

Bottom-up approaches and public participation in transboundary water governance

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The Danube River Basin

The Danube River Basin comprises of an area of 801,463 km². It is the world's most international river basin, as it extends into the territories of 19 countries.

The ecosystems of the Danube River Basin are highly valuable in environmental, economic, historical and social terms, but they are subject to pressures and pollution from agriculture, industry and cities - issues which are jointly addressed by the Danube Basin countries through the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR).

The International Commission for Protection of Danube River

The ICPDR is an International Organisation consisting of 14 cooperating states and the European Union. Since its establishment in 1998, the ICPDR has grown into one of the largest and most active international bodies of river basin management expertise in the World. The ICPDR deals not only with the Danube itself, but also with the whole Danube River Basin, which includes its tributaries and the ground water resources.

The goal of the ICPDR is to implement the Danube River Protection Convention (DRPC) and make it a living tool. In addition, the ICPDR is the body that coordinates the implementation of EU Water Framework Directive and EU Floods Directive in the Danube River Basin. Until December 2015, the ICPDR will finalise the development of 6-year work programs in line with these two directives, the Danube River Basin Management Plan Update 2015 (DRBM Plan) and the Danube Flood Risk Management Plan (DFRM Plan). For both these plans extensive public participation work was conducted, which is described in more detail below.

The ICPDR mission is to promote and coordinate sustainable and equitable water management, including conservation, improvement and rational use of waters for the benefit of the Danube River Basin countries and their people. The ICPDR pursues this mission by making recommendations for the improvement of water quality, developing

mechanisms for flood and accident control, agreeing standards for emissions and by assuring that these are reflected in the Contracting Parties' national legislations and applied in their policies.

Objectives and legal framework for Public Participation

The ICPDR is committed to active public participation in its decision making. The commission believes that this facilitates broader support for policies and leads to increased efficiency in the implementation of measures. The ICPDR pursues the consultation of stakeholders in the entire cycle of ICPDR activities: from conceptualising policies, to implementing measures, to evaluating impacts. A legal framework for this is provided by Article 14 of the EU Water Framework Directive as well as Articles 9 and 10 of the EU Floods Directive.

In practice, the ICPDR pursues public participation primarily through two avenues: (1) through the continuous involvement of observer organisations in its ongoing work; and (2) through specific activities that are dedicated to public participation and information. Although not purely aimed at public participation, a third line of relevant activities are ad-hoc stakeholder dialogues. These are conducted in areas that require inter-sectoral approaches, in particular inland navigation, climate change adaptation, hydropower and agriculture.

Observers to the ICPDR

Observers of the ICPDR can actively participate in all meetings of ICPDR expert groups and task groups, as well as plenary meetings (Standing Working Group and Ordinary Meetings). Observers represent a broad spectrum of water stakeholders in the Danube River Basin, covering social, cultural, economic and environmental interest groups. As of 2015, there were 23 organisations approved as observers, all of which had the opportunity to contribute to the development of the DRBM Plan – Update 2015. Observers are accepted upon approval of the ICPDR and have to meet a defined set of criteria.

Public participation, communication and outreach

Under the umbrella of public participation, the ICPDR pursues a range of specific activities. These include (1) public information such as the development of technical public documents and general publications (e.g. the quarterly magazine Danube Watch); (2) environmental education, awareness raising and outreach (e.g. the annual river festival Danube Day or the teacher's kit Danube Box); and (3) public consultation activities directly linked to the development of river basin management plans.

Case study: Danube Day & outreach activities

Danube Day is organised throughout the basin every year on 29 June. Drawing support from over 350 partner organisations, it conveys a positive message to tens of thousands

of young people: rivers have become healthier thanks to hard work, this effort needs to be continued to allow everybody to enjoy them. Celebration vary from one country to another, but usually include music and dance, water-sports and of course lots of interesting things to learn about rivers. The festivities are aided by the Danube Art Master, a creative competition and occasion for young Danubians to reflect about the value of rivers. The multi-lingual Danube Box teaching kit and the Danube Adventure online game help to further raise awareness for water among school children with the help from the private sector, especially the Coca-Cola system.

Public Consultation for the two management plans

To accompany the development of the DRBM Plan and DFRM Plan, public consultation is done in three main stages: comments from the public are collected (1) on a timetable and work programme including public consultation measures; (2) on significant water management issues (SWMIs) in the river basin as well as a flood risk and flood hazard map; and (3) the draft management plans.

Public consultation for each of these steps span periods of at least six months, in which the opportunity to provide comments is actively promoted through the ICPDR network. The timetable and work programme was published for comments from 22 December 2012 to 22 June 2013; the SWMI document as well as Flood Risk and Flood Hazard Maps were published 22 December 2013 to 22 June 2014; the draft management plans entered the public consultation phase on 22 December 2014, which was convened on 22 July 2015. The opportunity to participate in each of these steps was promoted through the ICPDR network of contracting parties and observers; the ICPDR website icpdr.org; the magazine Danube Watch; and a promotional video clip under the title “Get active” which was used in social media.

Consultation activities included the collection of comments in writing, a stakeholder workshop, online questionnaires, and a social media campaign. To consult the public beyond the observers, the ICPDR published all relevant documents, including basin-wide draft plans and links to national documents and processes, online for review. It encouraged stakeholders and citizens to submit comments (16 often very elaborate comments were received), and had two online surveys (200 were filled out) about river basin management and flood risk management to highlight their inter-linkages. For example, the flood-related survey asked about public perceptions around personal awareness of flood hazard exposure and the clarity of the flood hazard map.

In July 2015, the Voice of the Danube - Stakeholder Consultation Workshop was held. Some 80 stakeholders with diverse backgrounds, such as hydropower specialists, biodiversity experts, and corporate representatives, expressed their views about both plans. In addition, national consultation results were integrated into the basin-wide inputs through a basin-wide exchange in the ICPDR Expert Groups.

Links to public consultation on the national level

The management plans provide a basin-wide umbrella supported by national and sub-basin management plans. These management plans are developed with national endeavours in the field of public consultation. To support information exchange between the responsible authorities and link national public consultation activities with the basin-wide level, information on national consultation efforts was collected and centrally published on icpdr.org and the analogous ICPDR documents were linked to from national consultation sites. Meetings of the ICPDR and its Expert Group for Public Participation further supported a basin-wide exchange on the national consultation work.

All activities related to public consultation were pursued jointly for both management plans. This applied in particular to the publication of the timetable and work programme including public consultation measures in 2013; and the public consultation measures for the draft management plans. For example, the stakeholder consultation workshop is a joint activity to highlight the inter-linkages between both plans and also to enable an attendance back to back; the online questionnaires were developed jointly and referred to each other.