



## 9TH DANUBE PARTICIPATION DAY

# Key Recommendations for Civil Society Involvement to Improve Resilience in the Danube Region<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We thank for the valuable input from Irene Lucius, Regional Conservation Director, WWF-Central and Eastern Europe, and Thomas Prorok, Managing Director, KDZ-Centre for Public Administration Research.



The 9th Danube Participation Day on 18 October 2022 explored the question:

## **How can we build a resilient society with the EU Danube Strategy?**

The Danube Participation Day participants discussed the role participation of civil society organisations plays in resilient territorial development in the Danube Region and how this can be supported within the Danube Strategy.

The striving for greater resilience in the Danube Region can be pursued by the EUSDR itself as well as a support of the Danube Strategy to the wider democratic environment in the Region. Resilience is understood as the ability to pursue a pluralistic, liberal, and law-based society even in times of pressure and crisis. Hence Resilience refers to the ability of societies to adapt and respond to systemic challenges, such as consequences of demographic, geopolitical or climate change. Resilience results from the constructive interaction of the different forces of society, including civil society.

The aim of effective governance must be to strengthen resilience. In this spirit, one of the key factors is a collaboration between public and private actors, leading to network-based governance and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Hence, in the spirit of the UN Principles of Effective Governance and the Sustainable Development Goals, strengthening resilience in the Danube Region needs to be pursued at the level of the Danube Strategy to strengthen resilience through actions in the Danube Region.

The DPD acknowledges the UN Principles of Effective Governance<sup>2</sup> and the SDGs as relevant international instruments framing the recommendations of the 9<sup>th</sup> Danube Participation Day.

## **How can civil society organisations be enabled to contribute to EUSDR objectives?**

Civil society organisations contribute to the Danube Strategy in multiple ways:

- **Providing expertise**

Civil Society Organisations have valuable expertise and experience “on the ground” as they engage with local stakeholders. Thereby, they provide insights and feedback on the needs of stakeholders and policy impact. This, in return, gives a more complete picture of the effectiveness of policies and helps to develop needs-based solutions. At the same time CSO form networks of high competence and action that pursue the strive for resilience on the European level.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://publicadministration.un.org/en/Intergovernmental-Support/Committee-of-Experts-on-Public-Administration/Governance-principles/11-governance-principles>, lasted viewed 14. 11. 2022



- **Supporting good governance**

Supporting initiatives that strengthen participation of civil society (organisations) contributes to more effective governance and enhances the quality and effectiveness of democracies and public administrations. They can also mobilise action from the grass roots level and give voice to those who cannot make their voice heard. The Danube Strategy should also reflect this principle.

- **Strengthening regional cooperation**

Civil Society Organisations strengthen regional cooperation and cohesion through transnational networks.

To empower civil society organisations to play these roles in support of the implementation of the Danube Strategy, they need 1) opportunities for meaningful participation, 2) information, 3) channels for communication, and 4) trust.

## 1) Opportunities for Meaningful Participation

**Danube Participation Day** and similar platforms permit civil society to interact with governmental players, EUSDR key stakeholders, to exchange ideas among themselves, and to make their voices heard. These platforms are fora for capacity building and knowledge exchange.

**Meetings with National Coordinators:** some NCs meet with civil society organisations at the national level regularly – this should be made the norm. The EUSDR action plan foresees the *“involve(ment) of national, regional and local authorities, as well as civil society organisations and further relevant stakeholders in the communication and implementation of the EUSDR through implementing national/regional Participation Days.”*

National Participation Days repeatedly proved to be an appropriate and flexible format to reach out to Civil Society Organisations in several EUSDR countries. The elements of openness and regularity (annually) contribute significantly to a trusting and reliable cooperation.

The ideas and recommendations collected during such meetings should be analysed across the region to inform policy making and – importantly – at the next meeting the NC should report back how suggestions collected during the last meeting were considered.



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**Open Priority Area Steering Groups to CSO observers:** by providing access to a limited number of CSOs to become observers to PAs, their expertise can be put to use and trustful working relations between governmental SG members and NGOs can develop. CSO observers in PA Steering Groups can play a crucial role in distributing information and collecting input from the CSO community into the PAs. While CSO observers in PA Steering Groups is a practise for most of the PAs. This positive element of participation should be fostered and strengthened.

**Participatory Action Plan Review:** the next action plan review process should be made fully transparent and include a well-advertised consultation process to enable CSOs to provide their input. A strategic master plan of the revision process and its timeline should be made public well in advance to enable CSOs to participate to the full extent of their expertise.

Danube Participations Days can be actively involved as fora of a wide multi-level and multi-stakeholder debate in the action plan review process. National Participation Days can play an active role to support the action plan review process on a national level and act as clearinghouses of information. These would widen the scope and build ownership and support.

**Provision of Resources and Space for Participation:** Participation is a key element in the macro-regional cooperation, governance, and implementation processes. Enabling and supporting CSOs to actively play their role in the EUSDR small grants programme could allow more CSOs to develop a capacity for participation and engage consistently in the process. Smaller CSOs which form the vast majority of NGOs active in the EUSDR, have no access to the current financial instruments in the framework of the EUSDR. Financial support via regional, national, or European instruments, of small scale and easy to access and administer is a long-standing demand. Therefore, we encourage EUSDR stakeholders to consider this need in national (and regional) funding instruments in the development or decision making for European funding instruments.

Next to the financial resources, the EUSDR should provide adequate spaces for participation. Again, National Participation Days are a “first level responder” as easy to access and open and transparent fora for participation, opinion, and capacity building.

## 2) Information

**Use CSO networks** to spread information: 1) *what the EUSDR is about* and 2) *how to participate*. The EUSDR is complex, and umbrella organisations and international CSOs active in the region usually have more capacity to understand the opportunities and translate information into a language specific to their members. The Danube Civil Society Forum is a good example.



**Offer capacity building programmes** on policy advocacy, enabling civil society organisations to understand how to use participation mechanisms and how to ensure that their ideas and messages reach the target audience. The best is “training on the job” so that the learning process is as relevant and concrete as possible.

**The Strategy should promote the participation of CSO and non-state stakeholders** among governmental EUSDR players and build their capacity to engage effectively with CSOs – this is a mutual learning process!

### 3) Trust

The EUSDR offers the concept and regarding to content a common basis for fruitful cooperation and participation. Trust between governmental and non-governmental EUSDR players has to grow over time through frequent interaction but providing trust upfront helps greatly to accelerate this process. This is reflected in the action plan of the EUSDR. In the Danube region, the strategy can be exemplary through regular, open, transparent, and trust-building exchanges with CSO and non-state stakeholders. Without trust, there is no openness to share and jointly develop ideas and find solutions to obstacles that must be overcome. Open, trustful cooperation across sectors of society and levels of administration is a common aim.

### 4) Next Steps

Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacities & Cooperation”, the Danube Civil Society Forum, and the Foster Europe Foundation offer their support to assist National Coordinators and interested stakeholders to organise National platforms for civil society participation and exchange (National Participation Days).

National Participation Days have been held repeatedly in different formats in Ukraine, Serbia, Bulgaria, Moldova, Slovenia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Austria, Baden-Württemberg, and in Romania once. This valuable practice should be revived after two years break due to the pandemic. National Participation Days are of special importance for the EUSDR presiding countries and the layout and success of their presidencies.

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