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the magazine for the danube countries

Edition Climate Change
Municipal Climate Congress BW

danube connects



Municipal Climate Conference

Baden-Württemberg and the Danube Region



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TELL GREEN STORIES**
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Dear readers,

Black to black - from the Black Forest to the Black Sea, the Danube connects ten European countries.

Climate change is a global problem, but at the same time it requires regional cooperation. Politicians have recognised this, and for the first time the Municipal Climate Congress in Baden-Württemberg was given an international orientation along the Danube to the Balkans.



Particularly in the Balkans, there is still untouched nature and rivers, such as the Vjosa in Albania. They need to be protected, and local civil society is committed to their conservation.

As the interviews with the two mayors Gergely Karácsony from Budapest and Dominic Fritz from Timisoara show, a rethink is beginning in politics. Citizens are now demanding more from politicians and are even taking legal action before the German Constitutional Court to achieve the climate goals - with success.

We report on numerous projects of the Baden-Württemberg Foundation for Climate and Environmental Protection, in which young people are working to preserve nature and the environment. But this also includes consuming more consciously, eating less meat, purchasing regional products. The younger generation is showing us how we can do our part.

If we then succeed in creating technical innovations, for which the state of Baden-Württemberg is known, to the benefit of nature, then we still have hope for the preservation of our beautiful world and living space for future generations.

Sabine Geller,
editor-in-chief & founder,
danube connects

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We offer information and images from the international press on politics, tourism and culture in the Danube region. Furthermore, we keep you on track about the Danube Strategy and the various events alongside the Danube. Come and take a look!



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DANUBE OFFICE
ULM/NEU-ULM





Towns and villages tell green stories

Which stories have worked well for you? What innovations have you come up with that are good for the climate? Exchanging on all kinds of climate protection projects in municipalities - that was the aim of the municipal climate congress organised in May by the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of the Environment, the City of Ulm and the Danube Office Ulm/Neu-Ulm. With around 660 registrations, many cities, municipalities, districts and institutions participated online. The newly elected Lord Mayor of Timisoara in Romania, Dominic Samuel Fritz, and Vice Mayor Kata Tüttő from Hungary's capital Budapest also emphasised how important climate protection is.

"Climate protection can be fun." This was the message sent out by the Lord Mayor of Ulm, Gunter Czisch - and he highlighted the "Fridays for Future" movement. According to Czisch, the movement created an atmosphere that inspired many others. He said the municipalities were now feeling the "tension". In addition, the past one and a half years of Corona have turned some

fore, weather expert Sven Plöger called for more "blue" and "green" in cities to make them fit for climate change - i.e. more water areas and green spaces for the cooling effect. In Ulm, there is still room for improvement in this respect. A year ago, a new central square was completed at the railway station, which is a stone and concrete desert. Some citizens criticise the lack of plants. But they also criticise the fact that the majority of the city council recently voted in favour of widening the busy B10 that runs through the city. Six lanes are to become eight, and part of the green belt will be removed. The city will become more car-friendly again.



long-held convictions upside down. Czisch: "We now have a fundamental crisis. People feel that our very foundations are challenged: How do we live together? What is important for our future and for our children's future? Higher, faster, further... That's no longer possible."

Ulm calls itself not only a city of science, but also a city of the future. Digitisation and sustainability are supposed to offer its inhabitants a future that is worth living and will still be so for our grandchildren. However, the night be-

fore, weather expert Sven Plöger called for more "blue" and "green" in cities to make them fit for climate change - i.e. more water areas and green spaces for the cooling effect. In Ulm, there is still room for improvement in this respect. A year ago, a new central square was completed at the railway station, which is a stone and concrete desert. Some citizens criticise the lack of plants. But they also criticise the fact that the majority of the city council recently voted in favour of widening the busy B10 that runs through the city. Six lanes are to become eight, and part of the green belt will be removed. The city will become more car-friendly again.

When the Lord Mayor of Ulm, Gunter Czisch, speaks of sustainability, he thinks primarily of technical possibilities in Ulm: the district heating network that supplies more and more households. Or the new requirement that anyone who builds a house on a municipal property must install a solar system. Czisch also has in mind that there is a lot of research on fuel cells, hydrogen and solar energy in his city. Ulm also wants to achieve a climate-neutral administration by 2023. Many municipalities in Baden-Württemberg are currently focusing on better energy management - in other words, they are trying to save energy and identify potential for generating energy.

This can be achieved by taking small steps, such as replacing lighting with LEDs. Or making municipal buildings more energy efficient. Other municipalities, on the other hand, are replacing the municipal vehicle fleet with e-cars.



Vorarlberg in Austria, in particular, has repeatedly pioneered in climate protection. Gregor Sellner from the Energy Institute there not only presented examples of sustainable building. He also showed how municipalities can (re) create a lively and car-free town centre, despite the increase in motorised individual traffic. Blumenegg in Vorarlberg has come up with the project "I koof im Dorf" - "I shop in the village": anyone who comes to Blumenegg to shop locally receives a stamp in the respective shop, if they have come by bus, bike or on foot. After ten stamps, the stamp pass is full and the customer can get a regional shopping voucher. So the added value stays in the region again.

"Mobility" turned out to be one of the mega-topics of the congress. That became clear in a digital survey in which the participants could take part. It's a matter dear to the hearts of many. Sebastian Rihm from the Danube Office in Ulm presented how the "Danube Pearls" network strives to enable tourists in the Danube countries to easily move from sight to sight without a car: by bike, bus, train, canoe, car sharing or carpooling. "When you travel around an area by public transport instead of by car, you get more in touch with the country and its people." You miss a lot when you're driving 120 kilometres per hour on the motorway.

In addition, the Danube Office already organised a virtual side event with the Ulm Chamber of Commerce and Industry on the day before the congress. Its main focus: "Climate Protection and Green Economy in the Danube-Sava region". The almost 70 participants were able to make new contacts and initiate cooperation. In addition to people from the Danube-Sava region, the event was



The new Baden-Württemberg Environment Minister Thekla Walker made her first big appearance at the Climate Congress.

primarily aimed at companies that are already active in South-Eastern Europe or are interested in partners, suppliers or cooperation in the Danube-Sava region with a focus on climate protection/sustainability and the green economy. After all, why travel halfway across the globe - to China, India, the USA? When good things are so close by? Supply chains can be shortened again and products thus become more environmentally friendly if the potential of companies from the Danube region is increasingly recognised.

Isabella Hafner
journalist, Ulm



Municipal Climate Congress Baden-Württemberg 2021
The Municipal Climate Congress takes place every two years in a city in Baden-Württemberg. This year it was organised by the city of Ulm, the Danube Office Ulm/Neu-Ulm and the State Ministry for the Environment. For the first time, the congress also had an international dimension: participants from the Danube countries were represented as well. In addition, the European Energy Award was presented.



Tamás Kovács/MTI

"Our region must play its part in Europe's green transition."

Gergely Karácsony didn't just cycle to the office on his first day at work.

Gergely Karácsony, Budapest's green-liberal Lord Mayor since October 2019, comes from Hungary's rural north-east. With the convinced cyclist came a new style of leadership in the city: residents should be involved in decisions as much as possible. In mid-May, he announced his participation in the opposition's primary election for the 2022 parliamentary elections. An interview on the occasion of the Climate Congress in Ulm.

You ran for the Hungarian local elections in October 2019 with the promise to make Budapest greener, more climate- and bicycle-friendly, and more liveable as mayor. Where do you currently stand with these plans?

In Budapest, the election was not about replacing a leader, but a leadership style with a completely different one. We believe in the vision of a green, liveable, free Budapest. To fulfil this, we are making decisions that are in line with and inclusive of the will of the people of Budapest. Instead of immediate, expensive and permanent interventions, we test our ideas with temporary solutions and pilot projects, especially in transport, and give people time to test and evaluate. We have also handed over new trams and buses, improved pedestrian safety through small targeted measures, started the renewal of the Great Ring Road, created new cycle lanes, developed a new climate strategy, we are developing the MOL Bubi bicycles and much more. Other important projects are the participatory budget,

where Budapest residents can decide on almost three million euros. The phase for collecting ideas ended recently, now the ideas received will be voted on, and the winning ideas will be implemented in the summer. In April, the City Parliament adopted the new urban development strategy, which we will use over the next seven years to make Budapest even more liveable, greener, more competitive and more inclusive.

Your decision to give a lane on the busy Great Ring Road in the centre of Pest to cyclists drew some criticism. For example, it was said that only a few cyclists use the lane that is closed for them, while cars are jammed in the only lane left for them.

The Great Ring Road is the busiest cycling lane in Hungary today. It is absurd that the historic centre of Budapest has only a traffic function. I was aware that this would not be a popular move, that I would have to convince some of my own voters. However, this is a debate that needs to be

had. Basically, the point is that if the trends Budapest and the surrounding area are heading towards continue, life here will be hell in 10 years, much worse than it is now. In the long run, these inevitable measures make sense.

How do you assess the importance of the global "Fridays for Future" movement in Hungary?

With the climate crisis, we see that youth globally can be one of the most important engines for positive change. No wonder, because the sometimes insufficient engagement of politics will have a negative impact on the lives of younger generations. Therefore, I wholeheartedly welcome youth engagement as well as all kinds of bottom-up, constructive social activism. We want to encourage and support this in Budapest in every way. In Hungary, this is also very important because the government does not communicate enough about the climate crisis and does not use the available opportunities to inform the masses and shape opinions. The social pressure

for a successful sustainability transition comes mainly from Fridays for Future and similar movements.

You were invited to the Municipal Climate Congress Baden-Württemberg 2021, do you generally keep up to date on climate policy, what is being debated abroad, for example in Germany?

Our city diplomacy is intended to make knowledge and international experience of foreign partners - for example in the association ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, in the Global Covenant of Mayors network or the Energy Cities - available to Budapest as well. I myself regularly inform myself about the strategies and successes of cities and countries that are leaders in climate protection.

It is a great pleasure for Budapest to have the opportunity to participate in the Congress and to give a welcoming speech in the person of Deputy Mayor Kata Tüttő together with the Mayor of Ulm. Germany is also a leader in Europe in the fight against climate change, so we consider the climate policy solutions of German cities as prime examples.

Are there international cooperations of your city in the field of climate protection, for example with other cities and regions in the Danube region?

In 2019, Bratislava, Warsaw, Budapest and Prague jointly launched the "Pact of Free Cities" initiative. While this is not a technical policy cooperation on climate action, we are committed to putting sustainability and climate action at the heart of our city governance and development, to cooperate in this area and to jointly give a voice to climate-conscious metropolitan voters in the region. We are also exploring the possibility of jointly accessing funding from the EU's Green Transition programmes. Our region needs to play its part in Europe's green transition, and as

we see that some governments, such as Hungary's, have only committed to this rhetorically rather than practically, we want to be at the forefront of this process at city level.

What are the concrete measures of the Hungarian capital in the field of climate protection? Are there, for example, efforts for climate-neutral administrative buildings?

When I took office, one of the first things I did was to declare a climate emergency in Budapest. We set up the Main Department for Climate and Environment, which provides the institutional framework for climate protection. At the end of March, I adopted the Main City Climate Strategy and the Action Plan for Sustainable Energy and Climate that it had prepared. The priorities of the strategy include the significant reduction of harmful emissions and the reduction of the effects of climate change. The largest CO2 emissions are related to the energy use of buildings. Therefore, one of the main objectives of the action plan is to upgrade the energy efficiency and energy-conscious operation of the City Hall and our facilities. Short-term plans include meeting the energy and heating needs of the capital's wastewater treatment plants entirely with locally generated renewable energy.

Budapest's climate strategy, adopted in April 2018 while still under its predecessor, set as one of its targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 6% from the 2015 baseline by 2020, and by 15% by 2030. Did the first target succeed?

At the moment, we do not have complete statistics for 2020, but the data for 2019 show that Budapest's CO2 emissions did not decrease compared to 2015, but increased slightly. This is not surprising, as no meaningful programmes or measures to reduce them were launched in those years.

And does the city still have the same target for 2030, despite a much "greener" new mayor?

In line with the importance of the issue, or in better harmony with the European targets, we have increased the target in our new climate strategy: a 40% reduction in the city's CO2 emissions by 2030. To achieve this, one third of Budapest's housing stock must be comprehensively renovated in terms of energy efficiency in order to significantly reduce the energy demand of the buildings; this is where the greatest savings potential lies.



Gergely Karácsony

The second largest is the reorganisation of transport, e.g. reducing the share of car drivers from 61% to at least 30%, increasing public transport to 50% and cycling from about 1% to 5% through traffic restrictions, regulation and infrastructure improvements. The third largest potential is offered by the increased use of solar energy. Despite the large potential, only 0.2% of all electricity consumed in Budapest comes from it. To reach the target, a roughly 130-fold increase in this output is needed. To become a greener and more liveable city by 2030, we need the support of all stakeholders: residents, district administrations, the state, businesses and the EU. The planned improvements, most of which can only start with EU funds, are estimated to cost 2,500 billion forints. This will require EU funds, which are available to Hungary for just such purposes.

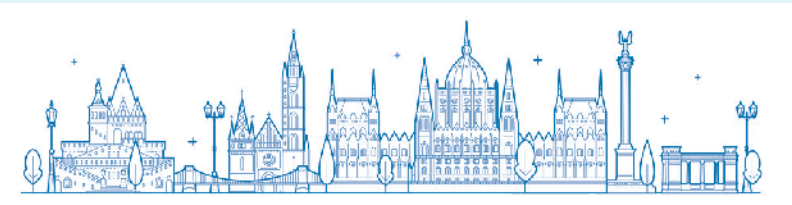
What measures or projects are you planning to strengthen sustainable mobility in Budapest?

The most important pillar of sustainable mobility in Budapest is public transport. We are continuously modernising the most important, mostly rail-based public transport systems. This year we will establish micro-mobility points in the inner districts, regulate the use of scooters, relaunch the bike-sharing system and develop bike lanes. In May, the tender for the design of EuroVelo routes started, local cycle path networks will be created within the framework of 10 state funding projects, and we will make pedestrian subways barrier-free. In 2021, the new FUTÁR public transport app will make it even easier to access transport information.

Do you actually know Dominic Fritz, the German mayor of Timisoara?

I welcome the fact that in 2020 a green and progressive politician became the head of Timisoara. I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting Dominic Fritz in person. I follow his work with interest, especially regarding his progressive and green measures.

Interviewed by
Daniel Hirsch, Budapest



BUDAPEST FORUM – Building Sustainable Democracies

Budapest Municipality and its partners are organising the very first international "Budapest Forum" on the Budapest campus of the Central European University from 15 to 17 September.

The focus is on the role of cities and local initiatives in building liveable and sustainable democracies. In addition to a meeting of the network "Pact of Free Cities" (Prague, Bratislava, Warsaw and Budapest), politicians, journalists, activists and researchers from all over the world will meet in the Danube metropolis to discuss various aspects of the topic. The high importance of the event is reflected in its participants: among others, Nina Hachigian (Deputy Mayor of Los Angeles), Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London), Anne Hidalgo (Mayor of Paris), political scientist Francis Fukuyama, historian Anne Applebaum, Katalin Karikó (Senior Vice President BioNTech), Věra Jourová (Vice President of the European Commission), Michael Müller (Governing Mayor of Berlin), Muriel Bowser (Mayor of Washington) and climate researcher Diana Ürge-Vorsatz (Nobel Peace Prize winner).

Awarding the György Konrád Prize

The György Konrád Prize will be awarded for the first time at the Budapest Forum. This prize honours personalities from politics, culture and civil society who are active for the development of democracy and civil rights, the rejection of nationalism, populism and discrimination against minorities, the strengthening of civil rights and the development of civil society as well as the dignity of the people in the Danube region. The Hungarian-Jewish writer Konrád was himself a civil rights activist during his lifetime and was also president of the Academy of Arts in Berlin. The international jury includes representatives from Budapest, Berlin and Vienna as well as the former mayor of Ulm, Ivo Gönner. The organiser of the award ceremony is Peter Langer from the European Danube Academy in Ulm.

SAVE THE DATE

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"Let's imagine: If our average annual temperature were to drop by four degrees, we would live in a different world. All the Alpine valleys would be covered in snow – Berlin would be under thick ice all year round." Sven Plöger, the well-known TV weather expert, said this at the opening event of the Municipal Climate Congress Baden-Württemberg in Ulm, where he is living since almost 30 years.

The humorous weather presenter - whose book "Zieht euch warm an, es wird heiß" ("Wrap up warmly, it's getting hot") has just been published - knows that anyone who talks about climate change has a hard time. Always these gloomy forecasts for the future. Many people don't even think about acting anymore, "because everything is already too late anyway". Others deny climate change. Or are convinced that mankind will invent something in time to prevent such an apocalypse. The good news is that it's not quite too late, but the eleventh hour.

To illustrate the explosive nature of what the year 2100 could look like, Plöger takes a look back. To a time when it was "only" four degrees colder: the last ice age. If you turn the phenomenon around, you can imagine what the consequences would be for us if the Earth were only four degrees warmer. The polar ice would melt even more - this would flood coastal cities, lead to changing ocean and air currents and massively change the weather. Extreme phenomena such as storms, droughts, forest fires and violent thunderstorms over overheated cities would also increase. And then? People will flee.

According to Plöger, last September alone was 1.3 degrees warmer here, even if you can't really imagine global warming with the cold spring we're ha-

ving. Compared to 100 years ago, it is one degree warmer today. That's why the Paris Climate Agreement is important: by 2100, the temperature increase is to be limited to 1.5 degrees above the pre-industrial level. All 195 countries have agreed on this. Many countries are likely to miss the target, says Plöger. In terms of CO₂ emissions, Germany is currently in sixth place in the world, which is not very glorious. The argument "We'll let the others go first" is not suitable. When he looks at the pre-Corona year 2019: "Never before have there been so many flights. There have never been so many cruises. Never so much plastic waste. Never has there been so much discussion about climate change." If all people lived as they do in Germany, three earths would be needed.

Politicians will have to pay out a great deal of money. The ideas of companies are also needed. "I'd rather someone get rich by cleaning up the environment than by polluting it." And every individual has to ask himself or herself what kind of lifestyle they are living. What's important: a change in consciousness. It is not always about renunciation, but about better alternatives and the realisation that "change and challenges can be fun!"

Isabella Hafner
journalist, Ulm

"It matters to me that I meet people where they are"

He citizen of Germany and mayor of a city in Romania: Dominic Fritz (37), originally from Lörrach in the Black Forest, has been at the helm of Timișoara City Hall since September 2020. Fritz used to be head of cabinet of former German President Horst Köhler and grew fond of the western Romanian city back in 2003, when he completed a year of voluntary social service there. Since then, he has repeatedly come to Timișoara to carry out cultural and social projects. In the following interview, Dominic Fritz reveals what he intends to do as mayor of Timișoara.

One of your concerns as mayor of Timișoara is to make the city bicycle and pedestrian friendly, but also to reorganise public transport in the city. What is the current status of these projects? Is there already a concept for sustainable mobility in the city?

We are very busy putting the whole thing on a new footing, both in public transport and in terms of cycling and pedestrian infrastructure. We are going to commission a study that will reanalyse the public transport network, because it is still functioning on the basis of the network from the 1970s. We want to invest massively in public transport. At the same time, we are currently working on a project to connect different cycle paths in Timișoara and, of course, we also want to have the existing cycle paths repaired. As far as pedestrian infrastructure is concerned, we are working on various district projects, where we want to create new connections within districts, especially between apartment blocks.

At the end of April, as an absolute novelty for the employees of the Timișoara local government, you took a bicycle tour through the city with representatives of the Office for Environmental Protection and Urban Development, with the aim of discovering the problems on site. How did the city hall employees react to this, and what did they notice?

Well, first of all, it was a bicycle tour not only of one single office, but of very different offices, the environmental office, the urban development office, the technical department, because we noticed that many of the projects are not planned together at all, but everyone plans their own part. And because we noticed that officials don't really have a sense of how much of their projects really arrives in the city. So we thought it would be very interesting to experience this on a bicycle, to find out ourselves, for example, how difficult it is to move through the city by bicycle. At the same time, of course, the common discussions on site are important to us. We want to repeat this every fortnight, in different parts of the city, in different constellations, and hope that on the one hand the officials will learn to understand each other's positions better and to incorporate them, and on the other hand, of course, to be closer to the reality of the city.

Your predecessor was often accused of cutting down (healthy) trees in the city. How "green" is Timișoara at present, and how do you plan to increase this quota?

Yes, I would say that we are lucky that – on paper – we have a very high quota now, because the city forest, the hunting forest, was added. This was previously in government hands and has now been transferred to the city.

That helps us purely statistically. But of course, that doesn't change the situation in the city itself. And we want to counteract this in a number of ways. Firstly, with a training programme for the companies that maintain our green spaces, so that they know how to prune trees properly, when to cut them down, etc. We also want to complete the green space register, of course. Furthermore, we have a plan for a new forestation on the outskirts of the city. We want to design a new big park in Ciarda Rosie. We are working very hard to have a new green space policy take root in the city hall and we will also create a new position of chief gardener for this.

You have been invited to the climate conference in Ulm, which will take place on 20 and 21 May. Do you follow the climate policy that is being pursued in Western Europe and especially in Germany? To what extent do you incorporate ideas from Germany into your local climate policy decisions?

Yes, I follow climate policy. Of course, I notice that the discourse is very different. Here in Romania, we have hardly any public awareness that there is a problem as far as climate protection is concerned. Basically, there is a great openness for environmental protection issues here, but this refers primarily to visible things, especially green spaces, trees, mobility, etc. It is a bit more difficult when the public is aware of the issues. The situation is a bit more difficult when it comes to "abstract" climate policy. And I believe that it is important that we manage to make people understand why this is relevant for their own lives and in their own city. That's why I'm a bit cautious when it comes to the German discourse, because it's important to me that I meet people where

they are; that they themselves have the feeling that this is not a new culture of prohibition and that concepts are not being imported from somewhere else,

forward, as far as the infrastructure is concerned. Unfortunately, the project is currently blocked because the association does not have a complete board. We



Dominic Samuel Fritz in front of the city of Timișoara.

but that they really have the feeling, for example when it comes to pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure or green spaces, but also air quality: "Hey, this actually concerns me and maybe I can even contribute to a more modern environmental policy here."

The European Capital of Culture Year 2023 is still a big topic. What is the current status of this project? (especially in view of the recent speculation that Timișoara could be stripped of this title...).

The speculations that the title will be revoked, those are political games, the people who put that in the public space... There is no danger of that, but we are already under a lot of time pressure, even though there was this postponement from 2021 to 2023; because the project is nowhere near where it should be, neither with what concerns the cultural programme, nor with what concerns the cultural infrastructure. We are now working very hard to push that

are waiting for the Ministry of Culture to appoint a representative to the board of the association so that we can hold a general meeting and then put the association back on a new footing. That is also why I will now travel to Bucharest again to talk to the Minister of Culture about this. All in all, I am still optimistic that we will manage to use this year as a real motor for tourism and culture here in the city, not only for 2023, but above all for the years after that.

By the way: do you know the Lord Mayor of Budapest? A network of cities in the Danube region could be advantageous.

No, I haven't met the Lord Mayor yet, although that is certainly interesting. I am currently in the process of reorganising the partnerships with the cities with which Timișoara is twinned. I have already held talks with the mayor of Mulhouse in France, with the mayors of Graz, Gera and Karlsruhe, and I want to continue this. I will certainly also visit Szeged and Novi Sad, i.e. our Hungarian and Serbian twin cities, soon, because it is important that Timișoara benefits from this European character of its own identity, takes this further and promotes mutual learning in the whole region.

*The interview with
Dominic Fritz, Mayor of Timișoara
by Raluca Nelepcu*

EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2023

With a population of around 350,000, Timișoara is Romania's third-largest city and the economic and cultural centre of the Banat region in western Romania. The uprising against the communist Ceausescu dictatorship began there in 1989. In its application for the title of European Capital of Culture, Timișoara presented itself as an intercultural, multi-confessional and entrepreneurial community. Timișoara will hold this title in 2023, together with Elefsina in Greece. www.timisoara2021.ro

TIMIȘOARA

Acting for environment and nature

The Danube Office Ulm/Neu-Ulm is a non-profit limited company of the cities of Ulm and Neu-Ulm. It acts as a project agency for cross-border cooperation in the Danube countries. Its current projects deal with environmental and climate protection and mobility: "Danube Guides Action", "Transdanube Travel Stories" and "Sustainable Mobility in Ulm/Neu-Ulm".

93 women and men from the Danube countries can call themselves Danube Guides. As special nature & culture guides for the Danube region, they are receiving further training and professionalisation in the project "Danube Guides Action". The lead partner is the Danube Office Ulm/Neu-Ulm. The aim is to establish a cross-border Danube Guides network in the medium term.

Originally, the Danube Guides were trained during a pilot action in the EU project LENA (INTERREG B, Danube Transnational Programme, 2017-2019). The Danube Guides combine regional tourism, environmental education and nature conservation, each field benefiting the others. Valentin Grigore confirms this experience. A member of the administration of the Romanian Comana Nature Park between Bucharest and the Danube, he says: "The municipalities record income when the park attracts more tourists through good promotion while maintaining a good conservation status."

Danube Guides for environmental education and nature tourism

For Serbia, the Danube Guides are a new concept, as Zdenka Mitic from the NGO Podunav in Bački Monoštor in the border region of Vojvodina says: "It also helps to break down the negative stereotypes that exist about Serbia and thus contributes to a better image of the country and to sustainable development." Her gaze also goes to the other side of the Danube, to Croatia: "Joint



Danube Guides Train the Trainer seminar in Orth an der Donau in the Danube Floodplains National Park.

activities with Danube guides from our neighbouring country will help to present the entire Middle Danube region, which is the most important part of the Danube region after the Delta in terms of biodiversity."

The emphasis of the current project is on "action". Ultimately, the Danube Guides are to be empowered so that they can develop and offer independent environmental education programmes as well as improve existing ones. Committed guides will go one step further and act as trainers for the next generation of Danube Guides in their country, according to the long-term project goal. With its slogan "Feel Slovenia", Slovenia focuses on nature-based tourism. Here, the project has been very well received. "The philosophy of Danube Guides fits

the Slovenian mentality like a glove. The Slovenian Danube Guides have made it their mission to provide tourists with an entertaining and exciting experience of nature, but also with the knowledge of how important it is to preserve nature for future generations," says Blanka Od-lazek from the project partner Regional Development Agency of Gorenjska in Kranj.

Some things may seem abstract, but the project's quality criteria set very concrete standards. For example, the internal "Quality Guide Lines" prohibit VIP excursions in strictly protected areas with a ban on entering or excursions with speedboats - even under the label of supposed further education.



Leadpartner: Donaubüro Ulm/ Neu-Ulm gGmbH (Deutschland).
Projektpartner: WWF Bulgarien, Comana Nature Park Administra-tion (Rumänien), NGO Podunav Backi Monostor (Serbien), Regional Development Agency of Gorenjska, Kranj (Slowenien).
Weitere Infos: www.danube-guides.net

„For the Bulgarian, nature has always played an important role in his heart. Bulgaria has a cultural, natural and historical heritage to present to the world. The Bulgarian Danube guides are the right people to show you these charms, because they are the keepers of the river and its secrets.”

Tanya Zheleva, Bulgaria

Thomas Zehender,
danube connects, Ulm

TRANSDANUBE TRAVEL STORIES

Environment, economy and tourism are linked to mobility in many ways. The Danube Office Ulm/Neu-Ulm as lead partner is dedicated to this cross-cutting issue in the project "Transdanube Travel Stories" and in the follow-up project "Sustainable Mobility in Ulm/Neu-Ulm".

At the Danube Office Ulm/Neu-Ulm, the project "Transdanube Stories" is followed by "Transdanube Travel Stories", with the Federal Environment Agency Austria as lead partner. The tourism project focuses on storytelling to promote the Danube region as a travel destination: selected sights along travel routes which are linked with a story that can be experienced, which arouses interest in the cultural and natural heritage and, at best, remains in the memory. Environmental considerations also play an important role. Mobility managers and mobility plans are to encourage travellers to switch to environmentally friendly means of transport. Another aim is the prevention of overtourism - all in the spirit of sustainability.

The project partners of "Transdanube Travel Stories" come from Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia and Romania. The 1.82 million euro project is funded by the EU's Interreg programme for the Danube region.



www.donaubuero.de/transdanube-travel-stories-projektinfo
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/travelstoriesproject>

SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY

The follow-up project "Sustainable Mobility in Ulm/Neu-Ulm" builds on the results of the Interreg B project "Transdanube.Pearls". It is aimed at locals and tourists in the Ulm/Neu-Ulm region and is intended as a contribution to climate protection.

The concrete goal is a mobility centre in Ulm/Neu-Ulm as a contact point for tourists. There they should be able to receive comprehensive mobility advice, independent of the providers and always as environmentally friendly as possible. The biggest challenge will probably be to get the many different providers, service providers and organisations in tourism and mobility to work together on a permanent basis. Network meetings and training courses contribute to this, and a study visit to Offenburg is also planned for September 2021, where mobility stations that have already been installed will be inspected. At the end of the year, the Tourism and Mobility Working Group from Ulm and Neu-Ulm will meet at a network day.



Focus on floodplains

The Danube Floodplain project aims to improve the transnational integrative water management and flood risk prevention while maximizing benefits for biodiversity conservation by restoring floodplains, combining classical and green infrastructure, natural retention measures, involving stakeholders.

In the past decades, heavy alteration of wetland ecosystems characterized the land use. Since 1970, 90% of the global wetlands have disappeared together with 84% of vertebrate species. Along the Danube 70% of the floodplains got separated from rivers, and on the remaining ones weighs extreme pressure to provide various services. Nowadays it is clear that nature-based solutions can help making life and management activities sustainable and building strong, resilient ecosystems.

Floodplains play a determining role in mitigation of more frequent climate extremities such as floods or droughts. Their reconnection and restoration and a suitable land use is an integrative solution to both. The more floodplains are restored, the bigger the effect on river basin level.

In the Danube Floodplain project water management institutions work together with researchers and ecologists to improve a tool for floodplain restoration (Danube Floodplain Evaluation Tool),

from selection of proper areas through design of restoration interventions until evaluation of effects on biodiversity, flood control and various ecosystem services. Five pilot areas along the Danube and tributaries in Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia were selected for its testing and preparing feasibility studies. Results showed that enhancing the area of the floodplains increases the amount of water storage capacity, while water level and velocity decrease. Restorations have a detectable effect on flood peak and on shift to maximum water discharge, which mitigates also extreme floods. The results also show the more new, potential floodplains are reconnected to the rivers, the bigger effect on flood peak is detectable. However, there were some exceptions, thus different combination of restoration measures can lead to different efficiency, local circumstances should be taken into account.

Results of meso-scale biodiversity assessment show that floodplain habitats

and thus biodiversity can benefit from increasing the lateral connectivity, as intended by the majority of restoration scenarios. Restoration of biodiversity and wetland ecosystems build a good base for climate impact adaptation as well. While the assessment on the meso-scale shows the general tendency for the development of habitats, a microscale analysis gives insight on the level of species or specific communities. However, this requires in-depth knowledge of the setting and extensive fieldwork.

Ecosystem services and their improvement through restoration have been assessed with involvement of stakeholders on pilot areas. An extended cost-benefit analysis with included ecosystem services was used to show economic benefits. Including integrity and health of ecosystems and their services approved the cost effectiveness of the restorations and the good effect for improving ecosystems as well.

*Andrea Samu,
Living Rivers Programme Project Manager,
Danube River Area, WWF Hungary*



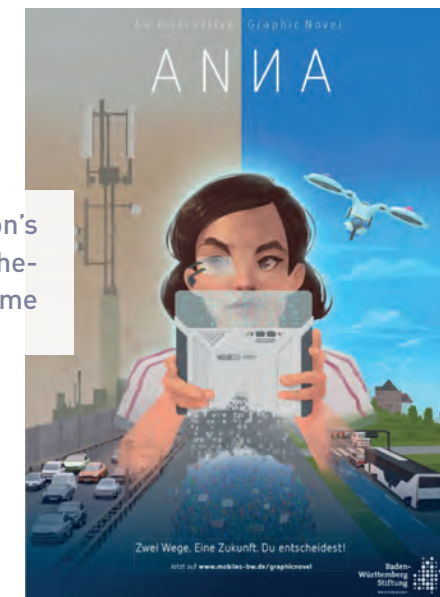
The Danube Floodplain project (Reducing flood risk through floodplain restoration along the Danube River and tributaries – DTP2-003-2.1) is co-funded by the European Union (ERDF, IPA funds).

TWO PATHS. ONE FUTURE. YOU DECIDE!

The Baden-Württemberg Foundation's interactive graphic novel sends its heroine Anna on a journey through time to the year 2050

How can mobility be shaped in the long term?

The Baden-Württemberg Foundation wants to motivate citizens to act sustainably. In order to address the question of sustainable mobility, the Foundation, together with the German environmental association BUND-BW, commissioned a study several years ago, which was presented at a symposium in June 2018. The three mobility scenarios of the future outlined in the study were examined in economic, ecological and social terms. The results of the study show that we should strongly change our mobility behaviour if we want to achieve the Paris climate goals and stop climate change.



Poster for the graphic novel "ANNA".

How can we draw attention to the necessary change in our mobility behaviour?

In order to also interest young people in the topic of mobility and mobility behaviour, we had an interactive, audio-visual application developed, a graphic novel called "ANNA". Together with the 19-year-old heroine Anna, we experience two adventures: We dive into Anna's world, who works as an inde-

pendent programmer in her hometown in Baden-Württemberg in the year 2050 and is accompanied everywhere by her artificial intelligence Jarvis. Two possible developments of our future can be played out, in which Anna receives an important, financially attractive order and suddenly everything goes haywire. The digital format allows us to determine Anna's actions ourselves and make decisions about which future we want to live in. Energy supply and mobility play a decisive role in these adventures. Give it a go on: www.mobiles-bw.de.



An autonomous rental vehicle takes Anna to her destination

CLIMATE PROTECTION FOUNDATION

The Baden-Württemberg Climate Protection Foundation was established on 1 January 2021 with a share capital of 50 million euros as a sub-foundation of the Baden-Württemberg Foundation.

The new foundation accompanies the state on its way to climate neutrality. This makes Baden-Württemberg a pioneer in Germany. The foundation has three core tasks: Firstly, it will initiate, tender and implement its own programmes for education and

research in the field of climate protection in the region of Baden-Württemberg; secondly, climate protection projects in the region, Europe and worldwide will be conceived and implemented, also in cooperation with partners; thirdly, targeted public relations work will draw attention to the concerns of climate protection. The Climate Protection Foundation supports the state of Baden-Württemberg in becoming climate neutral by 2040: it acts as a hub for compensating the CO₂ emissions that are

currently still unavoidable. The aim is to compensate for as much of the CO₂ produced in Baden-Württemberg as possible through the participation of municipalities, companies and citizens. This will soon be possible very simply via the website of the Climate Protection Foundation or, from autumn onwards, via an app that is currently being developed by the Ministry of the Interior of Baden-Württemberg.

www.klimaschutzstiftung-bw.de

The Danube region: a habitat with a future

Projects for sustainability in the Baden-Württemberg Foundation's programme

“Perspective Danube”: The Danube is the most important lifeline in South-Eastern Europe. Due to industrialisation, intensive agriculture and pollution, it is heavily contaminated and its biological diversity is endangered. With the programme "Perspective Danube: Education, Culture and Civil Society", the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung supports educational and exchange projects, many of which involve civil society organisations that are now active in the field of climate protection. In 11 countries, sustainability projects actively encourage different target groups to concern themselves with nature conservation, water protection and biodiversity. The projects also initiate changes towards sustainable development.

cleandanube – swimming for a pure and plastic-free river

AWP - association for wildlife protection e.V.
01.01.2021 – 31.12.2022
Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine

“No effort is too great for clean water.”
Andreas Fath

According to studies, there is more micro-plastic in the Danube than fish larvae. This project counters the pollution of the Danube with micro and macro plastic and contributes to water conservation. Young people from the Danube countries can participate in workshops where they learn how to act in an environmentally responsible way and how to use less plastic.



creativity b
a rich fasad

REGENSBURG

LINZ

design instead
of smoke

VIENNA

underdog on
the move

BRATISLAVA

creative
business

BUDAPEST

the city that
never stands still

surprises
PÉCS

X

OSIJEK

breathe
new life

NOVI SAD

opposites
attract

BELGRADE

a city in new colo

TIMIȘOARA

at home in the underground



Keep Danube diversity alive!: Young people in Ukraine and Moldova become ambassadors of diversity

ChildFund Germany e.V.
01.03.2021 – 31.12.2021
Ukraine, Moldova

“What I learn in the pro-
ject helps me to share my
knowledge with others and
to actively participate in
environmental actions and
projects.”

Viktoria Schadrina

40 young people between 13 and 16 years of age are trained to become ambassadors of diversity and opinion makers. They participate in workshops on different environmental topics, such as biodiversity, eco-management, environmental protection and sustainability. In this way, they gain practical experience in conserving their cultural diversity and the biodiversity of their home - the Danube habitat.

Municipal Climate Congress
Baden-Württemberg for the
Danube Region

Danube Office Ulm/Neu-Ulm
01.12.2020 – 31.08.2021
Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Her-
zegovina, Hungary and Romania

Climate protection and climate adaptation were the main focus of this year's edition of the municipal climate congress on May 21st. The project enables up to 50 participants from Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary and Romania to actively participate. Through their participation, municipal partners from the Danube-Sava-Forum, the Danube Office's project network and the network of Engagement Global (BMZ) had the occasion to gain professional insights, establish contacts, exchange and contribute to the different forums themselves. (see page 4 - 5)

Danube Nature Guides II:
Building bridges between
natural and cultural insti-
tutions in a cross-border
network

Nature School for the Lake
Constance Region e.V.
Romania, Moldova
01.02.2020 – 16.10.2020
Romania, Moldova

“The Comana Natural Park
Administration had the op-
portunity to select a number
of 5 potential guides who
were able to participate in a
training meeting in Danube
Delta. There, the colleagues
obtained a better understand-
ing of the importance and
functioning of the Danube
and its floodplain.”

Valentin Grigore

In the Romanian Comana Natural Park and on the Moldovan side of the Pruth River, the Nature School for the Lake Constance Region is committed to communicating the idea of protecting these areas and their flora and fauna. In particular, water guides have been trained to preserve the protected areas and promote nature conservation through the "Danube Nature Guides" project. In the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve in Tulcea, participants from Romania met in August 2020 to exchange views on the needs of nature parks and their training requirements. In the long term, a cross-border network of Danube Nature Guides is to be developed from the several project phases. Netzwerk der Danube Nature Guides ausgebaut werden.



Friends of the
Danube Youth Camps

AGAPEDIA gGmbH
01.02.2020 – 31.12.2021
Romania, Croatia, Serbia and
Bulgaria

“My favourite part of the
Friends of the Danube camp
was when we were walking in
the forest and learning about
birds that live in the trees.”
Milan

According to the motto "EDU-TAINMENT" (Education + Entertainment), youths and young adults aged 15-30 from the Danube region were able to participate in various Friends of the Danube Youth Camps. The topics of sustainability as well as specific environmental problems (e.g. polluted banks, plastic in the river) were discussed with experts, ideas for solutions were developed together and concrete activities were carried out. The social component also played an important role, for example marginalised delinquent youth participated in the Youth Camp in Bulgaria.



Go Zero, Danube!

Starkmacher e.V.
01.08.2018 – 30.04.2021
Germany, Ukraine and Romania
„I believe in a world without
waste, where my daugh-
ter can live on a safe and
clean planet. I believe that
businesses, authorities and
society should start acting
as this is the only planet we
have, because it is.”
Anastasiia Martynenko

In the youth project, young people from the entire Danube region dealt with the topics of waste avoidance, upcycling and zero waste in order to contribute to a clean and healthy Danube. During the international youth meeting, 75 young people were able to discuss and test practical solutions, methods of waste disposal and river cleaning. Participants could get to know examples of green start-ups and innovative young entrepreneurs and also get inspired for career orientation.

Special publication by

Baden-
Württemberg
Stiftung
WIR STIFTEN ZUKUNFT

PERSPEKTIVE
DONAU

It is quiet. You can hear nothing but the murmur of the river and the chirping of the birds. Although it is cloudy, every now and then a ray of sunlight will hit the surface of the water and make the water's true colour shine. It shimmers in rich emerald green, and every few hundred metres small waterfalls provide a natural spectacle. I am standing on the banks of the Una River in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the town of Bosanski Novi. It got its name from the Romans. Una - the unique one. And it is, just like all the other rivers and streams of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

THE BALKANS - Home to Europe's last living rivers

EUROPE'S RIVERS

"The only remaining crystal-clear wild mountain streams and rivers that are alive are in the Balkans," explains Ulrich Eichelmann. The managing director of Riverwatch, a Vienna-based NGO founded in 2012, is dedicated to saving the rivers. Especially in the Balkans, where there are up to 70% intact lifelines. "People care about the rainforest and the oceans, but hardly about rivers. Yet they are the most threatened ecological asset worldwide. Not even rainforests are shrinking as fast as the blue veins of our Mother Earth. Since 1970, biodiversity in rivers has decrea-



Ulrich Eichelmann (59): ecologist and conservationist. Born in Germany, he is living in Vienna since 30 years. After studying landscape conservation in Höxter, he worked for WWF Austria until 2007, where he led numerous projects and campaigns to protect rivers. He is internationally active against the construction of hydroelectric power plants in Europe.



The Štrbacki Buk waterfall on the river Una near the town of Bihacis considered one of the most beautiful in Europe.

sed by 83%. Their biggest enemy: hydroelectric power plants." Of course, a hydroelectric power plant is supposed to contribute to the electricity supply. And yet, hydroelectric power plants are bad! They're the worst thing you can do to nature. "Up to a certain point, they are okay. But we have too many of them. Officially there are 28,000 in Europe and we have reached the overdose a long time ago. The downside is dead rivers. In Europe, almost all rivers and streams are regulated, dammed and diverted. They are more canals than li-

ving flowing waters. We have grown up with them and don't even know what a living river looks like. Let's take the Danube in Vienna as an example. Unfortunately, it no longer has anything to do with its natural state. Before, it consisted of many arms. Today there is only one big river, regulated by man for centuries", says Eichelmann.

The Balkans, especially Bosnia-Herzegovina, are an exception: "In this country, the overall nature is so intact that it is something extraordinary even

in the Balkans. It could become the Costa Rica of Europe because of its natural jewels," Eichelmann gushes. Here, the naturally forested mountain slopes along the rivers are also intact, which are part of a river basin. When it rains, the water is filtered and purified all the way to the river. That is why its water shimmers from light blue to emerald green.

In 2010, Eichelmann noted that the Balkan states were becoming more and more interesting for investors. "The political leadership in these countries is a calamity for them. Their whole system is based on exploiting natural resources to get rich quickly" says Eichelmann. Especially the rivers are drawing the interest of people who want to make quick money with hydropower plants. There are about 1400 existing ones, another 3500 are planned, 90% of which are so-called mini power plants. "Our study in the Balkans showed that if all the planned plants were expanded, 49 fish species would become extinct or reach the limit of existence. That would be about ten percent of all European river fish species," Eichelmann notes.

Such a mini power plant was also to be built on the Una River, right in the heart of the Una National Park near the extraordinary waterfalls. The local population was able to prevent this. "If it had been built, one of the most beautiful waterfalls would no longer exist." Anes Podić of the NGO Eko-Akcija, whose headquarters are in Sarajevo, has been fighting to preserve Bosnia-Herzegovina's rivers since 1990. He recounts how foreign companies, local politicians and private investors want to build these mini power plants because they are profitable for generations: "The builders sign contracts with the state that are valid for 30 to 50 years with the prospect of extension. The state guarantees them the purchase of the electricity produced for a multiple price per kilowatt. For example: the population pays 1 BAM (0.50 Euro) per ki-

lowatt, the state pays 3 BAM (1.50 Euro) according to the contract". However, the country is not dependent on this electricity. On the contrary. The existing power plants produce so much electricity that it exports a third of its generated energy to neighbouring countries. These small hydropower plants do not produce any electricity at all, they only destroy. The fish huchen, also known as "Danube salmon", serves as an example. The Balkans are their paradise, because they need flowing rivers that are rich in nitrogen and gravel beds so that they can spawn: "Millions are currently being invested in trying to keep the remaining stocks alive here in Austria by renaturalising the rivers. But this is only half successful and it will never be possible to return a river to its original state. On the other hand, money is paid to make healthy stocks sick. This is one

of many examples that show how absurd the situation is," Eichelmann and Podić say. Before, the river flows for everyone, after construction, one family benefits from it for generations, while all the others suffer. But something is happening. "In terms of civil society, the Balkans are an absolute role model for the Western countries in terms of personal commitment to nature. I am thinking, among others, of the women of Kruščica who occupied a bridge for more than 500 days and nights to successfully prevent the construction of two hydroelectric power plants. And there are more examples," Eichelmann says. Today, Riverwatch cooperates with several lawyers in the Balkans to oppose the planned mini hydropower plants. It also works with scientists: "We now travel with them to Albania to the river Vjosa. We will use the



The river Neretva is known for its emerald green natural colour.



The river Vjosa in Albania, one of the last great wild rivers in Europe flows from its source in Greece to its mouth in the Albanian Adriatic Sea.

„ The Vjosa is the last large natural and intact river in Europe. It is important to maintain the natural watercourse so that biodiversity can survive.“

Olsi Nika, Albanien

results of the investigations for legal actions against the construction of water plants."



Mirella Sidro and Anes Podić.



Biologist Olsi Nika, Albania.

The Vjosa River in Albania is also one of the world's unique natural assets. Biologist Olsi Nika from the NGO EcoAlbania has been fighting for the rivers of his homeland since 2010. He actually grew up by the sea and realised how unique the rivers are: "The Vjosa is the last great natural and intact river in Europe. It is important to maintain the natural watercourse so that the naturally occurring biodiversity can also survive." So far, the construction of hydroelectric power plants has been prevented, in part thanks to international communication, in which actor Leonardo Di Caprio also participated. Nika is now fighting for Vjosa to be recognised as a national park: "A national park is a natural area. 70% of it is untouched nature, while the rest can be used sustainably and traditionally by the inhabitants in harmony with nature. But the most important point is that no hydroelectric power plants or oil rigs can be built in a national park. That is our goal."

Ulrich Eichelmann, Anes Podić and Olsi Nika - they are synonymous with an international network that works to preserve rivers. With success - quite a few hydroelectric power plants could be prevented. And the governments in the Balkans feel compelled to change the laws in favour of the last living rivers. If you want to see what naturally living river systems look like or have looked like, you have to go to the Balkans. Especially to Bosnia-Herzegovina or Albania.

*Mirella Sidro,
journalist, Sarajevo*

Our author Mirella Sidro received support for travelling from Audi AG Germany and Audi BiH during her road trips to the Balkans. Vehicle models: Audi e-tron Sportback 55 quattro
Audi Q3 Sportback 40 TDI quattro

Together with the Volkswagen Group, Audi is one of the first car manufacturers to commit to the Paris Climate Agreement. The company is pursuing the goal of CO₂-neutral mobility and aims to become climate-neutral throughout the company by 2050.

