

## South East Europe Transnational Programme

## Project Idea Form

### Project idea's title

## Danube River Network of Protected Areas – Development and Implementation of Transboundary Strategies for the Conservation of the Natural Heritage at the Danube River

## Priority

(choose priority and indicate the relative area of intervention)

<input type="checkbox"/> Priority Axis 1	AoI _____
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X <input type="checkbox"/> Priority Axis 2	AoI: <b>Promote cooperation in management of natural assets and protected areas</b>
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<input type="checkbox"/> Priority Axis 3	AoI_____
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X <input type="checkbox"/> Priority Axis 4	AoI: <b>Promote the use of cultural values for sustainable growth areas</b>
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## Project Idea Promoter

(name of the institution)

Nationalpark Donau-Auen GmbH

## Contact Person

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Is the applicant the project's potential Lead Partner?

X ☒ Yes ☐ No

If not, is the potential Lead Partner already being chosen?

☐ Yes ☐ No

### Background (main problems or challenges to be addressed)

The last decade has seen a growing interest in the unique natural areas yet preserved along the river Danube. These sites are part of Europe's common natural heritage. Environmental organisations such as UNDP/GEF or WWF-Danube-Carpathian-Programme have put a focus on these areas and have initiated a series of projects to raise knowledge and awareness of their specific values. In several countries new protected areas have been established along the Danube. The development of these protected areas involved first steps of cross-border co-operation (bilateral co-operation agreements, exchange of knowledge, conferences, joint management plans, joint training of staff, co-operation in the frame of LIFE-projects or the drawing up of management plans).

Since 1998 the Danube countries cooperate through the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube (ICPDR). This platform was created by the Danube Protection Convention and is seated in Vienna. Within the ICPDR issues like river morphology and conservation of species and habitats have gained increasing importance.

The enlargement of the European Union and the latest accession of Bulgaria and Rumania have created new conditions for economic and social collaboration along the Danube. The dynamics of economic development and the predicted substantial increase in traffic along the “Danube Corridor” put an increasing pressure on natural and semi-natural flood plains and river sections. At the same time most of the Danube countries share the common

European objectives and responsibilities defined by the Habitats Directive and the Water Framework Directive, still waiting for full implementation.

Considering these developments a new quality of continuous und structured cooperation of protected areas along the Danube is needed. All these protected areas share a common ecosystem and face similar problems and tasks such as river revitalisation, flood plain management, visitor guidance, environmental education and eco-tourism. The “Alpine Network of Protected Areas”, founded on the initiative of France and enshrined in the Alpine Convention serves as successful example of a new quality of international co-operation of nature reserves, national parks and other protected areas.

Based on existing co-operation and contacts Nationalpark Donau-Auen (A) and ICPDR initiated a workshop in Tulcea (RU) in April 2007. Representatives of protected areas administration and state conservation authorities from 8 Danube countries agreed to take first active steps towards the creation of a Danube River Network of Protected Areas. They signed the “Declaration of Tulcea”, which calls for concerted actions to develop the Network and defines objectives for joint programmes and measures. The director of the National Park Donau-Auen, Carl Manzano, was nominated to represent the Network.

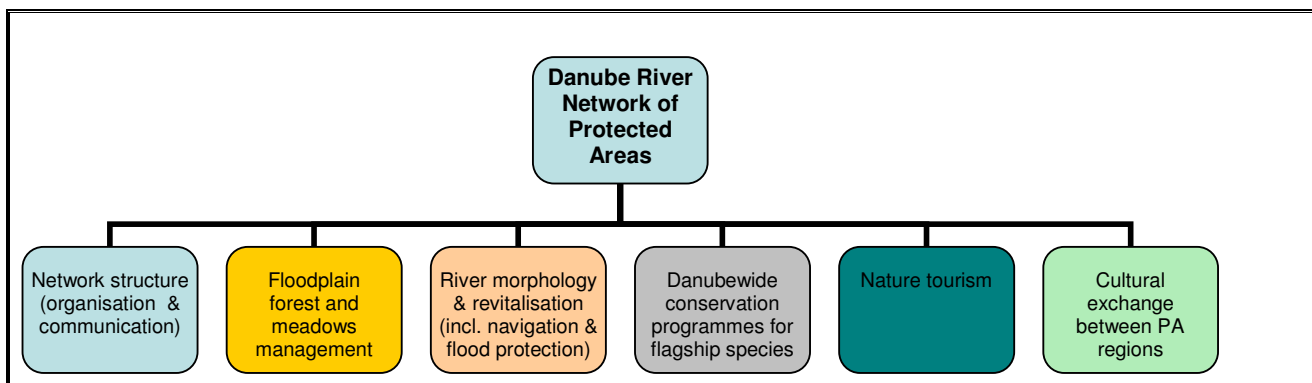
In a follow-up workshop in October 2007 in Visegrad (HU) a provisional steering committee was set up.

### Objectives (main and specific objectives to be achieved)

Strong and skilfully managed Protected Areas (PA) are a key factor to preserve the natural assets along the Danube. Varying from country to country, PA administrations work in different institutional settings, but generally as a state or a state owned public body. They work on the spot, have first hand knowledge of the practical needs and problems of conservation as well as of the needs and wishes of locals, visitors and a variety of other stakeholders. Yet many PA administrations along the Danube are today rather young institutions, still developing basic structures, strategies and management practices, often sharing their responsibility for the area with other public bodies like state forestry services or water authorities.

The proponents of the Danube River Network of Protected Areas (DRNPA) want to establish a stable and organised platform to reach a new quality of continuous practical cooperation of PAs along the Danube, based on a clearly defined working programme of projects and activities coordinated by a steering body and a small coordination unit (secretariat).

### Main foreseen activities



*Fig. 1: Subjects of main concern within the "Danube River Network of Protected Areas"*

### **Setting up the basic Network structure**

A main aim of the project is to set up the basic organisation and communication structure of the new network. A coordination unit (network secretary) will be established and based for the first four years at Nationalpark Donau-Auen, acting as Lead Partner for the ETC project. Other project partners (PAs) will take the lead in specific project modules.

Within the project period of four years a permanent funding of the basic network structure will have to be found and secured.

Measures:

- legal constitution of DRNPA and steering board
- Setting up of coordination unit (network secretary)
- continuous communication with network membership
- creation and running of network website, newsletter and other communication tools
- production of folders and other medias
- participation and lobbying in international bodies (ICPDR, EU commission, Ramsar Convention)
- securing future funding of the basic network structure

### **Floodplain Forest and Meadows Management**

PA administrations are facing similar tasks and problems concerning the management of floodplain forests and meadows. By co-operation with other PA they learn from the experience gained in other regions in order to use their own resources in the most efficient way.

Measures:

- Formation of a permanent working group "floodplain forest management" (PA responsible staff and experts), yearly workshops and study visits
- Exchange of staff
- international internship-programme
- creation of a concept and a catalogue of requirements for ecological compatible forestry operations in flood plain forest with special interest in the implementation of the FFH directive
- Help in designating new protected areas along the Danube, providing basic elements for a management plan

### **River Morphology and River Revitalisation**

The long term future and quality of the Danube ecosystem is more than anything else determined by the hydrological and hydro morphological conditions of the river. The deep impact of hydro morphological alterations in the past has become more and more striking over the decades. In the last years some countries have started more or less ambitious river and floodplain revitalisation projects. With their specific focus on habitat conservation and restoration protected areas provide best and most favourable conditions for the implementation of model projects. Navigation projects in line with the designation of the Danube as a Pan-European Transport Corridor VII put new pressure on the river ecosystem. Integrated projects however can open the way for large scale river and floodplain

restoration measures, as the Austrian example shows. The same can be said for new flood protection schemes. To reach such an approach PA management has to be enabled to discuss the matter at the same eye level with water engineers.

Measures:

- Formation of a permanent working group “river morphology and river revitalisation” (PA responsible staff and experts),
- Organisation of 3 workshops:
  - river bank and side arm restoration
  - navigation and river morphology
  - new ways for flood prevention and retention
- basic concepts and planning for selected cross-border revitalisation projects
- elaboration of a joint strategic paper: conservation needs, chances and restraints for current navigation and flood protection projects and concepts
- collaboration with the ICPDR Expert Group River Basin Management

### **Danube wide conservation programmes (flagship species)**

To preserve the full richness of Danube species and habitats local and national conservation strategies are necessary and important, but not sufficient. In general habitats are wider than the PAs. Many species migrate along the river ignoring both PA borders and national frontiers. There is an urgent need for joint conservation programmes along the Danube.

Partly based on ongoing initiatives, DRNPA will concentrate on developing and implementing transnational conservation strategies for a few “flagship species” like migrating fishes and big birds of preys like the White-tailed Eagle. The survival and the reintroduction of Danube sturgeons is an aim that can only be reached by international cooperation. Another focus is given to species which can serve as indicators for the most endangered habitats like open gravel or sand banks. Special attention is drawn to the European beaver, an extinct species that has been successfully introduced in the Danube floodplain creating new challenges for wildlife management.

Measures:

- Formation of a permanent working group “bird conservation” (PA responsible staff and experts),
- Formation of a permanent working group “migrating fishes” (PA responsible staff and experts),
- International internship-programme (ornithologists, ichtiologists)
- Development of a transnational conservation strategy for the White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*):
  - Establishment of an international database for the Danube
  - Coordinated Danube ringing program
  - Radio tracking
  - Pilot projects for the protection of nesting sites
  - International workshop
- Development of a transnational monitoring programme including conservation strategy for the Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*):
  - joint Danube mapping programme (every 2 years)
  - habitat analysis

- Development of a transnational conservation strategy for the Sturgeons
  - Collaboration with ICPDR task force
  - Preparation of a Danube wide restocking & conservation project (to be submitted to LIFE+)
  - Joint activities to raise public awareness (sturgeon festivals, sturgeon monuments, folder)
- Development of an international Danube fish database with special emphasis on migrating fishes and the implementation of Natura 2000
- International workshop on the ecology of European beaver (*Castor fiber*) in the Danube floodplains

### **Danube Nature Tourism**

The development of sustainable nature tourism is a great challenge for protected area management. It is a key element to fulfil the educational mission of PA management as well as an essential tool to raise public awareness and gain acceptance for conservation. Not the least it can be an important source of income both for the PA administration and for local communities.

With tourist initiatives and development coming from PA management itself it is easier to solve the potential conflict between tourism and conservation needs and to control possible negative impacts of tourist activities coming from outside the PA management.

As a distinctive feature Danube River Protected Areas should offer the opportunity for deep personal “nature experience”, as close to nature as possible, facilitated by skilled and authentic interpretation rangers (PA staff or trained locals). Since water is the dominant factor of the ecosystem, some PAs have successfully developed different forms of guided boat trips on the river and in the floodplain. Small and bigger visitor centres as well as nature trails gain increasing importance.

Danube tourism on a river wide scale is today dominated by tours celebrating the rich cultural heritage of the Danube cities. Joint marketing efforts of DRPA should change this image and give Danube and give focus to Danube nature and natural areas.

Measures:

- Formation of a permanent working group “nature tourism and nature education” (PA responsible staff and experts), yearly workshops and study visits
- Joint ranger training programme, language courses (English)
- Exchange of staff
- international internship-programme
- Joint marketing activities (DRNPA website, packages for tourist operators, co-operation with international organisations as Danube Tourist Commission, International Friends of Nature, etc.), including PA’s regional partners and products
- Development and support for different forms of “soft” boat tourism (canoes, dinghies, traditional wooden boats, electric boats, guided tours, etc.) as key element and common trademark for DRPA nature tourism
- Cross border nature tourism pilot projects (trails, programme of guided tours, maps, folders, etc.)
- “the Danube river natural heritage”: mobile exhibitions, movies, etc. to be placed in the PA visitor centres

### **Cultural Exchange between Danube PA regions**

Each region along the Danube has its own profile. Protected areas and National Parks are representative for the image of a region and contribute to the formation of a regional identity. But there is no common “Danube identity” for regions and people living in different (rural) regions along the river. PA can play a catalyst role in bringing people

together living in Danube PA regions and in fostering a mutual understanding of the common heritage by visiting Danube nature and exchanging Danube regional costumes, dances, music and food.

Measures:

- organisation of a yearly Danube Nature Festival, each year in a different protected area
- initiatives for the creation of formal international partnerships of villages or town communities in different PA regions

### Expected outputs and results

- common identity for the Danube River PAs preserving and developing a common European natural and cultural heritage
- strengthen and support the local or regional PA administrative bodies through continuous transnational exchange of information, knowledge and experience, learning from best-practice-models, expert meetings, training and exchange of staff and interns
- enable PA administrations to implement bi- or multilateral pilot projects of Danube wide significance
- preparation of transnational projects to be submitted to national and international state and private funds
- development and implementation of transnational conservation strategies, focusing on migrating fishes and birds, on the practical implementation of FFH- and WFD directives and on impacts and chances of new navigation and flood protection schemes
- developement and implementation of common strategies and standards for river and floodplain nature tourism
- give Danube PA a joint voice on a European and international level (European Commission, ICPDR, Ramsar Convention) to articulate the practical needs of nature conservation along the Danube
- foster new friendships and cultural exchange between communities living in Danube PA regions through PA administrations acting as catalysts

### Innovative character of the project idea

The Protected Areas have already been confronted with all foreseen tasks on a national level. Now this project gives for the first time a platform for the Protected Areas at the Danube River to cooperate on a transnational level. Therefore - following the example of the Alpine Network of Protected Areas – the project “Danube River Network of Protected Areas – Development and Implementation of Transboundary Strategies for the Conservation of the Natural Heritage at the Danube River” could lead to a new quality of cooperation of the Protected Areas on several topics.

### Partnership

Partners involved at this stage

ERDF Partners	Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (Romania), Duna-Drava National Park (Hungary), Duna Ipoly National Park (Hungary), Danube Flood Plain Protected Landscaper Area (Slovakia), MA 49???
IPA Partners	State Nature Conservation of Serbia, Kopacki rit (Croatia)

<b>Partners requested</b>	ENPI Partners*	
	ERDF Partners	
	IPA Partners	
	ENPI Partners	

**Estimated Total Budget**

**2.400.000 €**

**Does your project idea foresee the application for the 10% rule\***

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes. Please, explain in detail what will it be used for and the relevance for the project	<input type="checkbox"/> No
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**Estimated duration**

(in months)

**48 months**

X☐ I would like my project's idea to be published on the Southeast Europe Transnational Programme's website and presented during the SEE kick off event.

\* ENPI Funds won't be available for the 1<sup>st</sup> Call. Partners from Ukraine and Republic of Moldova can be involved by applying for the 10% rule.

\* The 20% rule is not applicable for the 1<sup>st</sup> Call.