

DATOURWAY: TRANSNATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE SUSTAINABLE TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DANUBE AREA WITH SPECIAL REGARD TO TOURISM

Elena STANCU

Eng., SRII, National Institute for Research and Development in Constructions, Urbanism and Sustainable Spatial Development URBAN-INCERC, e-mail: elenastancu527@yahoo.com

Amelia CAZACU

Eng., SR, National Institute for Research and Development in Constructions, Urbanism and Sustainable Spatial Development URBAN-INCERC, e-mail: amiczacu@yahoo.ie

Abstract. The article is a synthesis of the DATOURWAY project which is a part of South Est Europe Program (2009-2012) and represents “an outstanding example of transnational cooperation” between partners from seven countries, from which six countries are touched by the Danube River. The cooperation within the project was committed to the development of tourism along and on the middle and south-eastern section of river Danube, while paying particular attention to the protection and enhancement of the natural and cultural resources linked to this part of River. National Institute for Research and Development in Construction, Urban Planning and Sustainable Spatial Development “URBAN-INCERC”, through “Urbanproiect Branch”, has been one of the Romanian partners in the DATOURWAY project, together with The National Institute for Research and Development in Tourism and the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism. “URBANPROIECT” has mainly contributed to the National Analysis and Strategy concerning Romanian territory and two Pilot-Projects: PiP3 - “Vidin-Calafat” (Romania and Bulgaria) regarding city tourism and rural neighborhood, and PiP4 - “Deltas” (Romania-Italy) regarding eco-friendly tourism development of river Danube and Po deltas. The DATOURWAY project has been a “contribution to sustainable territorial development and has reflected a common strategic interest by setting a common future approach in the field of tourist development, focusing mainly on the rural areas, by elaborating a set of mutually agreed tourist strategies and implementing different pilot projects tailored to special areas”.

Key words: DATOURWAY project, Danube River, transnational cooperation, territorial development, tourism.

1. Introduction

The Danube is the second largest river in Europe both in length (2857 km) and in flow (approx. 5600 m³/sec when it enters Romania), being a real axis of Central Europe and the linking element for 10 European countries: Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldavia and

Ukraine. Being declared a part of the European Union’s Pan European Transport Corridor VII, The Danube represents a major European transport artery with high potential for tourism which however is underutilized in the south-east section of the river (Țigu *et al.*, 2010; Mazilu, 2013). The optimal use of its extraordinary tourism-related character-

istics is hindered by cross-border ecological damages (Nagl, 2012) and inadequate local capacities to adapt to economic growth via tourism. There is need for the rehabilitation of dead channels and riverside ecological systems, improvement of water quality, restoration of the damaged landscape (Illés and Thorpe, 2011). Further challenges include the poor quality of infrastructure and transport as well as rural poverty. In the absence of transnational cooperation among the affected communities, there is no appropriate ecologically sensitive, tourism related development strategy (Tăchiciu *et al.*, 2010; Cordoban, 2011; Hajdú and Hardi, 2012; Petrović *et al.*, 2012; SEE, 2013b; Sîrbu, 2013).

South East European (SEE) Transnational Cooperation Program, through its projects, encourage a sustainable and balanced development of the South East European countries, the global objective being to improve the territorial, economic and social integration process in South East Europe and contribute to cohesion, stability and

competitiveness of the area through the development of transnational partnership and joint action on matters of strategic importance (Mocanu *et al.*, 2011; Kodric, 2011; Čmejrek and Hašová, 2012; SEE, 2013a). Due to the fact that majority of the countries which covers the South East Europe Program Area are placed along the Danube, projects like DATOURWAY, dealing with the Danube River issues, were natural to be included in SEE Program.

DATOURWAY Project involved a transnational cooperation of 16 partners from 7 countries: Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia and Italy, as a contribution to sustainable territorial development of the Danube area (Fig. 1). The Project is considered just the “*first step in developing a common tourism strategy for the whole Danube region, the main purpose of this project being to enhance and propagate transnational cooperation in tourism linked to the variety tourist potentials of the river, including the natural beauty of the riverside area as well as the architectural assets of the lively cities and villages by the Danube*”.



Fig. 1. DATOURWAY area. Source: <http://www.datourinfo.eu/>

Tourism was regarded in the project as a many-sided activity, oriented towards recreation, resort and leisure, cultural enrichment, enjoyment of natural beauty and physical exercise.

Among the specific objectives of the project the following are to be mentioned:

- to remedy the current environmental condition and improve overall quality of life by international cooperation efforts (Ágh, 2012);
- to promote a balanced territorial development in the region (Ágh, 2010; Giffinger and Suitner, 2010), integration of the marginal, less accessible border areas;
- to harmonize and create a balance between urban and rural settlements, and identify potential development drivers;
- to improve local economic conditions by tourism development particularly in the underdeveloped rural regions;

- to exchange expertise formulate new and transferable approaches in tourism development planning;
- to widen the settlements functions through development of tourism and infrastructure;
- to stimulate transnational cooperation;
- to coordinate and promote the private and public investments;
- to enhance the role of Danube in the cultural links through revitalization of traditional links (SEE, 2013b).

Target groups of this project are local governments, community associations, tourism related investors as well as national and regional authorities and development agencies, but the ultimate beneficiaries are the people of this big River basin. The principle declared in the Project was to reach a transnational agreement on a common tourism strategy and integration of policies and pilot projects into national, regional and local as well as European plans and policies.

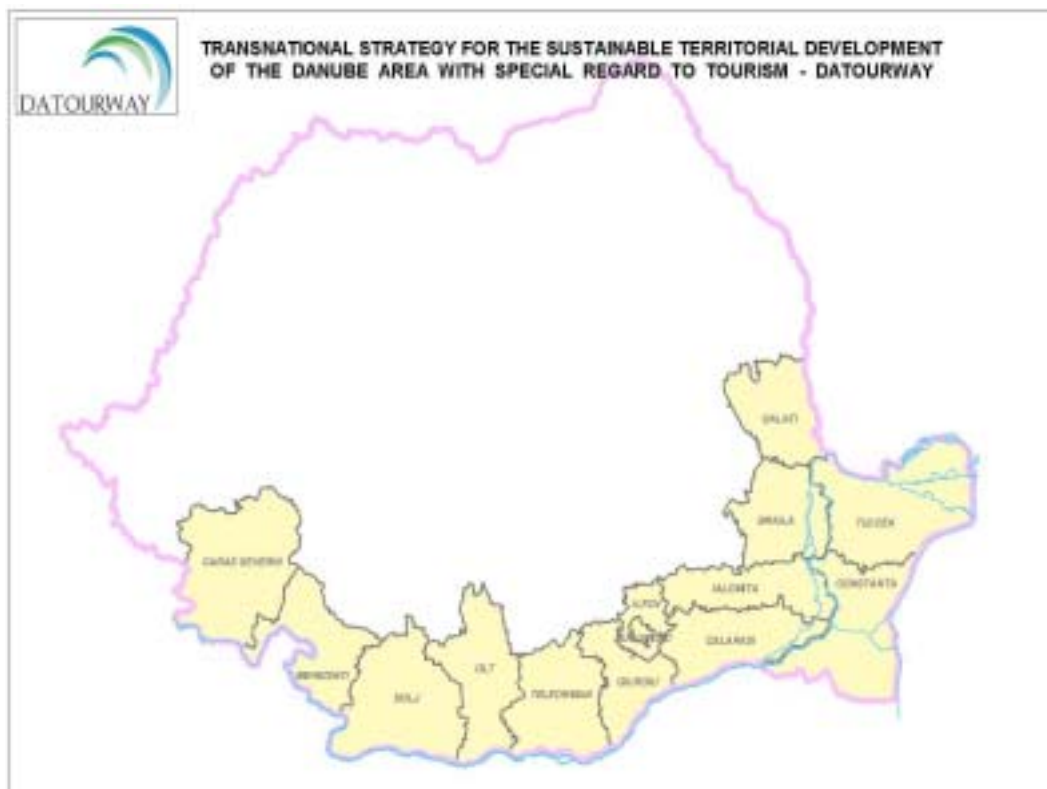


Fig. 2. Romanian DATOURWAY area. Source: NRDI URBAN-INCERC

2. Romanian contribution to DATOURWAY

Although Romanian partners participated to all the project activities, the main contribution was materialized in elaborating the National Analysis, DATOURWAY Strategy concerning Romanian territory along the Danube and two Pilot-Projects - PiP3 - "Vidin-Calafat" (Romania and Bulgaria) regarding city tourism and rural neighborhood, and PiP4 - "Deltas" (Romania-Italy) regarding eco-friendly tourism development of river Danube and Po deltas.

3. DATOURWAY National Analysis of Romania

The Danube enters the Romanian territory close to the confluence with the Nera River in the vicinity of Bazias, beginning the longest and the most spectacular of its narrow paths. The Danube River - Lower Danube sector (the Romanian) cover 1075 km in length. The studied area includes Danube riverside with the following counties: Brăila, Caraș - Severin, Călărași, Constanța, Dolj, Galați, Giurgiu, Ialomița, Mehedinți, Olt, Teleorman, Tulcea, Ilfov and Bucharest (Fig. 2).

The total number of settlements in these counties is 908, of which 82 represents urban settlements meaning 9% of the total number of settlements, and 826 represents rural settlements meaning 91% of total number of settlements.

The region has five of the main 10 cities in Romania: Bucharest which is the Romania capital (with almost 2 million people is the biggest municipality in the country), Constanta, Craiova, Galati and Braila. Also the region contains all Romanian ports: 2 maritime ports (Constanta and Mangalia) and 17 ports to the Danube (Moldova Noua, Orsova, Drobeta Turnu-Severin, Calafat, Corabia, Turnu Magurele,

Zimnicea, Giurgiu, Oltenita, Calarasi, Cernavoda, Harsova, Macin, Braila, Galati, Tulcea and Sulina). All are towns. The port towns alongside the Danube are less developed and are not attracting population. The region density of studied area, excepting Bucharest, is under national value (73,6 inhabitants/km²), being influenced by a low level of rural density, specific to this region. The Romanian Danubian region includes the international corridors IV road/rail, IX road/rail and corridor VII Danube (Laketa *et al.*, 2011). Besides, the region has direct access to other important transport axis that connects it to the neighboring countries, as well as to the rest of the continent.

Accessibility in the Danube area is poor and the lack of Danube crossings make difficult to access transport networks of European importance (Maftai, 2012) and the accessibility of rural localities become a major problem and constant over time. The different access of region to the county national and international transport infrastructure cause disparities in tourism development except the counties of Bucharest-Ilfov and South-Muntenia regions.

Share of modernized roads in these regions is low, which has negative consequences for attracting large territories in productive economic activities. The region benefits by points of control and border passage for mixed traffic of passengers, merchandise and cars, the most important being the terminal for merchandise Giurgiu, on the road E85 (Romania-Bulgaria). There is a civil airport in Ilfov County (Otopeni Airport, the Romanian biggest airport), and other two airports, Mihail Kogalniceanu and Tuzla in Constanta County.

Danube River and the rich hydrographic network are important resource for

tourism, offering a variety of ecosystems, of which Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, RAMSAR site, UNESCO site, is the best preserved wetland in Europe. In the analyzed area, there are an important number of protected areas (Natural parks and Biosphere reservations, Special Protection Areas for Bird, nature reserves category I, III and V IUCN) with diverse, rich flora and fauna with valuable exhibits, also having administrative structures with official documents, regulating the possible conflicts that might occur between tourism and environment. Nearly all forms of relief in Romania mark the analyzed territory: mountains with altitudes between 600 and 2200 m, hills, plateaus, valleys, plains.

The region contains many places with natural therapeutic factors for balneal treatment such as therapeutic mud of salt lakes (Techirghiol, Mangalia - Constanta county), sulphurous waters (Amara - Ialomita county), spring waters for treatment (Baile Herculane - Caras Severin county).

In the analyzed territory, the diversity of the protected cultural patrimony including architectural, archaeological historical monuments, memorials and monuments represents valuable elements which could be capitalized through tourism. In the analyzed territory, there are around 8450 historical monuments, of which the highest number is in Bucharest (2628). In some regions, the ancient traditions and customs are well preserved. Unfortunately, some of the tourist sights in the cultural-artistic patrimony are affected by a profound degradation and just a reduced number of cultural events have an international impact among the visitors.

From the economic point of view, in the analyzed region some disparities could be registered. Thus, ones of the most

developed counties in the country (Bucharest, Constanta, Ilfov) are encountered here, as well as low developed counties (Calarasi, Teleorman, Giurgiu and Olt) mostly agricultural ones, known like economically backward regions. In the majority of the Danube counties, the economic sectors are low developed, the GDP/inhabitant average value (4.235 Euro) being lower than at country level (4.613 Euro). The business community is relatively low developed and the investment opportunities are poor promoted. There is also an unequal distribution of the enterprises in the territory, concentrating in particular in the urban areas.

The region has a high agricultural and zoo technical potential, with qualitative agricultural lands. Agriculture is the main economic activity in the most of the counties in the region, but the agricultural holdings practice subsistence agriculture (poor mechanization, poor irrigation systems) and they are mostly fragmented.

The industry sector suffers a process of restructuring and even decline of some branches. Due to the fact that the analyzed area is large, there is a relatively high diversification of the industrial sector, still, there are an important number of mono-industrial areas affecting the sustainable development of the urban zones (Szarka, 2010), where the main industrial activities are located, and the level of industrial innovation is relatively low.

The service sector has a low contribution to the development of the regional economy in general and of the tourism sector in particular (Felea *et al.*, 2010). Tourism sector has a real potential for development in the analyzed region, but insufficient valorized due to various economic, social, environmental restrictions. The tourism activity is mainly concentrated in the west

counties (Caras-Severin) and south-east counties (Constanta, Tulcea and Braila) where the touristic facilities are more diversified. Boarding houses for tourists were opened in the last years, permitting the start up of rural tourism, agro-tourism and mountain tourism. Improving the tourism infrastructure in this area can be a priority for tourism development.

In the Danube riverside area, an important number of resorts (17) internationally and nationally recognized, are located especially in Constanta, Caras-Severin, Ialomita, and Ilfov counties. The concentration of the accommodation infrastructure especially in the tourism resorts and urban areas creates disparities in the territory, but still the lodging offer is a relatively diversified one. There are also some financing projects for tourist infrastructure, including tourist information and promotion centers by the Tourism Ministry. The natural conditions offer possibilities for recreational activities, starting with hiking, horse riding, cycling, golf, but the diversification of corresponding infrastructure for the tourists is relatively low. The tourism activity is seasonal, especially in the summer season the tourists flows are higher. Still a poor number of partnerships exist in the tourism field, for example, among local administrations and tourism organizations.

For this Danube region, the analyze revealed a high number of strengths: the Pan European corridors, existence of European roads, high density of roads and rail network, a major interest of the authorities in developing tourism sector, a large variety of ecosystems, rich hydrographic network, variety of landscape, the existence of spa resources, rich and diverse protected cultural patrimony, a complex cultural market with highly segments interests, a relatively high diversification of the industrial

sector, the presence of ones of the most developed counties from country (Bucharest, Constanta, Ilfov). Also in the analyzed region there are valuable hunting funds, an important number of resorts, and a relatively diversified accommodation infrastructure.

There are also a number of weaknesses, from which the most relevant are poor cooperation among tourism operators in the country and in the cross-border area, lack of regional strategies for tourism, insufficient financial resources, especially in the local councils, to implement new development projects, lack of express roads network, difficult access in some rural areas and tourist zones, poor exploitation of the natural therapeutic resources, bad use of land located in flood risk areas, a profound degradation of some tourist sights in the cultural-artistic patrimony and low development of the economic sectors in the majority of the Danube counties.

The main opportunities are considered to be the projects in various stages of implementation focused on the infrastructure development, especially in the tourism areas, the existing programs in the Lower Danube Euro-Region, which facilitates partnerships for drawing up programs and cultural projects, intensification of the cross-border cooperation, the openness of the existing projects of the sustainable development concept, the possibility to access Community funds and diversification of the rural economy by encouraging the intervention through government funding from the EU, increasing interest for the development of rural tourism, agro-tourism and spa resorts (Varga, 2012).

The main threats that may occur are an attitude of inertia in the development of tourism sector, a low level of absorption of

the European Funds in the cross-border programs, pollution of the Danube River because of uncontrolled discharges, decreasing of the volume of foreign investments. Based on the analyses presented above, a common sustainable territorial development strategy has been elaborated for the whole project area, with special regard to tourism and also different territorial strategies for selected tourist areas has been prepared.

The general objective aimed in DATOURWAY Transnational Strategy is *“building of a well known tourism brand for the DATOURWAY area by utilization of the tourism potential and strengthening the socio-economic, environmental and infrastructural background”*. There are also three strategic objectives established in the Transnational Strategy, as follows:

- widely utilized tourism potential in the DATOURWAY area
- supporting social-economic background for tourism
- strong environmental and infrastructural conditions for tourism
- These objectives are available for Romanian Danube area as well.
- In order to support the elaboration and the implementation of DATOURWAY project strategy, some pilot projects along the Danube course have been settled.

4. The Pilot Projects

The two selected Pilot Projects for Romanian Danube area analyzed two different areas but from the same perspective, sustainable development of tourism. PiP3 - “Vidin-Calafat” (Romania and Bulgaria) (Fig. 3) has referred to a site of urban-rural tourism linkages, and highlighted the factors influencing tourism development in the target area and elaborated an analysis of potential directions of development, especially in

the perspective of building the Calafat-Vidin Bridge, an aspect which will enhance the polarizing function of the town, mainly at the level of the European circulation. Although bringing disadvantages for the town because of its spatial development on the east direction, the bridge will create conditions for economic flourishing, especially in the services field, with beneficial consequences at the level of the other functions as well. In its influence area, in the near future, the Calafat municipality is considered to be an interest centre and coordination point for the included villages (Basarabi, Ciuperceii Vechi, Golenti) and other towns, neighbours at the administrative level. The creation of the Calafat-Bailesti-Craiova-Filiasi axis leads to a harmonious economic and social segmentation at the county level and even in the Oltenia area.

An important role in the area development could have the *“Dunarea 21” Euroregion Association*, created in 2001, at a meeting in Vidin with the participation of the representatives from 3 countries: Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia - the Vidin, Calafat, Zaycar municipalities.

Policy strategies as framework for future development of the region and the tourism sector were developed in the majority of the analyzed counties. Most of the County Councils developed strategies for sustainable development including aspects related to tourism sector and only few of them have finished a tourism strategy (Dolj County - County Development Strategy for the 2007-2013 period).

In the Pilot Project PiP4 - “Deltas” (Romania-Italy), the study has attained a comparison of river deltas between Romanian Danube Delta and Italian delta Po (Fig. 4).

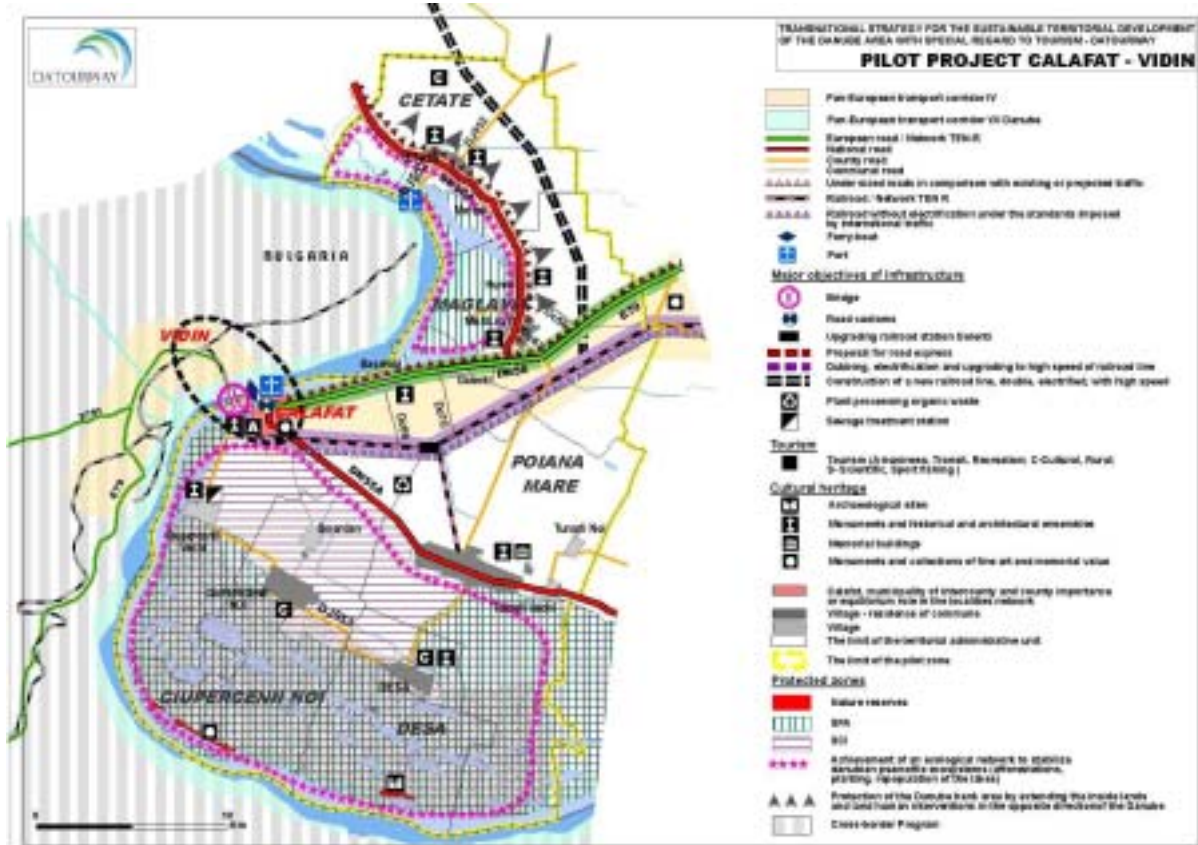


Fig. 3. Vidin-Calafat Pilot Project. Source: NRDI URBAN-INCERC

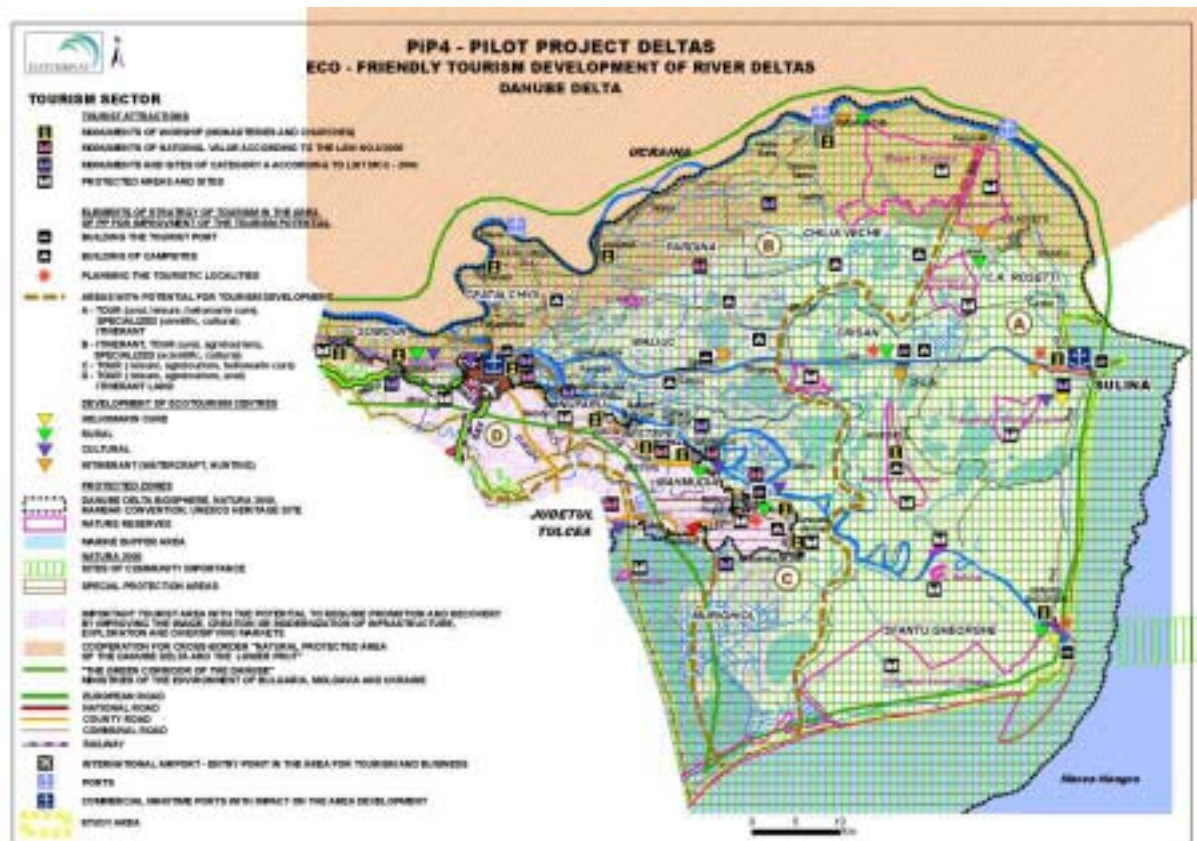


Fig. 4. Pilot Project PiP4 - "Deltas". Source: NRDI URBAN-INCERC

The purpose of this pilot project was to promote the Danube Delta as an eco-tourist destination both at national and international level. Danube Delta represents an opportunity for the development of tourism having in consideration the beauty of the landscape, the suitability for fishing and hunting and the transport facilities offered. Tourism represents a priority of development for the entire area and there is an important tourist potential, insufficiently exploited. This project creates conditions to promote the main points of attraction and the tourist sector in the Danube Delta area, and the general objective is the promotion and development of eco-tourism in the area of Pilot Project by valorizing the natural, cultural and traditional heritage. The main specific results of this pilot project would be a diversification of tourist offer focused on the Danube and addressed to a large national and international target groups, and increasing the number of tourists in Danube Delta.

In 1990 the Danube Delta was declared by UNESCO "Nature Reserve of the Biosphere". The Danube Delta has a triple status: Biosphere Reserve, RAMSAR site and Natural and Cultural World Heritage site. At the level of the South-East region, the development possibilities concentrate on the potential in the seaside area and Danube Delta, these being unique areas in the country, attracting Romanian and foreign tourists, involving a significant implication of the workforce and contributing to the region economy.

Tourism in the protected areas is mentioned in different development plans which must be taken into consideration. At the level of local communities there are projects and programs being implemented or in the feasibility stage, a series of works and socio-economic importance actions are developed for the towns lying on the territory of the

Danube Delta biosphere reservation. Regarding tourism, the main development objective proposed by the reservation administrators is the development and promotion of a tourism such as "exploring the Danube Delta slowly". Thus they can create the conditions for an integrated approach, by which the objective to store the natural patrimony is not in contradiction with the development process, but becomes a part of the development. Tourism becomes the central element which stimulates both the process of preserving and protecting the environment and the sustainable socio-economic development of communities.

REFERENCES

- Ágh A. (2010), *Regionalisation as a Driving Force of EU Widening: Recovering from the EU 'Carrot Crisis' in the 'East'*, *Europe-Asia Studies* **62(8)**:1239-1266..
- Ágh A. (2012), *Global Governance and Integrative Balancing: EU Efforts to Respond to the Global Challenge*, *Global Policy* **3(2)**:145-153.
- Čmejrek J., Hašová B. W. (2012), *EU Strategy for the Danube Region*, *Politics in Central Europe* **8(1)**:107-117.
- Coroban C. (2011), *Some considerations on the EU Danube Strategy and the Black Sea Region*, *Eastern Journal of European Studies* **2(1)**:97-110.
- Dieringer J., Laukó P., Schneider G. (2010), *Towards a European Strategy for the Danube Area*, in: Ágh A., Kaiser T., Koller B. (Eds.), *Europeanization of the Danube Region: The Blue Ribbon Project*, Blue Ribbon Research Centre King Sigismund College, Budapest, 260 pp., ISBN 978-963-9559-45-5, pp. 64-79.
- Felea M., Yankov N., Maruțelu N., Vasiliu C. (2010), *Education and training needs in the field of logistic structures and services in the lower Danube region*, *Amfiteatru Economic* **12(4)**:785-814.
- Giffinger R., Suitner J. (2010), *Danube Region Strategy - Arguments for a territorial capital based multilevel approach*, *Spatium International Review* **23**:9-16.
- Hajdú Z., Hardi T. (2012), *Changes in the state territory, systemic changes, the development of ecological thinking and the issues of the utilisation of hydroelectric power in Hungary*, *Scientific Annals of the Danube Delta Institute Tulcea* **18**:263-278.

- Illés Z., Thorpe N. (2011), *By the green Danube*, *Hungarian Review* **3**(5):10.
- Kodric M. (2011), *The EU Strategy for the Danube Region: What Potential Contribution to Regional Stability and Co-operation?* *Bruges Regional Integration & Global Governance Papers* **4**:3-35.
- Laketa M., Anicic J., Zaric M., Vukotic S. (2011), *Coridors: Development opportunity of Serbia*, *UTMS Journal of Economics* **2**(2): 25-138.
- Maftai J. (2012), *The Danube 3D*, *Journal of Danubian Studies and Research* **2**(2):75-88.
- Mazilu M. (2013), *Tourism - Innovation for Sustainable Turinn Cluster model*, *International Journal of Energy and Environment* **7**(1):19-26.
- Mocanu O., Sebe M., Andreica G. (2011), *Strategic Thinking in the EU - Aspiration or Reality?* *Romanian Journal of European Affairs* **11**(4):12-17.
- Nagl G. (2012), *New infrastructure projects and a biodiversity strategy in the Danube River Basin*, *River Systems* **20**(1-2):111-128.
- Petrović P. (2012), *Ecotourism - A driving force of development in some Danube regions*, in: Šarčević N. J., Karanović E. S. (Eds.), *Danube Strategy - Strategic significance for Serbia*, Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade, Serbia, 348 pp., ISBN 978-86-7067-167-6, pp. 253-258.
- Popović V., Sarić R., Jovanović M. (2012), *Sustainability of agriculture in Danube basin area*, *Economics of Agriculture* **59**(1):73-87.
- SEE (2013a), *DATOURWAY - Transnational Strategy for the Sustainable Territorial Development of the Danube Area with special regard to Tourism*, <http://www.datourway.eu/>
- SEE (2013b), *South-East Europe Program presentation*, http://www.southeast-europe.net/en/about_see/programme_presentation/index
- Sîrbu C. (2013), *European cooperation for the Danube region*, *Scientific Papers Series Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and Rural Development* **13**(1):389-392.
- Szarka E. (2010), *Find out the Danube! The European Danube Region Strategy*, *European Spirit* **1**(1):33-42.
- Tăchiciu L., Yankov N., Balalia A. E. (2010), *Education and training needs in the field of local development in the lower Danube macro region*, *Amfiteatru Economic* **12**(4):815-838.
- Țigu G., Andreeva M., Nica A.-M. (2010), *Education and training needs in the field of visitors receiving structures and tourism services in the lower Danube region*, *Amfiteatru Economic* **12**(4):735-760.
- Varga A. (2012), *Making the European Union strategy for the Danube region matter: chances and challenges from Romanian perspective (An outsider's view)*, *Strategic Impact* **2**:98-104.

Received: August 9, 2013 • **Revised:** September 20, 2013 • **Accepted:** September 24, 2013