

Danube Territorial Strategies

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Abstract: The Danube region has been particularly affected by the economic consequences of the pandemic, so the recovery of the region's economy requires increased attention. The purpose of this article is to analyze the possibilities of financing through the Danube Transnational Program 2021-2027. It continues the previous research dedicated to the management of the projects implemented through the financing programs dedicated to the Danube Region. All the measures described in the program are based on the territorial strategy and must be seen in the broader context of existing strategic frameworks, such as the EUSDR (especially for PA7, PA8 and partly PA9), the Territorial Agenda 2030, the New Leipzig Charter, Recovery and Resilience Facility and the European Green Agreement.

Keywords: European Strategy; Strategic Management; Danube Region

Using survey and observation, we have analyzed the main benefits of regional macro-strategies funded through programs dedicated to the Danube Region. Trandafir considers that the EUSBSR (for the Baltic Sea Region) and the EUSDR (for the Danube Region) are good practice models for initiating new macro-regional strategies (Trandafir, 2016). From this perspective, the funding possibilities of the Danube Transnational Program (DTP) 2021-2027 are examined in comparison with the funding provided by the Danube Transnational Program 2014-2020. The global economic crisis caused by the pandemic has led European Commission decision-makers to direct the funds available for the region's economic recovery. In this regard, Marchis (2020) appreciates that “Covid-19 lessons highlighted alternatives, solutions and priorities for 2021-2027 programming period”.

At the same time, “the most common treatment option for economic development problems can be best handled through strengthening the competitiveness of the SME sector and the coordination and diversification of economic strategies” (Panaitescu, 2017). The strategic objectives of the Danube Transnational Program 2014-2020 were built around four priority axes:

- Innovative and socially responsible Danube region;
- Environment and culture responsible Danube region;
- Better connected and energy responsible Danube region;
- Well-governed Danube region.

The Danube transnational program 2014-2020 established for the Danube Region was designed as a complementary tool for implementing EUSDR objectives (Panaitescu & Trandafir, 2015).

All the Danube countries, without exception, are currently facing the Covid-19 pandemic and are looking for solutions to recover their economy. Thus, based on stakeholder consultation, in the Danube Transnational Program 2021-2027, new chapters were introduced in relation to covid-19 pandemic effects, complementarities and synergies, macro-regional strategies and mission program. The opportunities offered by the Danube Transnational Program 2021-2027 refer to the following strategic objectives (Table 1):

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Table 1. Strategic Objectives of DTP

A greener, low-carbon Europe	promoting renewable energy	Priority 2	There are several factors that support the promotion of renewable energy. The share of renewables in gross final energy consumption is low, and has never reached 50% in any countries. There is a huge variety in the energy mix of the macro-region by region and source. Biofuels responsible for more than 50% in all countries except for Germany (36%, while EU28 average is 49%), and represent the highest rates in Hungary (87%) and Ukraine (79%). Hydropower (EU28 11%) in Serbia (41%), Austria (34%), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia (32% each) and Montenegro (29%) is by far the second most utilized source. Wind, solar energy, municipal waste and geothermal energy are less preferred. Thus, the shift towards renewables is crucial.
	promoting climate change adaptation, and disaster risk prevention, resilience, considering ecosystem-based approaches	Priority 2	Extensive parts of the Danube Region are heavily exposed to large floods. Owing to having both upstream and downstream areas with a transboundary character, the Danube Region experiences frequent floods risking large transboundary riverside areas. Climate change related environmental risks and disasters like droughts, forest fires or heat waves are becoming more frequent issues season after season in many different parts of the Danube Region. Although these phenomena don't have transnational impacts, it is important to harmonize and standardize the preparation of response authorities and organizations and their related procedures at transnational scale for a more effective preparedness and response in case of emergency situations.
	promoting access to water and sustainable water management	Priority 2	Climate change is forecasted to affect both the quantity, as well as quality of transnational water bodies in the Danube River Basin that requires joint solutions. There is a need for better coordination between water management and certain economic activities such as agriculture, navigation, hydropower and flood protection, which are strongly influencing water quantity and quality quite often.
	enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	Priority 2	The macro-region is a colorful mosaic of different regions resulting in high biodiversity, which is in danger also because of weak adaptation techniques to climate change that comes with e.g. invasive species or fragmenting habitats. Nature protection is challenged by the still low level of joint management and protection initiatives, furthermore by notable differences in the policies, competences, and human and financial resources of the given protected areas. Therefore, enhanced transnational cooperation is needed with regard to safeguarding the transboundary habitats of indigenous animal population.

A more social Europe	enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labor markets and access to high quality employment through developing social infrastructure and promoting social economy	Priority 3	The Danube Region is affected by interconnected challenges of high (long-term) unemployment, profound income inequalities, intensifying westward labor migration and weak social economy. The strong persisting north-west versus south-east divide in spatial inequalities on the labor markets results in depopulation, ageing, unfavorable economic structure, low population retention force in often transboundary peripheries. The Danube Region is a part of Europe where large shares of population are currently living abroad partly because of differences in employment conditions. Since high inequalities are going to be present in a long run, it is of major importance to tackle the challenges deriving from westward migration flows. As a result of COVID-19, 36.5% of EU27 employees started working from home, but the transition rate to remote working was much more modest in Southeast European countries. Consequently, significant progress could be reached in the field of remote working in the context of just transition and social inclusion. Social entrepreneurship is still not a commonly-used practice to find innovative solutions to employment and other social challenges.
	improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure	Priority 3	Exclusion from education and thus from the labor market and social mobility is a major challenge. While in the majority of the Danube Region the economy and the current business cycle would require more human resources in manufacturing, ICT and services, most students opt for studying business, administration and law, social sciences or journalism which results in labor shortage in critical fields simultaneously with unemployment among the highly educated young people. This results in skills mismatch. The non-harmonized educational offers with the labor market needs lead to increasing student and labor migration, brain drain, tertiary unemployment among the graduated. There is a loss of the skilled and young intellectuals because of unfavorable/non-established higher education at certain regions.
	enhancing the role of culture and tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation	Priority 3	The macro-region incorporates large number of transnational cultural and natural heritage sites on which the development of joint tourism and cultural products and services, destination management can be based on for the sake of job creation in areas with vulnerable population and areas of depopulation.

A better cooperation governance	enhance institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, as well as other territorial strategies	Priority 4	The Danube Region is heterogeneous in terms of level of European integration. It consists of old and new Member States, candidate countries, a potential candidate and countries targeted by mostly the Eastern Partnership. There is still a lot of room to cooperate in breaking down administrative and legal obstacles within the Danube Region to serve the four freedoms. Good governance and regional policy can also function as a prime tool for increasing the level of trust towards the EU. The DTP can support the EU integration, strengthen the visibility and close-to-people character of the Regional Policy. The countries differ in their political-administrative systems. Subsequently, there is no homogeneity between the countries which can render regional cooperation challenging and at the same time offer room for enhancing legal harmonization. Hence, high diversity in public administration and governance can be challenging to overcome, and efficiency of public administration regarding cooperation on a transnational level.
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Source: DTP processing 2021-2027

Target groups of funded operations include all public and private institutions and stakeholders that will be involved or use/benefit from the project outputs/results.

Target groups are according to their legal form local, regional and national public authorities/institutions, bodies governed by public law, international organisations and private bodies.

Target groups comprise according to their thematic scope among others local, regional and national public authorities and organisations established and managed by public authorities, research and development institutions, universities

with research facilities, business support organisation (e.g. chamber of commerce, business innovations centres), higher education, education/training centre and school, civil society organizations, expert bodies or networks (in fields such as urbanism) private enterprises including SME.

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