

SMART, GREEN AND SOCIAL DANUBE CITIES

The Cooperation between our cities creates the new European Danube Region.

Ulm Declaration 2015

“Cities are the driving force of economic development. They are the most significant locations in terms of removing obstacles to growth and employment, as well as preventing social exclusion and environmental destruction.” This statement from the EU Commission on the “Urban Agenda” certainly applies to the Danube Region, an area with one of the most significant socio-economic potentials and a large number of cities in Europe, many of them capitals and large cities, giving the region a polycentric, potentially powerful and competitive urban structure. 115 million people live in the cities and regions that lie directly on the Danube – with a thousand years of common history and a unique cultural heritage.

Bringing the citizens along the Danube lasting peace, democratic governance, legal security, a clean environment, prosperity, education and social justice – those are the aims of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). They can only be achieved once the people of the region have credible access to the opportunities of the Danube Region Strategy, and once their interests are actively incorporated in its realisation. This requires more information and a much greater openness from governments, but also specific exemplary projects and initiatives to make positive changes visible in people's everyday lives, and to create an optimistic prospect for growth and employment. This applies especially to marginalised groups like the Roma. Due to its short decision-making paths, the local and regional level is particularly well-suited to initiating processes of social innovation on the path to a modern Danube Region.

It is especially in the cities and among their citizens that European identity can emerge. Accordingly, the success of the EUSDR crucially depends on cooperation and networking at the municipal and regional level: it is here that we can alleviate existing problems and increase the appeal of new, future-oriented and sustainable paths of development.

The cities of the Upper Danube with their developed structures have a particular European obligation and responsibility here. They are offering the cities of the Central and Lower Danube a lasting cooperative partnership. The Council of the Danube Cities and Regions (CoDCR) provides the organisational framework for this. It is a network organisation for the cities, communities and regions along the Danube, encouraging and coordinating in collaboration with the Working Group of Danube Regions (ARGE Donauländer) in fields and working areas of common interest.

Thus, the CoDCR contributes to the development of a strong, economically, politically and culturally connected macro region along the Danube, and makes an active contribution to realisation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region by fostering institutional capacities, processes of social innovation and heavier integration of civil society. We want to consolidate and expand this function.

The “Urban Platform Danube Region”, which the CoDCR is running in collaboration with the priority area “Institutional Capacity Building” of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, plays a central role in the exchange of experiences and experts and project development, supporting realisation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region through the exchange of information and experts, of best-practice projects, joint studies, conferences and strategies. There are still substantial deficits in the public administrations of the Central and Lower Danube, which impacts competence, quality and sustainability. We can remedy this effectively by exchanging knowledge, developing training programmes for administrative employees, and institutionalising Danube Officers in urban administrations.

The cooperation coordinated by the CoDCR with the ARGE Donauländer comprises the following, mutually dependent and interconnected fields, working areas and domains:

➤ **Economy, tourism and transport**

- Developing institutional capacities – especially in terms of improved use of EU funds
- Urban/regional development, boosting transport infrastructure, especially for cities in border locations
- Economic development and housing
- Tourism development and networking

➤ **Culture, science and education**

- Cooperating to preserve cultural heritage
- Promoting contemporary art and the independent cultural scene
- Developing common educational models, exchanging trainees and students
- Bringing young academics and students together
- Collaborating with universities, knowledge management

➤ **Sustainability, energy and environment**

- Joint project development and expert exchange
- Using of synergies e.g. with European Danube Moldova Region for projects concerning energy efficiency, renewable energy and e-mobility

- Cooperation with existing networks such as European Land and Soil Alliance ELSA, Soil Strategy Network in the Danube Region SONDAR, Climate Alliance, Energy 5 Network
 - Dissemination of results of leading projects e.g. management of humus and regional production of organic fertilizers, soil map & soil information, reduction of erosion by planting hedges, etc.
 - Integration of on-going and future projects in the EU Strategy of the Danube Region and Danube Transnational
- **Civil society, Local Actors and Social Affairs**
- Equality initiatives, combating human trafficking and forced prostitution
 - *e-Government (“Digital City”)*
 - Integrating and fostering civil society
 - Social inclusion – especially with regard to marginalised groups like the Roma:
 - programmes for sustainable employment and education of the Roma in urban spaces
 - Youth encounters

Based on these domains, an integrated work plan with concrete projects and responsibilities will now be developed.

Our cooperation is governed by the principle of the Founding Declaration of the Council of the Danube Cities and Regions (Budapest 2009): “Democracy, tolerance, humanism, respecting religious freedom and unconditional will, opposing any form of nationalism and extremism, are the foundations of our mutual development.”