

## Participation in the EUSDR

### Principles - Formats - Procedures

Policy Paper by Stefan August Lütgenau, DCSF

#### Framework

Participation is a constitutive element of all EU and EU-led multi-level actions to materialize in the related policies (*contents*), polities (*structures*) and politics (*processes*). Therefore Participation is a constitutive element of the EUSDR. While Participation is present on the policy level of the EUSDR, Participation still has to be adequately established on the levels of polity and politics. The structures and processes of Participation related to the EUSDR in the EUSDR-participating countries and the supranational EUSDR level should be coordinated, comparable, and complimentary. The structures and processes on the EUSDR level should be adequately mirrored and supported by adequate process in all participating countries on a comparable level and in a comparable format.

Civil society is an organized actor of European dimension that is part of and contributes actively to the multi-level- governance macro-regional strategy in the Danube Region. Civil Society is experienced actor actively involved in all EUSDR-policy areas and cooperating with national and supra-national actors (ICPDR, CEI, etc.) for decades. Active and open involvement of Civil Society participation creates a higher level of transparency and fosters stronger compliance with the basic principle of subsidiarity in all EU actions. Widespread and structured participation on all levels of the multi-level macro regional strategy in the Danube Region that meets the standards set by the TEU will be a starting point for an emerging European and Danube Region public sphere.

In regional and cohesion politics especially in macro-regional frameworks of the European Union with its place-based agenda, participation must not be limited to a single top-level event at the Annual Fora. In order to reflect the local, regional and national conditions, requirements, and demands annual national hearing with Local actors have to be introduced and held regularly.

Civil society, other non-state actors from the local and regional level (cultural institutions, academia) as well as local authorities share a common role as executive elements of the multi-level approach of macro-regional strategies, a close position to the citizens in the Danube Region as well the overall grass-root character of civil society and local authorities. Endowed with competence, experience and direct access to the citizens, participation of civil society and local actors will lead to better project development and implementation, tailored to the local framework (place-based) and in consequence to better spending.

This led to the decision to form the EUSDR-Platform for Local Actors (D-LAP). D-Lap is coordinated by PA 10 in the framework of the EUSDR governance platforms (Urban, Local Actors, Financing, and Capacity) and in accordance with the Action Plan of the EUSDR which was proposed by the Commission on 8 December 2010.

The establishment of the EUSDR **Participation Day** as the EUSDR-wide structure for Participation, first held in the framework of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Forum in Vienna in June 2014, enables local actors to contribute their expertise as well as to introduce, develop and voice their perspectives, needs and concerns. The event and structure of the EUSDR Participation Day needs to be underpinned by corresponding **National Hearings** for Local Actors.

The Participation structure in the EUSDR is composed of two components, a) national annual hearings in each participating country and b) the EUSDR Participation Day connected to the Annual Forum of the EUSDR as well as the reporting section in the a plenary session of the Annual Fora. Coherence of national hearings and annual fora is supervised by the PACs (PA 10 lead-function), the Steering Group for the Participation Day and the D-LAP Advisory Committee.

## National Hearings for Local Actors and the Annual Participation Day in the EUSDR

### Key aims

**Annual Hearings** held on a national level are the tool to top-down, bottom-up and horizontal information of all relevant local actors and the implementing bodies on the national level (NC, PAC, EU Programme national contact points and agencies, Civil Society, Academia, Cultural Institutions, Local Authorities). The **Annual National Hearing** shall provide all relevant information of the national implementation strategies, main points of debate on the EUSDR-level as well as all relevant information on the national and supranational planning. The hearings should provide the opportunity of an information exchange from the local and regional level and of non-state actors. National hearings will thus form the national counterpart to the EUSDR Participation Day and serve as national preparation for the future Annual Fora and Participation Days. Held in a spirit of mutual trust and cooperation the hearing shall function as the national fora for information exchange. In participating countries with participating regions with a special status (Serbia, Autonomous Province of Vojvodina; Austrian Bundesländer) or where only parts of the state are participating (Germany, Ukraine) regional hearings can be an additional option.<sup>1</sup>

### Standards

Cooperation and mutual information shall be the *modus operandi* of the annual hearings. The participating countries in the EUSDR have various cultures and traditions of participation and political dialogue. With due respect to these traditions and cultures a set of minimum standards should be kept in order to give equal opportunities to Local Actors throughout the Danube region. The hearings should comply with the following standards.

#### Transparency:

- National Hearings should be held in the most transparent way. List of participants, invites, and agenda should be public;
- Invitation should be made well in advance (4 weeks including draft agenda and a list of invitees);
- It is recommended to publish a resume/resolution protocol timely in the aftermath.

#### Accessibility:

- National hearings should be open to all interested local actors (state and non-state) as well as to the academia;
- International stakeholders active in the country or in close cooperation with national stakeholders are to be invited;

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<sup>1</sup> Bulgaria opted for a sequence of regional hearing related to the NUTS 2 based Regional Development Councils

- EUSDR managing bodies and implementation units as well as the steering group of the Annual Participation Day are to be invited.

**Low-threshold event:**

- Held once a year;
- One day event;
- Open invitation;
- No cost-coverage.

**Relevance:**

- National hearings should include all relevant state actors such as NCP and PAC, provide all relevant information on the national strategies, implementation and planning related to EUSDR as well as inform on the relevant supranational ongoing and debates;
- Local Actors should have ample possibility to express themselves;
- The hearing should give fair space and time for debate.

**Formal procedure:**

- The annual National Hearing shall be held upon invitation by the NC(s). It can be held at the national capital or a focal point of EUSDR related activities;
- The venue should be accessible in term of time and space;
- Hearing should be open to all interested stakeholders (not upon invitation only);
- Hearing should reflect the interregional and international linkages of actors and stakeholders;
- Hearing should be a low-threshold event in term of costs, access and communication;
- Preparation for the next Annual Forum and the next Participation Day should be high on the agenda.

**Follow-up:**

A resume/resolution protocol as well as the list of participants should be published timely following the event. A possibility should be given to interested stakeholders to declare interest for up-coming hearings.

## Participation Day

The Annual Participation Day is the forum for Civil Society stakeholders in the EUSDR. It serves as EUSDR-wide structure for Participation in the EUSDR, reflects the debates and results of the National Hearings held in the participating countries.

It is in terms of location, timing and content closely connected to the EUSDR Annual Forum, to which it reports in a plenary session.

The Participation Day is jointly organised by the Civil Society, the PAS, the hosting country, among others represented in the Participation Day Steering Group and the EU Commission. The Steering Group reflects the Troika Principle of outgoing, actual and future Annual Forum hosts and organizers.

The Participation Day is open to all stakeholders from civil society and local actors in the EUSDR. Participation including travel costs and accommodation should be subsidized for non-state actors, especially for those from non-EU Member States.

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#### **Danube Civil Society Forum**

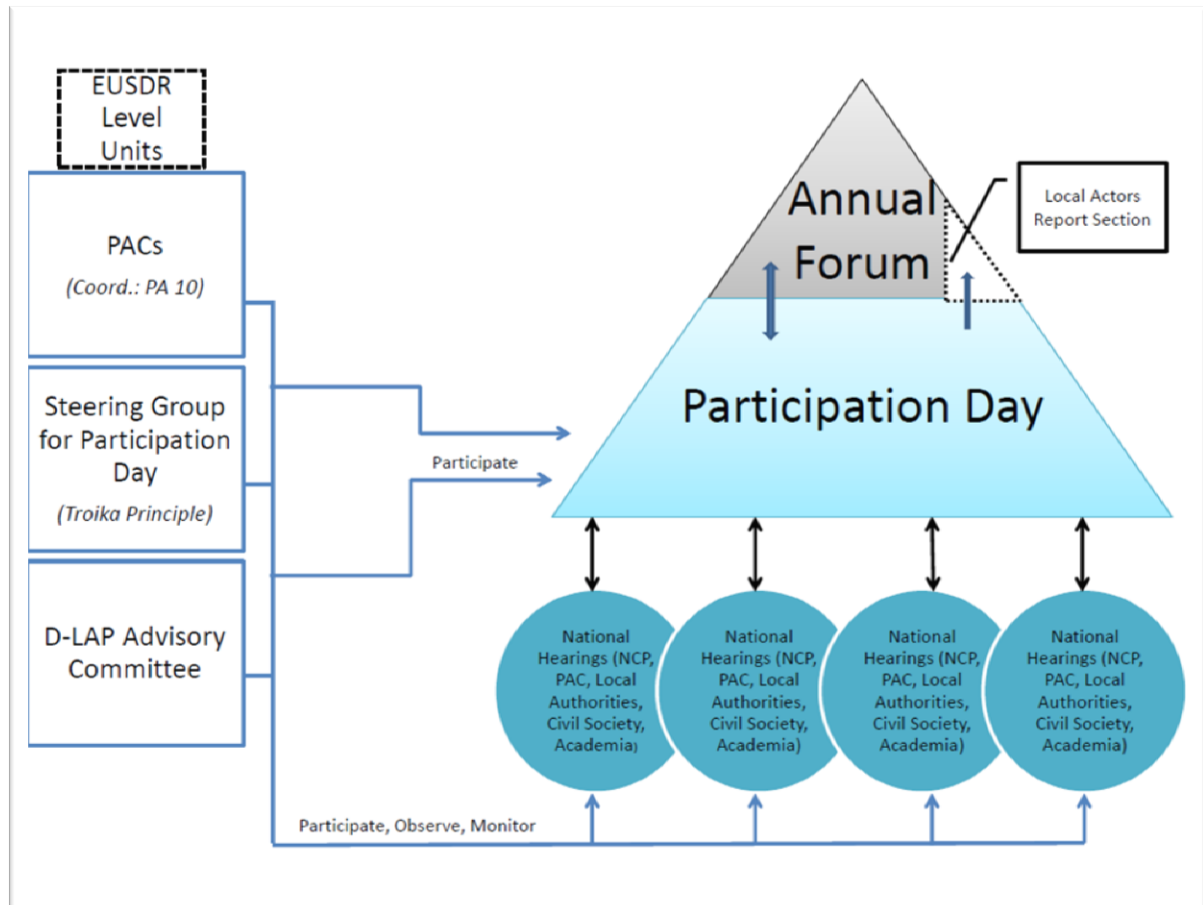
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**Diagram:**

**The Structure for Participation in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region**



**D-LAP Advisory Committee:** Committee in the framework of the PA 10 to advise PA 10 on the D-LAP.

**D-LAP:** Danube Local Actors Platform.

**NCP:** National Contact Point (EUSDR coordination point on national level).

**PA 10:** EUSDR Priority Area Coordination 10 (Governance, Finance, Capacity Building, Civil Society).

**PAC:** EUSDR Priority Area Coordinator.

**Troika:** Team of representatives of the current, the previous and the future host of the EUSDR Annual Forum.