PARTICIPATION DAY IN THE DANUBE STRATEGY

LOCAL ACTORS AND PARTICIPATION

Village report: Local Administration Village

Date of the event: 25 June 2014, Esterházy Palace, Eisenstadt

The participants: With about 35 participants took place the Local Administration Working Group' (after that WG Admin) meeting in Eisenstadt. WG Admin main aim was to trigger a lively discussion on local actors' role, performance and possibilities in EUSDR in the frame of guiding principles such as subsidiarity, competence and transparency. The moderators focused on the facilitation of "constructive dialogues" that articulated general needs and demands for the improvement of the local administration rather than collecting existing shortcomings and deficits. WG Admin tried also to find common solutions and/or some starting points the above mentioned aims.

The participants well-represented the entire Danube region as they came from Germany, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Serbia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Moldova. Beside the local and regional administration, representatives of NGOs, state administration and the European Commission attended the meeting. On one hand this allowed a wide and free discussion on the topic as very different voices and interest were introduced. On the other hand this made some limitations on the discussions and the given results were mainly general statements.

After a brief introduction of the topic and the participants lively discussion started focusing on two major topics:

Main issues for the debate:

1. **How is local actors' embeddedness in EUSDR?**

This includes questions such as:

In what kind of platforms are they active, how committed they are for EUSDR and what are the main areas of their interest, horizontalization cooperation with NGOs, academia and private sector.

2. **How national strategies promote participation?**

This includes questions such as: What steps have been done by the states to better involve bottom-up actors into the strategy? How is the communication between state administration and local-regional self-governments.

Participants were asked to discuss these questions in two horizontal aspects:

3. **The achieved results (learning processes, experiences)**

4. **Future expectations, demands.**

Given results of the working group:

- Local actors have very different situation in the Danube area. They face very different challenges, and there is a considerable gap between the performances of public administration of the respective countries. This means also that we cannot speak about a homogeneous administrative space in the Danube area, there are rather sub-regions alongside the Danube with different capacities in personal, financial resources advocacy and network building. E.g the city of Vienna was mentioned as the key driving force for bottom-up participation and initiatives. At the same time, some common issues can be identified as general demands of participants e.g. the better transparency and reduction of corruption.

- Participants said that local actors' embeddedness in EUSDR was still weak. The influence of the central state is still too strong and decisive which is combined in some cases with political pressure on the local level. In this respect local actors should clearly speak up their demands. Regular communication is necessary between local actors and states. Simultaneously to that a decentralisation process of the public administration should continue by considering the principles of subsidiarity, participation and transparency.

- As common areas of interest transport/intermodality, migration and the preserve of drinking water were mentioned. These areas were mentioned rather as potential opportunities for cooperation than areas with concrete experiences, taken from already existing collaborations.

- Participants underlined that there was still of high importance to ensure facilities for international cooperation and projects as this was the first stage of cooperation in the area. In this respect there were high expectations for the newly established urban platform website – operated by PA 10.

- Participants argued that Council of the Danube Cities and Regions should stronger promote the policy making of cities and it should explain cities why it was important to participate in EUSDR.

- Strengthening the horizontal and vertical partnership of cities was defined as a key exercise for the future. To achieve that focused capacity building of the local administration would be important. Some concrete examples for best practices and exchange of methods were mentioned: e.g. how integrated territorial investment was managed in Vienna, Bratislava and Budapest could open new areas of cooperation, especially for the metropolitan cities in the Danube region. Small and medium size cities should also find similar topics for exchange in the field of education, culture and advocacy building.

There are no additional suggestions comments to the Eisenstadt Declaration

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