



Trans-border tourism in the central and lower Danube region

Creating a trans-regional Competence Centre as a shared platform for tourism promotion in the Danube region



Background

The Danube, the second-longest river in Europe, winds its way through ten countries between the Black Forest and Black Sea, linking up myriad cultural and economic regions. While tourism is well developed in the upper reaches from Germany through Austria and Slovakia down to Hungary, the countries in the central and lower Danube region are still very much on the sidelines of the international travel and tourism business. Although the region has a lot to offer in terms of its pristine natural beauty and cultural heritage, it still lacks internationally marketable tourism products.

The countries in the lower Danube region are undergoing a profound process of transformation towards a free-market economic system. However, ineffective public structures continue to restrict full exploitation of the economic potential here. And even though the region has laid its turbulent past to rest, there is still a need for greater international cooperation.

These circumstances are also holding back tourism, a key sector with enormous promise for this region's future. For the people living in this part of the Danube region, all this adds up to one key challenge – the unfavourable conditions for economic development, and how to change these for the better.

The Project

On behalf of Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH has been working to strengthen trans-regional structures linking Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova since 2009, with the objective of improving the conditions for trans-border tourism in the central and lower Danube region. The innovative element at the heart of this approach is the creation and roll-out of a regional institution, the Danube Competence Center (DCC), headquartered in Belgrade. Consisting of more than 60 members from the private, state and non-governmental sectors, DCC is engaged in tourism in all of the Danube riparian states. As a regional platform, DCC provides advice and support services for national tourism ministries, government agencies, cities, towns and municipalities as well as private-sector and civil-society organisations. DCC thus serves as a platform for regional cooperation, communication and marketing, and especially helps promote economically relevant small and medium-sized companies in the region. It also promotes joint



participation in trade fairs, supports investment decisions and encourages member countries to coordinate their national tourism strategies. GIZ advises DCC members on ways to improve cooperation with partners from other Danube riparian states and on the design of joint tourism products.

DCC is presently working on a number of different pilot projects:

- Joint web portal
- Trade fair representation for the entire Danube region
- Regional conferences, such as the '2nd Danube Floating Conference' 2013
- Promotion of new trans-border tourism services and events along the Danube, e.g. the Blue Week Festival and the launch of a hiking trail and cycling route through Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania
- Advice and support on biodiversity projects for tourism partners
- Quality standards for sustainable tourism in the Danube Delta

Results

DCC activities are geared to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), the main objective of which is to accelerate sustainable economic and cultural development in the macro region and to promote cooperation between Danube riparian states.

The political reorientation of Romania, Bulgaria and Moldova has enabled GIZ to initiate new consultancy inputs for key executing institutions in these partner countries.

In Bulgaria a complementary project measure is backing the implementation of a new tourism strategy and assisting the Bulgarian Ministry of Economy, Energy and Tourism to execute its coordination tasks within the EUSDR. Alongside Romania, Bulgaria is responsible for coordinating EUSDR priority area no. 3 'Culture and Tourism'. Furthermore, creating and supporting a so-called 'Focal Point Destination Danube' is intended to improve the Bulgarian partners' dialogue and communication capacity as well as enhance interaction between decision-makers from the Bulgarian capital and the rest of the Danube region.

The Romanian line ministry is considering setting up a National Tourism Organisation (NTO) as implementing organisation and has requested corresponding advice from the GIZ project.

In Moldova, GIZ is supporting the integration of the country's new NTO into the Danube strategy and the cooperation process.

DCC's diverse member structure also promotes trans-national cooperation between the public and private sector at regional and local level. This has led to joint EU project applications as well as joint marketing activities and new products by tourist organisations, associations and travel tour operators. For example, the Odessa-based sustainable travel company, Salix Eco Tours, featured a three-country tour through Bulgaria, Romania and the Ukraine in its catalogue for the first time in 2011. The trans-national and integrative approach of the Danube Competence Center is highly significant in the trend it sets for economic development in the central and lower Danube region.

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