

Report of Working Group “Environment – Sustainability – Youth” of the 7th Danube Participation Day, 21 October 2020

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Irene Lucius, WWF-CEE, gave an overview of the agenda and provided the **EUSDR policy frame**, highlighting the following:

- 1) EUSDR Action Plan of 6 April 2020 outlines five Strategic objectives, out of which three are relevant for this session: Counteracting Climate Change, Stimulating Sustainable Development, and Enhancing Democracy, Sound Administration and Strong Involvement of Civil Society and Youth.
- 2) The EUSDR Governance Architecture paper endorsed on 22 July 2020 emphasises that the National Coordinators should promote dialogue with stakeholders and that Priority Area Steering Groups can invite non-governmental key implementers to attend meetings as observers thus helping to bring the Strategy closer to people.

Blazka Dimitrova, a young Bulgarian, told her inspirational story. Blazhka is a keen follower of the Zero Waste philosophy and believes that with small steps we can achieve positive change in the world we live in. She is the founder of the ZeroWaste Bulgaria Association and of the first restaurant with zero waste in Bulgaria and an author of the book "Life with zero waste in BG". She narrated how she moved from changing her own lifestyle to building a successful business concept on zero waste by carefully choosing her suppliers and finding creative solutions, even through Covid-19 times. She is also teaching others, in particular children, how to change the world step by step using an empathetic communication style.

[Video](#) - please, do not share it without the consent of Blazhka, Zero Waste Bulgaria [website](#).

Monika Spierkermann, an Austrian student of Geography and Intercultural Communications, then told her story. Monika is active with Fridays For Future and with Generation Earth (GE), WWF Austria's youth network. As a member of the GE Steering Committee (elected by the youth network), she closely works with senior WWF management, discussing all aspects of engaging in environmental initiatives, including new ideas, financing and providing speakers for each other's events. She has experienced how both youth and WWF benefit from youth participation in terms of making their organisations more successful and for impactful political action, e.g. influencing environmental policy decisions at national and European and even international level. Website: www.generationearth.at/en/

Rossy Rousseva moderated an interactive session with the audience, collecting key messages and ideas how youth could be better involved in EUSDR environmental affairs:

Summary of key messages

- Youth have an amazing potential in the environmental realm - they can provide energy, fresh ideas and forward looking, relevant solutions - if they are being given trust and space, but preferably also resources
- Working with and in institutions can be helpful for youth, e.g. in the case of Generation Earth that can fall back on expertise and resources provided by the environmental organisation WWF; however, fully independent work can also have benefits
- Youth engagement can be a win-win for youth and institutions involving them - a holistic intergenerational approach is best;
- Youth are ready to get engaged in environmental affairs of EUSDR, including the DCSF
- Youth can help spread messages e.g. on climate action, in their own way, reaching more people, and thereby contribute to a change in behaviour
- Small steps can lead to positive change over time
- Open the mind of youth to environmental issues through fun action / edutainment

Summary of ideas for next steps and opportunities:

- Reach out to young people, help them to understand why it is important to become a part of the story, and to raise funds for engagement
- connect youth movements with environmental organisations
- Entrust an increasing number of young people with tasks under the EUSDR (e.g. dialogue with National Coordinators, Priority Area Steering and working groups, DCSF), actively involving them in the whole process - from brainstorming to real action; and include more youth in the Forum and Youth Participation Day ;-)
- propagate successful stories of youth involvement in environmental affairs, incl green businesses
- Lets create a "Danube State", where youth is a priority :)
- Create a marketing plan, produce video content, to promote youth projects, initiatives; inspiring stories to be shared via social networks,, e.g. Instagram, TikTok

Srdjan Stancovic, Danube Youth Network and Supernatural, and Irene Lucius pledged taking these points forward and collected names of interested co-workers:

- Ivana Davidovic, National Coordinator office in Serbia
- Eva Gänsdorfer, Global 2000, Austria,
- Blazhka Dimitrova, Zero Waste Enthusiast
- Rossy Rousseva, WWF CEE, youth engagement and marketing in the CEE region;
- Monika Spiekermann , Generation Earth and a FFF activist
- Sorana Pogacean, New Horizon Foundation