



All things considered

Key messages from the 1st Danube Region Workshop

More than 40 participants gathered on January 28-29 at the REC Conference Center in Szentendre, Hungary for the 1st Danube Region Workshop. The workshop brought together practitioners and relevant stakeholders from the Danube River Basin (i.e. Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia), from regional networks (i.e. Baltic, Mediterranean, Western), and representatives from international bodies such as the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (UN FAO), International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), International Sava River Basin Commission (ISRBC), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Global Water Partnership (GWP) and International Association for Danube Research (IAD).

The workshop provided an opportunity for all participants to share knowledge and experience, form partnerships and consider any of several good practises regarding the implementation of 'national water retention measures' (NWRM). What follows is a summary of key messages from the two-day workshop.

MAIN CHALLENGES

Several challenges were identified with regard to NWRM implementation in the Danube region. Amongst those listed were:

- Overcoming administrative and legal constraints
- Overcoming lack of relevant knowledge and interest
- Taking into consideration local characteristics and limitations (e.g. demographic, geographical)
- Securing sufficient financing and investment
- Re-establishing economic balance following changes in land-use that favour green infrastructure
- Establishing and maintaining relevant institutions and organisations tasked with development, implementation, monitoring and enforcement
- Drafting health and safety measures

BENEFITS AND GOOD PRACTISES

Participants compiled a list of the many benefits of NWRM implementation, namely:

- Lessened pressure on ecosystems
- Water and nutrient recycling in constructed wetlands
- Improved visual aesthetics
- Lower flood risk
- Local water retention (especially beneficial during dry periods)
- Enhanced water quality and quality protection
- Sustainability of urban development and drainage systems

Recognising that good practises need to be in place to reap NWRM benefits, several were mentioned, namely:

Preliminary information on any measure should include an indication of the level of contribution to primary objectives. Will the benefits be minor (short term), fairly significant (medium term) or significant (long term)?



Any contribution that a measure makes to legal or policy obligations should be highlighted, as this will provide added incentives to implement the measure.

Relevant terms need to be clearly and carefully defined, so that all stakeholders are clear about the terminology used in relevant measures. One term of particular importance and demanding clarity is that of 'ecosystem services'.

Furthermore, the economic value of ecosystem services should be included if it applies to the measure in question. It is important that the positive economic impacts of NWRMs are indicated.

It is imperative that measures strengthen the local environment's resilience to the effects of climate change.

INSTRUMENTS TO PROMOTE NWRM

Participants listed roughly a dozen concrete ways to promote NWRMs, which are listed below:

- Appropriate financial incentives need to be in place to motivate as many stakeholders as possible.
- It is essential that legal standards and requirements are comprehensive and up to date.
- Current obstacles need to be assessed in order to identify which legal instruments are in need of review.
- During the new programming period [which is?], explore creative possibilities to mobilise existing funds and to allocate them directly for NWRMs.
- Fundraising efforts are made easier when preliminary studies are carried out to help determine a hierarchy of priorities.
- Present clear arguments and persuasive studies when trying to win political commitment to implementing measures that promote and secure sustainability.
- Promote a basic understanding of the retention capacity of catchment areas and stretches of river, and keep existing retention areas open.
- It is crucial to continually exchange knowledge and information; otherwise, even the best instruments may not work.
- Present information to decision makers in a clear, understandable way.
- Communicate and raise awareness as much as possible concerning all possible options.
- When attempting to develop and implement river basin management plans (RBMPs) or flood risk management plans (FRMPs), stress the importance of the solidarity principle and the transboundary aspect of NWRMS.
- A partnership or bilateral agreement between countries on bilateral issues provides a solid foundation for further planning and implementation efforts.