

Report 2011/2012

# Status Quo analysis of hiking tourism along the Danube

## Summary



Supported by subsidies of the  
Austrian Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth



This project is co-financed by the European Union  
under the preparatory action "Sustainable Tourism".  
The sole responsibility of this publication lies with the author.  
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**Imprint:**

Published by

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[www.bmwfj.gv.at](http://www.bmwfj.gv.at)

and the

**European Commission, Enterprise and Industry DG**

Communication and Information Unit R4

BREY 13/092

B - 1049 Brussels (Belgium)

<http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise>

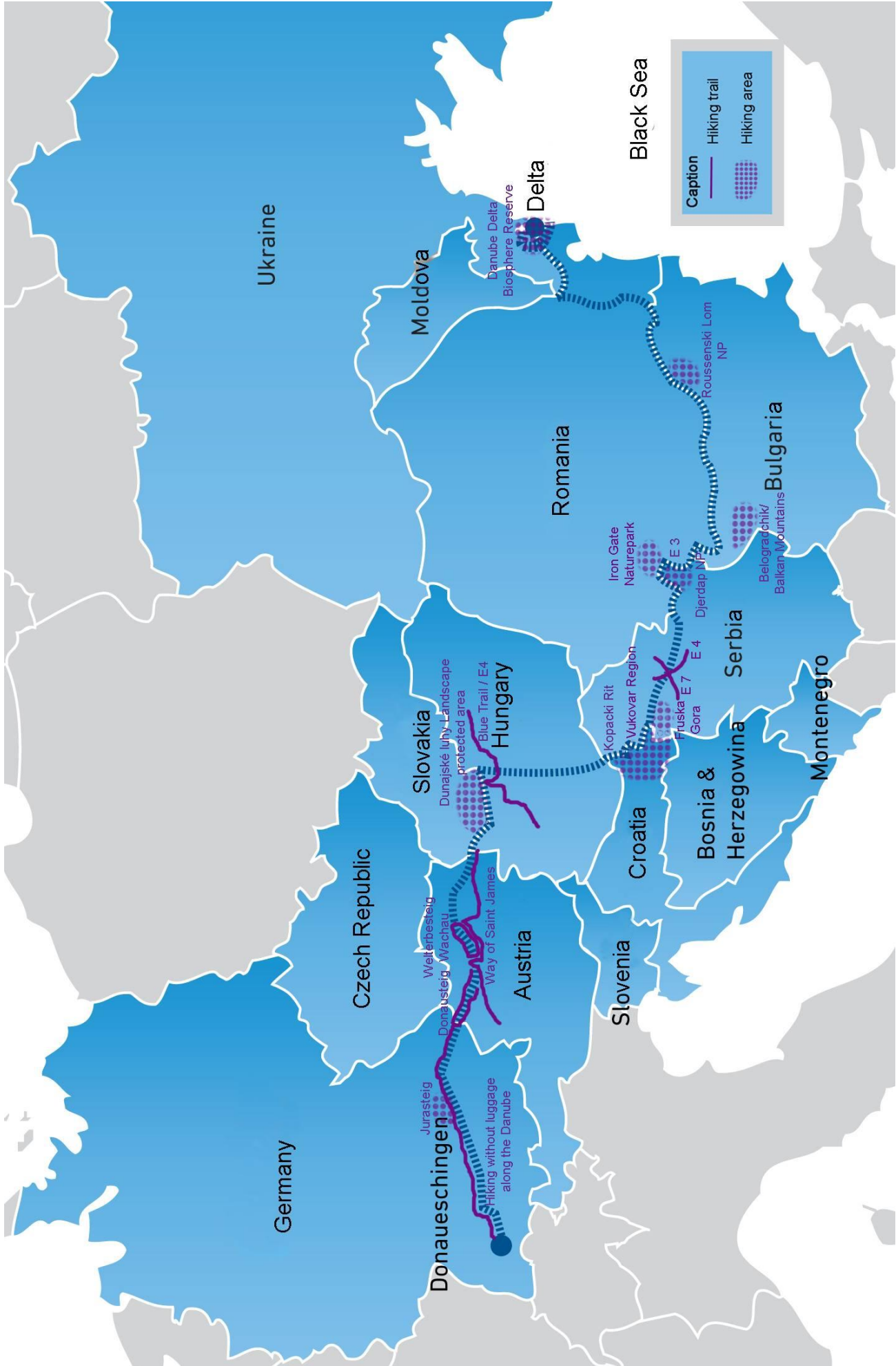
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# 1. INTRODUCTION – CROSS-BORDER HIKING ALONG THE DANUBE

The Danube is the second longest river in Europe with an overall length of 2.880 km. This major stream is sourcing in Germany. It passes through Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, and Moldova and is ultimately leading through the Danube Delta, Ukraine, into the Black Sea. Hence there are many European countries having the Danube with its economic, natural and touristic potential in common. It links Eastern and Western European countries, culture, people and ideologies on either side of the former iron curtain.



Picture 1 Course of the Danube

Hiking enables tourists to get to know countries and cultures in a direct way. Therefore establishing cross-border hiking along the Danube should not only support the touristic infrastructure, but also strengthen the bonds between all bordering countries. Moreover, visitors should get the possibility to widen their horizons and encounter a unique hiking experience within a variety of landscapes and regions.

The collaboration of Naturefriends International (NFI) and WGD Tourismus embraces and unifies the expertise of both partners in sustainable tourism development and project management.

This supports the aim of the EU Council to establish a targeted policy for the Danube that meets its ecological, transport and socio-economic needs. Sustainable tourism development in particular positively contributes to the economic, ecological and socio-economic environment and therefore facilitates the creation of long-term benefits for the entire Danube region.

## **1.1. EU-Strategy for the Danube region**

In June 2011 the European Council endorsed the EU Strategy for the Danube Region in order to launch its second macro-regional strategy.

### **Countries and regions concerned**

The macro-regional strategy will concern not only the countries along the Danube but within the whole Danube basin: Germany (Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria), Austria, the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Romania, Bulgaria, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (Odessa, Lviv, Transcarpathian and Chernovtsy Ob-lasts).

### **4-pillar-strategy**

The European Commission has prioritised 4 pillars and 11 priority areas as core content for the Danube strategy:

- Connecting the Danube Region: including mobility, sustainable energy, culture, tourism
- Protecting the Environment in the Danube Region: including water quality, risk prevention, biodiversity & landscape
- Building Prosperity in the Danube Region: including knowledge, education, invest in people and skills
- Strengthening the Danube Region: institutional capacity and cooperation, security and safety

The steering group for PAC 3 (Priority Area 'tourism and culture') defined amongst 7 main targets one concerning the 'development of new green tourism products'. Therefore a project on hiking tourism could be seen as direct contribution to the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

## **1.2. Aims and methodology**

Main purpose of the paper is to collect data on already existing hiking infrastructure in the countries along the Danube from its spring to its delta.

More than that, this report is the fundament for the project 'Danube-Hike – hiking tourism along the Danube' which has started with 1<sup>st</sup> March 2012 and is supported by European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry. This project should create awareness for hiking tourism along the Danube, contribute to the exchange of experiences in hiking tourism between the Danube countries and furthermore contribute to the application of quality criteria for sustainable hiking tourism along the Danube. The overall aim is to set the basis for cross-border cooperation in order to create benefits for all stakeholders along the Danube.

In July 2011 WGD Tourismus GmbH and Naturefriends International developed and sent out a questionnaire focusing on information about hiking infrastructure, important sights and landmarks, the hikers' motivation, touristic basis data within all Danube bordering countries. Moreover some missing information has been collected via e-mail and telephone enquiries and were researched via the Internet in order to complete the report. Subsequently the information has been analysed and summarized in this paper.

## **2. OVERALL COUNTRY SITUATION**

The access to hiking tourism is different in every country along the Danube. Some countries do already use some of the potential of this unique region; others are still developing touristic strategies and infrastructure for the Danube bordering areas. Therefore an overview is created about the actual situation in each of the 10 Danube countries.

### **2.1. Germany**

In Germany ARGE Deutsche Donau is responsible for marketing the German Danube region.

The organisation has developed the offer "Hiking without luggage along the Danube" starting in Donaueschingen and ending in Passau.

Other hiking areas or paths are touching the Danube region as well (e.g. Donau-Zollernalbweg near Sigmaringen, Hiking near Bad Gögging or the Jurasteig).



Most of the hikers are coming from the nearer and farther surroundings. The dominating countries of origin from hikers from abroad are Austria, Switzerland, France and Netherlands.

Concerning the length of stay, one-day-trips without overnight stays are prevailing. Most of the hikers are arriving by own car.

The importance of tourism in die German Danube region is high to medium – numerous tourist information offices are easy to find ([www.deutsche-donau.de/Informationen/Staedte-Kultur](http://www.deutsche-donau.de/Informationen/Staedte-Kultur)).

Optimizations of the perfectly continuous hiking area along the Danube in Germany could be standardized way-marking, with standardized resting points, maps and GPS-data, a qualification project and quality label for hosts meeting the requirements of hikers and bookable hiking packages.



Picture 2 Danube Gorge in Germany

## 2.2. Austria

The hiking infrastructure in Austria is of high quality and very long parts along the Danube are well developed for hiking tours. The responsible organisations for the development and maintenance of the trails are WGD Tourismus GmbH and Donau Niederösterreich Tourismus GmbH.

In Upper Austria there is the Donausteig, which mostly runs on both shores of



Picture 3 Donausteig – Schlögener Schlinge

the river. On the Northern shore it starts in the Bavarian city Passau, leading via Linz to the Strudengau region and ending in St. Nikola. On the Southern shore the Donausteig runs from Passau via Linz to Enns. The whole path is divided to 23 stages. On 40 loop-tours it is possible to leave the main trail and discover the surroundings of the Danube region. On the Donausteig

hikers find standardized markings, signposts and resting places with consistent



Donausteig furniture and information boards. Qualified accommodation facilities and hosts provide tailor-made amenities for hikers ([www.donausteig.com](http://www.donausteig.com)).

Along both shores of the Danube in Lower Austria between Melk and Krems runs the Welterbesteig Wachau. Standardized markings and signposts allow hiking experiences in both directions ([www.welterbesteig.at](http://www.welterbesteig.at)).

As the Austrian Way of Saint James pilgrim route runs from Wolfsthal via Vienna, Krems, Melk in Lower Austria, continuing in Upper Austria near Enns and leaving the Danube region in Wilhering after crossing Linz.

As there isn't any organisation/institution responsible for the infrastructure, renewing signpost and markings etc. Donau Nieder-österreich Tourismus GmbH has developed parts of the Way of Saint James in Lower Austria. In Upper Austria the Way of Saint James touches the Donausteig on the Southern shore of the Danube ([www.jakobswege-a.eu](http://www.jakobswege-a.eu)). But as the Way of Saint James is only marked in one way (upstream) it is definitely not an ideal option for linking the Austrian trails.

In November 2011 Danube NÖ GmbH started a project for developing hiking paths in Nibelungen area (Nibelungengau) from Sarmingstein (Upper Austria) to

Emmersdorf (Lower Austria) in the north and from Ybbs to Melk in the south.



Picture 4 Welterbesteig Wachau

Main target

in Austria is to develop a continuous hiking path along the Danube and to guarantee a consistent quality in way-marking/signposting and infrastructure. In 2012 steps for developing the continuous trail along the Danube are going to be made.

The hiking areas in Austria are easily accessible by public transport (mostly by bus). The hiking tours can be combined with a river cruise on the Danube or a train ride. As Welterbesteig and Donausteig only started in 2010 there aren't any long-time statistics and evaluations concerning hikers available yet.

### 2.3. Slovakia

In Slovakia the Danube flows 172 km from Bratislava to Esztergom. On its way the Danube passes three Slovak regions: the Bratislava Region, the Trnava Region and the Nitra Region, all named after their largest cities. Not only the city Bratislava attracts tourist, but also the ancient mills and the beautiful floodplain forests along the Danube.

Hiking tourism is a very prospective area of the Slovak tourism industry; the total length of marked footpaths is more than 14 000 km. More than 95% of these marked hiking trails are in the hilly part of the country (<http://www.telecom.gov.sk/index/index.php?ids=119830>). Hiking in



Picture 5 Hiking in Slovakia

Slovakia is popular due to the European Long Distance Walking Trails, above all E8 crossing Bratislava and Trnava region ([slovakiaholi-days.org/walking.htm](http://slovakiaholi-days.org/walking.htm)). The Slovak Tourist Club maintains the trail, but no initiative for developing hiking tourism could be found, given the lack of financial resources. At the moment, main attractions for hikers are the Bratislava region as well as the Štúrovo region. The Danube region – (except for Bratislava) is popular mainly among less solvent clients as a cheap holiday destination. As far as foreign tourists are concerned, only holidaymakers from the Czech Republic with a tight holiday budget and guests from neighbouring Hungary - often due to their ethnic links - come to visit this region (Transnational Strategy for the Sustainable Territorial Development of the Danube Area with special regard to Tourism, 2010).

### 2.4. Hungary

The Hungarian part of the Danube counts up to 417,20 km. The most important Danube cities are Győr, Komarom, Esztergom, Visegrad, Szentendre, Budapest, Dunaujvaros, Kalocsa, Baja, Mohacs.



Picture 6 Hiking trail in Hungarian forest

UNESCO has recently declared the Great Plain along the Danube together with the Hortobágy Puszta a world heritage site ([www.danube-river.org/de/ungarn](http://www.danube-river.org/de/ungarn)).

The National Blue Trail, part of the European Long Distance Trail E4, provides a well-established infrastructure for hiking tourism in Hungary. Since it has a long tradition Hungarians as well as international hikers appreciate the well-established infrastructure ([www.kektura.click.hu/](http://www.kektura.click.hu/)).

Since the maintenance of the Blue Trail and the Hungarian part of E4 is subject to the Hungarian Naturefriends Association, the development of further hiking infrastructure should be supported. Given the fact that no questionnaires were available for Hungary, there is little information about hiking tourism development within the Hungarian Danube regions.

## 2.5. Croatia

The Danube flows approx. 134 km along the Croatian-Serbian border. Slavonia, located in the northeast of Croatia, is the region dominated by the rivers Danube and Drave (Drau / Drava). Around 20 km from Osijek the Drave joins the Danube.

Croatia offers a wide network of hiking trails, mainly in the regions along the Mediterranean Sea, the islands, respectively. Even though hiking is not the main touristic activity in Slavonia, there is potential for cooperation. No information about hikers could be gathered by means of questionnaires.



Picture 7 Danube in Croatia

Within the Danube Competence Centre the International Cooperation Office, TINTL as well as the Croatian Agrotourism- and Cyclotourism Associations are involved. Thus there is potential for the development of hiking infrastructure in Croatia during the Hiking and Biking Project of the DCC ([danubecc.org/index.php?pg=list-of-members](http://danubecc.org/index.php?pg=list-of-members)).

## 2.6. Serbia

The Danube enters Serbia near Bezdán, continues along the border between Croatia and Serbia, then flows to Novi Sad and Belgrade and finally leaves the country near Ram. The river passes eight regions and covers a total



distance of 587 km in Serbia. The regions are the following: Zapadana Backa, Juzna Backa, Srem, Beograd, Juzni Banat, Podunavile, Branicevo and Bor.



Picture 8 Hiker in Novi Sad, Serbia

In 2007 Serbia joined the Pedestrian Association. According to the National Tourist Organization of Serbia, two walking routes E4 and E7 cross the country. These routes offer tourists the possibility to get to know the Eastern and Western part of Serbia walking along the most important sights and get to know

landscape and people. The E4 and E7 routes cover main at-

tractions such as the Iron Gate, cross the Fruška Gora National Park and lead along the famous orthodox monasteries ([www.visitserbia.org/i2.php?modid=609&p=readdesc&infoid=766&portalid=1](http://www.visitserbia.org/i2.php?modid=609&p=readdesc&infoid=766&portalid=1)).

According to the survey conducted the majority of hikers in the Danube in Serbia region is from the nearer surroundings and is staying for one day. Only a minority of hikers comes from the neighbouring countries.

## 2.7. Bulgaria

In Bulgaria the Danube is the border river to Romania and counts up to 471 km. The Danube is the only navigable river in the country ([www.bulgarienweb.de/Geographie.84.0.html](http://www.bulgarienweb.de/Geographie.84.0.html))



Picture 9 Danube in Russenski Lom, Bulgaria

. It crosses seven regions of the country, Vidin, Montana, Vratsa, Pleven, Veliko Turnovo, Rouse and Silistra

([www.thybo.net/bulgarien/thumbs/BGRegion.gif](http://www.thybo.net/bulgarien/thumbs/BGRegion.gif)).

Given the fact that Bulgaria possesses many mountain ranges, namely Rila, Pirin, Stara planina, Rodopes, Sredna Gora, Vitocha (vicinity of Sofia),

the country offers a well-established hiking infrastructure. Also the European Long Distance Hiking trails E4 and E3 pass through the country in the North and in the South ([www.era-ewv-ferp.com/index.php?page\\_id=29](http://www.era-ewv-ferp.com/index.php?page_id=29)). Especially the Western Balkan Mountains provide a distinctive hiking trail network.

According to the questionnaires received hikers are mainly from the nearer and farther surroundings and staying for 1 – 3 days within the region. No homogenous answer concerning the main incoming nation has been stated. Nevertheless, France, Greece and Italy were mentioned most often.

## 2.8. Romania

In Romania the Danube passes through 12 counties, namely Caras-Severin, Mehedinti, Dolj, Olt, Teleorman, Galati, Giurgiu, Calarasi, Constanta, Ialomita, Braila and enters the Black Sea in the region of Tulcea. The Danube's macro region is characterised by a huge linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity. In the frame of the transnational project DATOURWAY, committed to the development of tourism along the middle and lower sections of the Danube River, the analysis undertaken for Romania states the fact that the region



Picture 10 Danube Delta trail

faces the problem of insufficient accessibility and a low developed traffic network.

Hiking routes in Romania exist within the protected areas along the Danube:

- Iron Gates Nature Park
- Comana Nature Park
- Braila Small Moor Nature Park
- Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve

The Iron Gate area is located at the border between Romania and Serbia. Within the Romanian part one can find the Iron Gate Nature Park. Comana Nature Park lies in the vicinity of Bucharest, at about 40 km south and it is the third wetland in Romania and the second as biodiversity. As the Danube approaches the Black Sea, there are two other protected areas, Braila Small Moor Nature Park and Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, which offer the visitors enchanting sceneries.

In order to foster nature tourism, an analysis of the greenways along the Danube in Romania, was done until the end of 2011 within the DATOURWAY project and supported was by the Romanian Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism. It is already finalized and published on the website of the DATOURWAY project (DATOURWAY, the national analysis of the territorial tourism strategy; Romanian Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism).

The main incoming destinations for Romania are Germany, Italy, France, USA, Austria, UK/Ireland, Russia and Hungary. Further increase is expected for the upcoming year.

## 2.9. Moldova

The Danube touches Moldova near Cahul. It only strives the country in the Danube River Basin for app. 340 m. Around 1 Million People live in the Danube River Basin in Moldova, but only 8% of the area is occupied by settlements. In the Cahul region, more specifically in the lower Prut Basin and only 20 to 30 km away from the confluence of Prut and the Danube, one can find the Lake Manta and the Lake Beleu ([www.icpdr.org/icpdr-pages/moldova.htm](http://www.icpdr.org/icpdr-pages/moldova.htm)).

Main incoming destinations are Romania and Turkey, followed by Russia, Ukraine and Italy ([www.tur.md/eng/section/762/](http://www.tur.md/eng/section/762/)).



Picture 11 Danube in Moldova

([www.moldova.md/en/tourism/](http://www.moldova.md/en/tourism/)). According to the official website of Moldavia, main touristic forms in the country are rural – especially wine tourism, cultural tourism and spa tourism

([www.moldova.md/en/tourism/](http://www.moldova.md/en/tourism/)). No information about hikers could be gained through questionnaires. Even though there is a lack of hiking infrastructure, there could be potential in the rural and wine tourism sector to develop hiking

tourism in specific. There is a great potential for the ecological tourism in this area, giving the fact that in the country there are dozens of landscape re-

serves, where could be developed hiking tourism, specifically in the Padurea Domneasca, Plaiul Fagului, Codrii, Saharna, Tpova and Trebujeni reserves.

## 2.10. Ukraine

The Danube gets into the Ukraine near the Lake Cahul, in the Odessa region, and then enters the Danube Delta Reserve before finally leading to the Black Sea. Reni and Izmail are directly located at the Danube. Given the fact that the Romanian-Ukrainian border leads through the Danube Delta Reserve, visiting the Reserve from both sides represents a natural and cultural experience to visitors. Hikers within the Odessa region mainly come from the nearer surroundings and only few from Russia or other countries. Means of transport are almost equally bus, coach and train. Length of stay is approximately 2- 3 days. Nevertheless the questionnaires answered prove that hiking is not a main activity within the area.



Picture 12 Pelicans in the Ukraine

Moreover, according to replies received during this analysis, it was found that the Ex-USSR sport tourism was pedestrian, water, bike, mountain and speleo tourism. Hiking is quite developed in Crimea and Carpathians but was not developed in the Danube Delta region because of the lack of infrastructure (due to border zone which restricted visit to the region during Soviet era). Hence there are no marked hiking trails nor is there a well-established accommodation structure. Nevertheless, high expectations of the region are put on the development of hiking tourism to change the situation.



### **3. CONCLUSIONS**

Given the fact that no or almost no questionnaires were received from Hungary, Slovakia, Moldova and Croatia, most of the information has been researched via the Internet or partners. Austria, Germany and Bulgaria in contrary sent many questionnaires and therefore information by those countries helped to get a clearer picture of the actual situation. Further helpful information was provided by Romania sending an analysis of the DATOURWAY project. Also the extent to which the questionnaires were answered highly differed. Whereas some tourism institutions and partners answered with high effort, some did not send English Internet sites or information. In terms of brochures and additional material, one has to say that Austrian and German interviewees sent many brochures. Also Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania sent pictures, maps and further material. Given the fact that answers quite differed, it can be assumed that interest, touristic infra and information structure but also linguistic differences played a major role for the response rate.

It was found that all countries do have in common that there are touristic highlights, exciting natural sights and interesting culture along the Danube, worth creating a hiking trail along the Danube. In terms of existing hiking trails, the extent is highly differing between the countries. Germany and Austria do already use the potential of hiking tourism along the Danube providing hiking, cruising and cycling offers and infrastructure. Furthermore communities next to the trails are involved in the maintenance and offers for the trails. But there is also potential for countries such as Hungary, Slovakia and Serbia using the European Long Distance Trail. In terms of signalisation all countries have different trails, being differently signed. Hence in order to create cross-border cooperation, the use of similar or the same signs would be an asset. In terms of maps and brochures the existing basis highly depends on the touristic use of the Danube bordering regions. Hence also Austria and Germany provide a high number of brochures and also practise cross-border marketing. This could motivate further Danube countries to pooling their marketing efforts in order to promote the Danube region. Accommodation is provided in all countries, with the minor difference that the majority is not dedicated especially to hikers. Nevertheless some certification associations have been found which could be used as basis for a common hiking accommodation label. In terms of tours and packages it has to be mentioned that hiking is the

basis for many national and international tour operators. Nevertheless guiding is also subject to national hiking associations. Given the fact that within the European Rambler's Association international trails are established under maintenance of national hiking associations, this would be great potential for a common hiking trail.

Nevertheless the establishment of a cross-border hiking trail can be mainly considered in connecting hiking trails in Germany and Austria and partially in countries such as Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia and within the Danube Delta region. Considering the combination of hiking, biking and cruising there is potential to establish and enlarge existing cross-border offers. Furthermore the involvement of hiking regions along the Danube plays a major role in respect to the establishment of common labels, quality standards, signposting and certification of accommodations. A potential cooperation between the Wanderbares Deutschland, Donausteig Guesthouses, the Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism and the Union for Green Tourism would facilitate the establishment of mutual certification for sustainable hiking accommodation along cross-border hiking trails. Furthermore international cooperation with hiking associations such as the European Ramblers Association would further facilitate cross-border trails and signposting.

Most countries mentioned their motivation for cross-border collaboration as well as the will to improve their hiking infrastructure. Not to forget several cross-boarder cooperation's, either focusing on hiking or biking tourism. In terms of cross-border collaboration the already existing ones such as the Donausteig or EU launched projects such as the ENPI Cross-border Programme bare potential for the integration of cross-border hiking along the Danube.

This paper should, apart of other activities, create the basis for underlining the potential of hiking tourism along the Danube. Moreover connecting existing infrastructure, the creation and implementation of innovative hiking offers, common standards and web presence should be further steps towards hiking tourism beyond the borders. Also the production and distribution of this report and a brochure will contribute to information in several languages and countries. Above all the basis for a common marketing strategy will be established and all outcomes of DanubeHIKE will be presented on an international hiking conference.

Joining expertise and know-how within all Danube bordering countries is

desirable to ensure a constant quality level of hiking trails along the whole Danube. Hence this should strengthen the sustainable tourism presence in the Danube basin and therefore is one of the first steps towards the implementation of the EU Danube strategy. Putting all these aspects to a nutshell, there is great potential for the establishment of one common goal – enlarging the offer and creating standards for cross-border hiking within the Danube countries.

## 4. APPENDIX

### 4.1. Sources and literature

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[www.wanderforschung.de](http://www.wanderforschung.de)

Zolles & Edlinger; Danube Tourist Commission (2009), Der Donau Radweg –  
Eine touristische Bestandsaufnahme

Zolles & Edlinger (2011), Danube Travel - Optimierung des erdverbundenen,  
öffentlichen Verkehrs für den Tourismus im Donauraum

Romanian National Institute for Research and Development (n.y.a.),  
DATOURWAY, The national analysis of the territorial tourism strategy

Bulgarian Ministry of Economy, Energy and Tourism (n.y.a.), Destination:  
Danube Bulgaria

Personal conversation with Beatrix und Florian Weichselbaum, further  
information <http://donauwelle2011.wordpress.com>

Additional Information attached to the questionnaires: maps and regional  
information of Novi Sad, Serbia; Walking in the Danube Delta Information by  
Salix Tours; Maps of Roussenski Lom Natural Park and the Western Balkan  
region, Bulgaria

Further: Additional Information sent via Emails

### 4.2. Pictures

Picture 1: [www.interact-eu.net/danube\\_region\\_strategy/  
danube\\_strategy/285/3928](http://www.interact-eu.net/danube_region_strategy/danube_strategy/285/3928)

Picture 2: Straße der Kaiser und Könige/Wilkin Spitta

Picture 3: Donau OÖ/Weissenbrunner

Picture 4: Christian Bogner

Picture 5: [www.infohub.com/images/tours/1\\_12653\\_2.jpg](http://www.infohub.com/images/tours/1_12653_2.jpg)

Picture 6: [www.123rf.com/photo\\_1696708\\_green-forest-in-hungary-with-stairs-  
and-a-fallen-tree.html](http://www.123rf.com/photo_1696708_green-forest-in-hungary-with-stairs-and-a-fallen-tree.html)

Picture 7: [www.wildlifeextra.com/resources/listimg/world/europe/  
croatia\\_danube@body.jpg](http://www.wildlifeextra.com/resources/listimg/world/europe/croatia_danube@body.jpg)

Picture 8: received by partner from Novi Sad, Serbia

Picture 9: received by partner from Russenski Lom, Bulgaria

Picture 10: NFI

Picture 11: v19.lscache4.c.bigcache.googleapis.com/static.panoramio.com  
/photos/original/40260437.jpg

Picture 12: assets.panda.org/img/greatwhitepelicans\_360501.jpg

### 4.3. Contact points for the Danube and/or hiking tourism

Country	Contact person/point
Germany	ARGE Deutsche Donau Uly Koch E-Mail: info@deutsche-donau.de www.deutsche-donau.de
Austria	WGD Tourismus GmbH Petra Riffert E-Mail: info@donauradweg.at www.danube.at
Slovak Republic	Slovak Ministry for Transport, Building and Regional development Livia Bertokova E-Mail: livia.bertokova@mindop.sk www.mindop.sk
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Bulgaria	Bulgarian Ministry for Economy, Energy and Tourism Hristomir Hristov E-Mail: e-docs@mee.government.bg www.mi.government.bg
Romania	Romanian Ministry for Regional Development and Tourism, Division for Tourism Development Octavian Arsene E-mail: octavian.arsene@mdrt.ro www.mdrtr.ro
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