

# Working together on eco-friendly growth in the mid-Danube region

*Environmental protection depends on cooperation. The EU is promoting joint approaches to sustainable management of natural resources where the Danube flows from Hungary into Croatia, in the unique natural landscape of the Baranja region.*

## COOPERATION AND RESPECT

The natural heritage on both sides of this border offers real potential for developing the local economy through rural tourism. But the area is divided by administrative boundaries, which can be an impediment. Neglect or indifference can also allow the attractions to deteriorate. So the EU is helping to put in place systematic cooperation and to encourage respect for the local culture and environment.

A central element in the project has therefore been to raise awareness in the local population about the value of the region's natural heritage. Information campaigns and workshops and study visits have demonstrated how rivers can be damaged by untreated waste or inappropriate dredging. A documentary film about the region explained the importance of preserving forests and wetlands, and warned about the risks if intensive agriculture is mismanaged.

The result has been a growing sense of pride and identity in the region. And because much of the project is conducted in both Hungarian and Croatian, it is also improving links between people on both sides of the border.

## POTENTIAL FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH TOO

There have been benefits for tourism and local businesses too. Bilingual promotional materials and the

creation of cross-border tourism routes have attracted new visitors – with

positive results for the local economies on both sides of the border. Examples

of the innovations include providing clearer indications

in both languages of how to reach the local beauty spots, or the

eco-centres and museums in the region. Because

visitor numbers are up, investment in the tourism sector is also growing – and creating

new jobs, often across the border. The increase in cross-

border cooperation is also generating new contacts, supporting local businesses in finding partners in a region where recent history led to the severing of many ties.

There is a strong educational component to the project too. Nature-related programmes have been devised for schools in the region, focusing on conservation, renewable energy sources and energy efficiency. Engaging the younger generation is an important element in assuring sustainability of what the project has started.



## MAXIMISING THE LOCAL VALUE

Antonio Sobol of the Baranja tourist board in Osijek is certain of the importance of working on protecting the natural heritage in the area. "We have resources like the nature park of Kopacki rit, and of course the Danube river, one of the biggest brands. We are increasingly making use of these resources in tourism in the region, but we must exploit it in a sustainable way, for us, for tourists, and for future generations. Community-based projects like this show that sustainable development is possible."

## PROJECT DETAILS

### Cross-border protection of Middle Danube



#### Partners:

Danube Drava National Park, Hungary  
Association for Nature and Environment  
Protection Green Osijek, Croatia  
Public Institution for Nature Protection in Osijek –  
Baranja County, Croatia

**Total cost in €:** 176,793

**EU Contribution in €:** 149,792.87 (85%)

**Start date:** September 2011

**End date:** December 2012

#### Results:

Enhanced protection for natural environment, improved opportunities for cross-border tourism business, raised public awareness of environmental issues

#### Techniques:

Bilingual public and educational campaigns, study visits, documentary film, website, joint planning by local authorities and educational institutions

#### Project website:

[www.zeleni-osijek.hr/en/projects](http://www.zeleni-osijek.hr/en/projects)