUBEPARKS in this section is supporting its members in raising the standards of their offers and developing transnational and/or cross-border offers.

##### *A.1. Develop a basic module of information about all PA members that can be shared with each network member*

This action will allow each PA administration to have a comprehensive package of information about all members in order to communicate to its visitors. The information has to contain basic knowledge about each PA (e.g. surface area, main species, major challenges/threats, main conservation objectives, wildlife and bird populations, possible outdoor activities, etc.).

Diverse possibilities should be used for sharing the information with the public, such as: within information centres (e.g. shelves, info points), websites (action B.7), at least one person from each PA should be skilled to provide information based on the DANUBEPARKS information package.

##### *A.2 Develop and implement a DANUBEPARKS signalisation*

As a joint marketing approach, this should make visitors aware of entering/leaving a PA. A set of defined icons and signs need to be designed and agreed by the network in order to secure a minimum level of information about the existence of PA, location of visitor centre, major tourism services in each PA region, access roads, etc. The signs should be designed and installed for three different categories of guests: coming on boats along the Danube, cycling along the Danube, and eventually also for those coming on foot, by bike or by car.

The signalisation should not only inform about the currently visited PA, but also show the distance to and basic information about the next PA up- or downstream.

##### *A.3 Develop and implement a master plan for interpretation among DANUBEPARKS PAs*

The master plan includes:

- a. An evaluation part identifying and analysing interpretation infrastructure along the Danube (e.g. nature trails, visitor centres) and interpretation opportunities for each PA;
- b. Identification of the Unique Selling Proposition (USP) for each PA.

It develops dedicated interpretation themes for each PA, and recommendations what and how to include DANUBEPARKS concepts and themes within local interpretation.

The master plan for interpretation could bring a coherent vision of the whole Danube project with the programmes and facilities of each PA, in such a way that visitors can learn about the network and individual PAs when visiting any member of the network.

#### *A.4 Smart phone app*

Developing a smartphone application that provides geographical, biodiversity and other information about the members as well as general information about DANUBEPARKS.

#### *A.5 PAs get on board*

Developing a dedicated nature guiding system to be available to accompany ships along the Danube, supplying the passengers with high quality information about nature and culture specific to each PA crossed by the ship. The nature guiding system could have personal interpretation with the programme run by a specially trained guide, or could be an audio-visual interpretation set to be installed on the ship.

The tasks of DANUBEPARKS would be setting up quality criteria, training programmes and acting for coordination and promotion of the offer, becoming the focal point for tour operators / cruise companies.

#### *A.6 DANUBEPARKS junior ranger camps*

Several PAs organise and offer junior ranger camps for young people from their areas or countries. On this basis, DANUBEPARKS could support the activities by:

- General support for cross-border programmes, bi-, trilateral or international camps by existing networking means;
- Develop a similar quality of the offer in terms of safety, education/learning component, use of didactic tools, outdoor activities and training programmes.

For long-term development of these junior ranger camps a central responsible PA and special company sponsorship would be necessary. Long-term cooperation with schools, youth organisations and other interested associations should be envisaged.

Junior ranger camps should be linked with common ranger training and follow the same system of quality criteria.

### **B. Regional development, networking and common marketing**

This category includes activities that can stimulate sustainable development of each region through tourism that can be catalysed by each PA administration. Activities covering networking and common marketing of PA regions along the Danube are also presented under the current cluster.

#### *B.1. Develop the “Danube outdoor experience” for each possible PA*

The “Danube outdoor experience” has to be translated into a non-motorised outdoor activity with a high degree of nature interpretation. So, DANUBEPARKS could develop and promote a walking-cycling-boating<sup>5</sup> set of outdoor activities, combined with high quality nature

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<sup>5</sup>“boating” stands for non-motorised movement on the water: rowing, canoeing, kayaking, rafting etc.

interpretation. Therefore, a common quality standard has to be elaborated, which will be implemented at the PA destination level including infrastructure, interpretation and additional services. The “Danube outdoor experience” will consist of a series of high quality opportunities to perform walking-cycling-boating activities in different locations in PA regions along the Danube.

This action will consist of:

- Assessing the potential for each PA to develop walking-cycling-boating activities;
- Developing a DANUBEPARKS set of standards for organising walking-cycling-boating activities and infrastructure. Those sets could be based on existing general principles (e.g. those from the ‘European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas<sup>6</sup> of the Europarc Federation);
- Evaluating and branding the activities with the DANUBEPARKS logo from selected PAs that qualify according to the defined standards;
- DANUBEPARKS tasks would be to help in assessment (e.g. by providing experience, assessment tools, etc.), development of standards, training programmes and common promotion (e.g. through leaflets, website, etc.).

### *B.2 Develop the “Danube nature experience” for each possible PA*

The “Danube nature experience” includes the opportunity that each PA has to offer in order to experience nature, such as: bird watching, wildlife tracking, photo safari, etc. Such offers should integrate all senses and offers should also be designed for specially challenged people. Certain standards should be developed and implemented by the network in order to have good quality of infrastructure, nature guiding and interpretation, as well as minimum impact on nature in each PA.

This action will consist of:

- Assessing the potential for each PA for nature experience programmes;
- Developing a DANUBEPARKS set of standards for nature experience programmes and infrastructure. Those sets could be based on existing general principles (e.g. those from the ‘European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas<sup>7</sup> by the Europarc Federation);
- Evaluating and labelling the programmes with the DANUBEPARKS logo from selected PAs that qualify according to the defined standards;
- DANUBEPARKS tasks would be to help in assessment (e.g. by providing experience, assessment tools, etc.), development of standards, training programmes and common promotion (e.g. through leaflets, website, etc.).

### *B.3 Cycling and boating – linking PA destinations*

The network should encourage the PA destinations to be accessible one from each other in a non-motorised way. Therefore, DANUBEPARKS can assist in identifying possible links on bike, boat and other means of public transport (train, bus) travelling from one PA to another. Special signing of the access roads has to be agreed and implemented along the Danube and the information has to be available in each PA destination.

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<sup>6</sup>[www.european-charter.org](http://www.european-charter.org)

<sup>7</sup>[www.european-charter.org](http://www.european-charter.org)

Special infrastructure will be necessary in order to facilitate cycling and boating along the Danube (e.g. boat mini harbours, cycle-friendly accommodation, cycle corridors, etc.).

The task of DANUBEPARKS would be lobbying and assisting in the development of such types of infrastructure. Furthermore, DANUBEPARKS could set up cooperation with tour operators that are offering combined bike and boat trips and link them with the PAs.

#### *B.4 Develop the tourism, recreation and education section of the Communication Plan for DANUBEPARKS*

DANUBEPARKS needs to develop the Communication Plan for its overall management in order to have effective communication with various target groups. The current action focuses on developing a specific section of the Communication Plan, dealing with the tourism, recreation and education sectors.

#### *B.5 Assist developing tourism-marketing programme*

DANUBEPARKS should assist in forming a business community around the PA. The business community together with the PA administration develops an annual marketing plan in order to increase the profile of the Danube as a green tourism destination.

To fulfil this action, DANUBEPARKS should assist in organising a partnership between PA administrations and the tourism industry. This partnership should cooperate with other Danube institutions (e.g. Danube Competence Centre<sup>8</sup>) to project a coherent Danube destination image at the European level.

#### *B.6 Develop a tourism map of the PAs*

Outdoor, nature and culinary activities need to be projected onto a tourist map, adding the available services for each PA destination and the access to each PA region. DANUBEPARKS can assist in producing such a map that can be both on paper and in a digital format available on the internet.

#### *B.7 Develop a common tourism website*

DANUBEPARKS network should assist in developing a web-portal dedicated to Danube destinations. The website has to include necessary travel information about each PA destination (e.g. access, services, programmes, calendar of events, etc.) and can extend to include a social network.

We recommend cooperating in this point with other (planned) Danube tourism web-portals, such as the one by the Danube Competence Centre.

#### *B.8 Contribute to Danube branding*

The EU Danube Strategy foresees special branding for tourism within the Danube region.

DANUBEPARKS should become the main promoter of sustainable nature tourism along the Danube. The network should use the lobbying and participation options within the EU Danube Strategy implementation structures to:

- Contribute with special nature tourism criteria under the planned Danube tourism brand for PAs;

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<sup>8</sup>See [www.danubecc.org](http://www.danubecc.org)

- Lobby for green management standards and quality criteria (such as the ones currently developed by Naturefriends International and the Danube Competence Centre) for tourism along the whole Danube River.

### **C. Capacity building and coordination**

DANUBEPARKS is a network consisting of PA administrations. Recognising the various tasks and challenges of PAs that widen the pure aim of nature protection to environmental education, contribution to sustainable tourism and sustainable regional development, it seems logical that a lot of effort is put into the question of capacity building of both the members' employees and network coordination.

#### *C.1 Establish a legal entity for DANUBEPARKS network*

This measure is in fact not part of the tourism strategy and action plan. However, considering the responsibility, the needs of the network and the opportunities to support its activities efficiently and effectively, it is recommended to establish a clear structure (a legal body or some other form) that can represent the interests of the whole network in terms of fund raising, lobbying, coordination, developing a coherent identity, keeping quality standards to all field activities part of the network, and representing the network at the European level.

#### *C.2 Establish a training programme for PA staff*

Due to the new dimension brought by the DANUBEPARKS network (e.g. common marketing and branding), further capacity building needs to be developed at each PA administration level. Therefore a series of training modules needs to be developed and offered by the DANUBEPARKS network, such as:

- Guiding and interpretation training (for outdoor and nature experience excursions as well as for indoor exhibition guiding, and for different target groups) for rangers and local guides;
- Training on designing and running visitor centres and other interpretation infrastructure as well as elaborating guided (outdoor) offers, for PA staff responsible for education and tourism;
- Training on sustainable tourism development, including stimulation of sustainable regional development, regional cooperation and marketing for PA staff responsible for education and tourism;
- Project development and application writing, presentation and moderation skills, etc. for PA staff responsible for project development (not only) in the field of education and tourism;
- Training on the other DANUBEPARKS PAs as well as their tourism offers, for information service staff of the PAs;

Those activities could be linked with the discussed Danube Ranger Academy. The role of DANUBEPARKS can be the planning and implementation of transnational training programmes to secure similar quality standards within the network. Transnational training programmes should be done in a train-the-trainer style, so that participating staff can then train other PA staff.

### *C.3 Coordinate the development and implementation of different guidelines*

All capacity building activities (see e.g. C2) should follow clear quality targets. Different guiding principles have to be developed and implemented by the network in order to maintain a high quality of the programmes and services marketed under the DANUBEPARKS branding, and to secure a mechanism for sustainable development at the regional level.

The following training modules, mentioned under category B. 'Regional development', should be developed and operationalized:

- Guidelines for organising walking-cycling-boating activities and other outdoor activities, as well as the associated infrastructure;
- Guidelines for nature experience programmes and infrastructure.

The guidelines need to be operational; therefore an easy-to-handle implementation system will be required for the whole DANUBEPARKS network.

### **D. Representation and Cooperation**

DANUBEPARKS commits itself to cooperation and collaboration with other institutions and processes that work in the field of nature protection and tourism along the Danube, such as the ICPDR, the DCC, DTC, the EU Danube Strategy and others.

If required for good cooperation for mutual benefit, DANUBEPARKS could also represent the network of PAs within the structure of such institutions, for example as observer, member or in other forms.



- 1** Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve    **2** Srebarna Nature Reserve    **3** Kalimok-Brushlen Protected Site    **4** Rusenski Lom Nature Park  
**5** Persina Nature Park    **6** Djerdap National Park    **7** Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve    **8** Kopački rit Nature Park  
**9** Lonjsko Polje Nature Park    **10** Duna-Dráva National Park    **11** Duna-Ipoly National Park    **12** Dunajské luhy Protected Landscape Area  
**13** Záhorie Protected Landscape Area    **14** Donau-Auen National Park    **15** Donauauwald Neuburg Ingolstadt



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**DANUBE**PARKS  
 network of protected areas