



4th Participation Day & 6th EUSDR Forum 2017

“A secure, connected and prospering Danube Region”

#civil_society #human_resources #participation_partnership
#sustainable_development #importance_of_media #macro-regional_acting

To be part of the 6th Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) on 18-19 October 2017, as well as the 4th Participation day (PD) on 17 October in Budapest were a great and fruitful experience. For anyone new to the topic I will introduce the Strategy and then focus on my personal highlights during our stay in the capital of Hungary.

Following the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the EUSDR is the second EU macro-regional strategy. 14 participating countries (9 of them EU Member States) build a Danube Region, which hosts the world's most international river. It is a crucial interconnected hydrological basin and a world renowned ecological corridor all at once. The underlying rationale of the Strategy is to connect ideas with the actual needs of the people in the region, which is quite a challenge considering the big differences in the economic performances in the countries and the very diverse communities. One of the central aims is to ensure, that by 2020 all citizens in the region enjoy better prospects if higher education, employment and prosperity.

The 4th PD itself was divided in two days - the first one was held in the impressive Hall of Mirrors at the Andrassy University. The programme was shaped with opening and closing sessions, many inputs and discussions, keynotes presentations, reports, working groups, coffee breaks and a networking lunch. This year's PD was held with the title *“Science meets Participation, Innovation and Sustainability”*. The Agenda for Participation reinforces the role of civil society and participative governance for better policy-making and provides concrete steps for its realization in the Danube Region.

It was an interesting meeting and for me personally the working groups, which were focused on how the targets of the Agenda for Participation can be implemented, were the most exciting part of the day. We needed to generate in small groups our own Participation Partnership, focusing on Social innovation and Sustainable Development. This Partnership had to identify innovative, co-creative and trans-sectoral approaches in order to sustain long term top-down (thinking) and bottom-up (acting) processes (developments). Our brainstorming was quite vivid, as we had input from different countries from the Danube basin. Sharing our personal experiences, we realized our

common weaknesses and challenges (ex. lost in trust in the system; education injustice; lack of dialog for local innovations; lack of support or recognition from the state; lack of transparency and the absence of sensibilisation - no awareness of the people what is going on, etc.). We have concluded, that there cannot be any social innovation without a civil society. For a sustainable development even more people, resources and debates should be mobilized. Essential is building reliable structures and building education for a sustainable change. Starting from the individual awareness there can be an impact of social change.

The second day our group of 6 young parliamentary fellows from Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and the Ukraine, led by Ms. Iryna Gumenchuk (AGAPEDIA Foundation), had the chance to do a presentation and workshop with the major topic “*Participation Through Media*”, having in mind the major headline of the Participation Day. We had a vivid discussion with our guests about the power of media and in which cases the usage of media can be crucial for civil societies. We chose contents like freedom of media vs. trust in media, media literacy, instruments for social media, the legal aspects of using it and summarized the importance of social activism through media for a strong civil society. We chose some case studies from various Danube region countries to show the major differences in the above-mentioned topics. I am eager to work with our group further on this topic and develop it for the next year’s PD and address the problem on a local level.



Our team during the 4th PD and the 6th EUSDR

The following days were full of workshops and plenary sessions, where we had to choose our own topic of interest. I learned for example, that the cooperation of the Strategy focuses on four pillars: connecting the region, protecting the environment, building prosperity and strengthening the region. Within these pillars there are 11 *Priority Areas (PAs)* in order to prioritize efforts more effectively. *Priority Area Coordinators (PACs)*, who are officials of national and regional administrations, manage the specific fields of coordination. The Implementation is managed by the *National Coordinators (NCs)*, who have a strategic coordinating function within their national or regional government. They keep an overview of the participation of their country in the implementation of the EUSDR including all PAs. As I consider human resources as very essential, I took part in the workshop about the funding opportunities for the third pillar of the EUSDR. The importance of mobilizing regions and the EU Education Modell were discussed, as well as the significant role of the *European Social Funding (ESF)* as a main protagonist of funding in the Macro-Regions. Participants were able to discuss potential financing of project ideas relevant for the EUSDR and get an inside in the potential financial instruments available for each of the pillars.

The Forum and the PD are a great networking place, where you can meet interesting people and potential partners. It a perfect connecting platform for stakeholders and organizations with common interests.

I am so excited to be part of the 5th PD and 7th EUSDR annual forum and even more excited that it will take place in my home city - Sofia. I think that the Bulgarian Presidency of the EUSDR is a wonderful opportunity for national organizations to engage even more in the region and to make participants aware of crucial things going on in my country.

(More [photos](#) made by the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

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