



6th Danube Participation Day

26 June 2019 | Bucharest (RO)

Youth – Empowerment – Participation

Results of the World Café discussions at the 6th Danube Participation Day

The World Café sessions at the 6th Danube Participation Day addressed different dimensions of youth participation and youth empowerment in the Danube Region. The discussions touched upon thematic priorities as well as upon methods of participation.

The discussions revealed a comprehensive overview of challenges and obstacles that need to be overcome. At the same time, the stakeholders defined manifold solutions and instruments that are supposed to empower young people and facilitate participation for co-design a prosperous future for the Danube Region. In this spirit, the discussions showed four major dimensions that need to be addressed:

Capacity building

Building capacities for media/digital literacy or acquiring skills is a pre-requisite for active commitment in co-designing policies and implementing activities. In this regard, effective initiatives for youth participation need to make sure that young people are equipped with the knowledge to actively shape their future.

Accessibility

Viable and sustainable development needs to be inclusive. Hence, accessibility of knowledge and information, accessibility of places, networks and services is crucial for increasing the quality of life for inhabitants in the Danube Region. This is all the more true for young people and their participation in the long-term development of the Danube Region.

Cooperation

Cooperation is the essence of macro-regional strategies and needs to be further strengthened. Thus, initiatives for youth participation should facilitate the connection between different stakeholder groups in order to lower the threshold for forming partnerships and fostering cooperation. This refers particularly to closer cooperation and dialogue between state and non-state actors as well as to closer connections between different generations to support mutual learning and understanding.




Changing mind-sets

In order to achieve the vision that is promoted in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, the implemented activities should encourage the change of mind-sets towards stronger cooperation (from a nationalist to a cooperative attitude), better communication and sustainable development.





World Café Sessions

Environment & Sustainability

The stakeholders taking part in the discussion on “Environment & Sustainability” defined several key obstacles regarding youth participation to push forward sustainable development:







-  Access to reliable information
-  Feeling of being powerless
-  Biases and prejudices against sustainable development approaches

Against this background, stakeholders proposed the following measures to support youth participation:

-  Expert NGOs need to reach out to young people and impart knowledge to young people (e.g. in schools)
-  Empowerment and increasing capacities through on-site volunteering
-  Networking and forming a critical mass to gain access to policy-makers
-  Stronger communication on benefits of sustainable lifestyles




Employability & Education

Stakeholders identified Employability & Education as the major opportunity for the younger generation even in rural areas and vulnerable groups to social rise and to fair participation in social, economic and political life. Nevertheless stakeholders identified mayor obstacles for young people to enjoy adequate education and thus open doors to adequate employability:






-  Lack of investment by the state in the education system
-  Lack of interest within certain socials groups in education
-  Need for capacity building and continued training for teachers
-  More support to informal education and life-long learning
-  Lack of jobs and training opportunities in rural areas
-  Lack of public and private investment for sustainable jobs in rural areas.

Social Innovation & Entrepreneurship

In the area of social innovation and entrepreneurship the stakeholders identified major obstacles for young people such as:



-  Lack of experience in starting a business or developing a business plan
-  Lack of knowledge about suitable financing instruments as well as low availability of suitable funding
-  Shortcomings in formal education in entrepreneurial skills

Based on the identified challenges, the stakeholders defined possible solutions to enhance youth participation in the area of social innovation and entrepreneurship:

-  Simplified and accessible structures for launching start-ups with a special focus on young people
-  Development of suitable funding instruments for young entrepreneurs
-  Increasing impact investment for civil society by the public sector
-  Supporting intergenerational teams (generation X & Y) to enhance exchange of views and experience for a holistic approach to change
-  Strengthening the link between business and social value




Connectivity

Connectivity was understood as the technical means to allow (full) access to the social, economic and political life in the nation state and in Europe. The stakeholders demanded better connectivity in better terms to travel abroad and to experience Europe and the EU. Erasmus was named as the shining important example to support connectivity for younger generation.

-  Better public traffic and infrastructure
-  More and accessible means to travel abroad (and incentives to return home [brain drain])





Digitalisation

Digitalisation was seen as the essential innovative development in Europe. At the same time digitalisation may bear the risk of leaving behind less qualified and vulnerable groups.




-  Better and more state-of-the art digital portals in society and politics
-  More investment in digitalisation and education for digitalisation
-  A safe and secure framework for implementing digital technologies in society.

Financing

Regarding stronger involvement of civil society, and young people in particular, access to suitable financing for projects poses a major challenge. Currently, stakeholders of regional development in the Danube Region are confronted with the following obstacles:

-  Current funding regulations include a high amount of bureaucracy
-  Funding frameworks often do not meet the actual needs of beneficiaries
-  People responsible for setting the programme rules do not have profound experience with project implementation.
-  Potential project promoters lack capacities and knowledge for project applications and project implementation/complying with funding rules.

In this respect, the stakeholder suggested to:

-  Simplify funding rules (with special focus on better involvement of youth organisations)
-  Establish small-scale funding to finance concrete solutions of issues at local level
-  Develop mechanisms to involve young people to stimulate their involvement in EU projects

Information flow (to and from decision-makers)

Regarding the information flow within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, the stakeholders identified different kinds of sources: a) political sources and b) technical sources.

Political sources: National Coordinators, Priority Area Coordinators and the European Commission (DG Regio) are constituting the primary “political” sources of information from the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. So far, Priority Area Coordinators are communicating through Steering Groups and Working Groups about activities and policies in their respective thematic priority. However, the stakeholders identified a need to provide guidelines to National Coordinators on how to spread and collect information to and from stakeholders. In this respect, the stakeholders referred to the format of

National Participation Days that can be organised in a bottom-up and/or top-down manner and offer the opportunity for exchange in both directions.

Technical sources: The stakeholders identified the EUSDR website as main instrument for communication and discussed the need to present information for different target groups. Additionally, the stakeholders addressed the need for a comprehensive communication strategy that includes different instruments of communication that might address different target groups.

At the same time, stakeholders of the EUSDR need to enhance different forms of literacy (political, media, digital) to process information to strengthen participation.

Structural Participation

Regarding structural participation (for young people) in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, the stakeholder identified the following challenges:

- Lack of institutionalised participation as it takes a lot of effort, communication and money
- Disabled people are excluded
- Communication Strategy of the EUSDR is not aiming at young people

In order to make structural participation in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region work, the stakeholders suggested the following initiatives:

- Implementation of flexible participatory structures (for young people) with flat hierarchies and low thresholds.
- Involvement of young multipliers (in communication)
- Quota for young people in participatory platforms
- Connecting different “worlds”/stakeholder groups through projects (e.g. building bridges between civil society and public administration through internships, public hearings, public events etc.)
- Supporting young talents

Cross border Cooperation

The stakeholders identified the following obstacles to cross border cooperation for young people:

- Infrastructure
- Money/suitable funding
- Different competences
- Lack of knowledge and access to information
- Prevailing nationalistic mind sets that frame cooperation as a problem

Against this background, the stakeholders formulated the following solutions:

- Implementing information formats and gatherings to build bridges between local authorities and young people
- Offering support for cross-border cooperation at national level
- Enhance connectivity and mobility between young people
- Initiating projects that young people can identify with
- Mobilisation through education (e.g. encouraging cross-border cooperation in educational sector)



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