

## GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT of the TRANSDANUBE TRAVEL STORIES

### CONTENT

1.	Definitions.....	2
1.1.	Definition of the Danube region.....	2
1.2.	Definition of destinations and trails.....	3
1.3.	Narratives.....	3
2.	The Stories.....	3
2.1.	Finding the Experts (Workshop and Working Groups).....	4
2.2.	Defining the topics of the stories.....	5
2.3.	Defining the trails.....	6
2.4.	Authors writing the story (lecturing).....	6
2.5.	INTRODUCTION and Summaries.....	7
3.	The Trails.....	14
3.1	The points of interest/destinations.....	14
3.2	Sustainable mobility – The Sustainable Travel and Mobility Plans (STOMPS), the Danube Travel Information Database, the Travel Time Maps and Touristic Information Material Including Sustainable Mobility Services.....	14
3.3	Infocards for Travellers – An additional possible Communication-Tool.....	16
3.4	The mobility management training.....	17
3.5	The E-learning course.....	17
4.	The Experiences.....	19
4.1	Defining Experiences Quality.....	19
4.2	The product clubs, Experience development and Guides Training.....	19
4.3	The green travel products, Tourism Panel and Testing.....	25
4.4	The Danube travel challenge.....	26
4.5	Communication activities:.....	28
4.1	More things learned on the project-preparation:.....	30

## Introduction

The UN Environment programme stated that against all odds, COVID-19 can also be understood as a chance for transformation of tourism towards the Paris climate goals and more sustainability at both, social and ecological level.

Mass tourism only provides superficial experience for tourists (you check boxes, but you don't really get in contact with local realities and experience the country). Over-tourism also affects local communities in a negative way in terms of reduced quality of daily life (crowds, waste, water usage, pollution). With the COVID-19 pandemic, this concept of tourism was highly challenged. Local residents are regaining appreciation of their own cultural and natural heritage. At the same time, they value tourists more now that the impact of no tourists has also become obvious (mitigate love-hate-relationship). Cycling tourism, camping, hiking are on the rise and are one of the only touristic areas that are thriving during COVID-19.

This is the time to reconsider touristic strategies and ask ourselves what kind of tourism we want? With our project "Transdanube Travel Stories", we are aiming to use sustainable tourism as a chance to

- deepen the tourists' understanding for natural and cultural heritage and link it to local communities;
- include tourism more into local communities for them to benefit more (indicator no longer only number of visitors), implementation of overall strategy at destination level (=product club) who are more flexible to adapt to changes;
- include domestic (local and regional) tourism in the strategy (more resilience) and also increase local appreciation for their own cultural and natural heritage;
- include cycling, hiking, and other means of sustainable transport into all trails as a COVID-19 resilient means of transport and experience.

## 1. Definitions

### 1.1. Definition of the Danube region

The Danube region can be defined in various ways. The Danube unites ten riparian states.

Widening the definition, we can add another four countries with inflow rivers to the Danube.

The Danube Transnational Programme includes all these 14 countries.

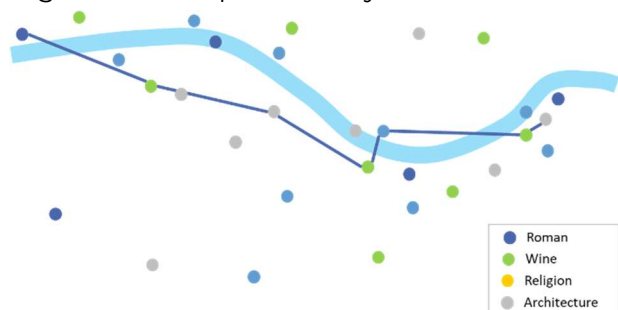
The project consists of partners from Germany, Austria, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania and Serbia. They represent the cultural routes "Emperors and Kings – the Danube", "Saint Martin of Tours", "Jewish Heritage", "Iter Vitis", "Art Nouveau" and "Roman Emperors and Danube Wine".

Natural heritage is reflected by the DANUBEPARKS Network. The first activities for sustainable mobility in individual destinations were already started in the previous project

Transdanube.Pearls. Complementary measures to promote sustainable mobility for all newly developed trails were implemented in this project.

## 1.2. Definition of destinations and trails

The project includes natural and cultural heritage routes certified by the Council of Europe. Select a set of heritage sites (points of interest) and arrange them in a particular order that together tell a specific story.



A destination is a village or town where a point of interest is located. Destinations shall be chosen that can be reached in a consecutive way and which therefore define a certain trail. We use the term *trail* in order to distinguish them from the existing cultural heritage routes. Destinations can be combined from different cultural routes and thematic backgrounds

(cluster of themes) according to the story.

A table of potential destinations is attached to this document.

## 1.3. Narratives

What is a Narrative?

*Narrative is the telling of related events in a cohesive format that centres around a central theme or idea. All literary elements of a narrative story work to uphold and enhance that central idea. Story is often considered a synonym for narrative. Generally, a narrative is told by a narrator of some type who relates all the action and details to the reader as the story develops. Narrative techniques, at their most basic purpose, tell stories. The telling of a story is an instinctual human desire and readers tend to be more engaged in a work of writing if it is doing just that. Narratives can serve both to entertain and to inform, depending on the central idea or message. Readers can easily find themselves absorbed by a narrative and this encourages reader participation. Increased engagement with ideas through storytelling means that broader audiences can be reached than if the information was presented in a dryer method of expression lacking a storyline. Narratives appeal to humans' social instincts and so at its heart, narratives are a social tool that encourages people to think, discuss, and retell. (from: <http://www.woodheadpublishing.com/literary-devices/narrative> )*

## 2. The Stories

A narrative seems to hold the wished effect to encourage people to travel the Danube transnational. Although they do a long time via cruise-ship, a trip on the land, can offer a much better experience to explore the sense of the Danube-river. By visiting places and meeting people that are strongly connected to the characteristics and meta-topics defining the Danube region and its inhabitants, a more intense and unconventional and sustainable way of experience is possible.

This also answers the question on how the different stories can be connected: The narratives follow some paths, that were chosen randomly for a section of the Danube, that is possible to

travel in one piece. The trails, the stories take place contain fitting points of interest and destinations, but the topic itself can be found in every spot along the river Danube. 2 Stories were situated in the upper Danube, two in the middle and 2 at the last part until the delta. The stories sometimes cross each other and the topics themselves can be used for every destination you are passing on your way along the 2800 km.

## 2.1. Finding the Experts (Workshop and Working Groups)

The creation of the Transdanube Travel stories was a process, where experts from various disciplines were invited. According to the Danube topic being a very wide one, they came from the university field in the subjects marketing/tourism, there were artist and authors, politicians and tourism specialists/manager.

In a first workshop, the project aim was presented and the potential topics for the stories were defined. The project partners, the keynote speakers and the experts joining, collected, what **characterizes the Danube**, the people living there, the landscape and history.

Keynote speakers were inspiring and brought in the discussion, why the Danube should be told in new narratives and various aspects of the Danube:

- Prof. Georg Steiner (Tourism Board Linz, WPTI Leader)
- Mag. Andreas Friedwagner (verracon consulting, for the lead partner Bundesumweltamt)
- Dr. Erhard Busek (Chairman of the Board of Directors Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe)
- Kurt Farasin, Artistic Director Schallaburg
- Sebastian Frankenberger, Owne of DonauGuides
- Dr. Stefan Traxler, Archaeologist, Upper Austrian Provincial Culture Ltd.

### Challenges and things learned:

An international project like this is a good way to personally connect people working in the same field, and make connections that sustainably last for many years and make following co-working easier and more likely. Due to COVID pandemic, it was necessary to meet online mostly. Using the technology on the one hand made it possible to work together successfully on the project in the first place, but on the other hand we discovered that it cannot totally replace personal contact. Meeting online made it easier to have more meetings, as planned, which also effected the output positively.

Take care if you hold workshops hybrid and simultaneously translated. This is a very difficult task not to leave anyone behind. Have enough personnel to take care on the translation and question answering, to keep the persons on spot and the ones online connected.

As the first workshop had a good output to work on further within the different working groups we had no second workshop as planned. It was an advantage to have more bilateral meetings and we could structure the tasks with a smaller round containing the authors and experts covering one topic each. The working groups met several times and found the key-points of the story.

To get a good result out of a process like that, a good network to the experts is necessary. Fortunately, the Danube is a well-organized topic and many experts are working for this purpose.

## 2.2. Defining the topics of the stories

The process was challenging, especially the structuring of the topics and the conversion of the topics and meta-topics in to the story and the according trails.

From a brainstorming, to a structuring and bundling of ideas the following topics finally were defined as being used for the 6 Stories and characterizing the Danube region and the societies on the way:

- Danube and its meaning for Europe (Political)
- Nature
- Romans (as the Danube-Limes was recently enlarged as a worldheritage site by UNESCO)
- Culture and Architecture (in all its forms: Music, Literature, Theatre, etc.)
- Trade
- Religion and Spirituality

Besides, there were defined Meta-Topics, that should be visible in all the defined topics for the stories. The Experts were collecting the following:

Metatopics collected by the experts
Change/Transformation (16)
Meeting/Network (15)
Myths/Spirituality (14)
Diversity (10)
Orient-Okzident (9)
Take your time (5)
Danube is Europe(4)
Experiences
Danube Sounds

Meta-narratives are horizontal values that are reflected in each story. They are abstract concepts that represent the **new Danube image** that we want to sell to visitors and that shall result in a collective Danube memory.

The main two **meta-narratives** were defined and grouped being

- *Diversity* (biodiversity, verity of landscapes, multi-ethnicity, mix of architecture styles, plurality of philosophy/ideology/religions reflected in literature/music/art, etc.) The Danube stands for Europe, in its diversity and as a way for travelling Europe.
- *Transition/Change* (change over time, all thematic topics seen from the perspective of history, development, and manifold influences, roots of where we are today, legacy of history found in today ´s world)

The third and fourth meta-narrative is seen as **means of transporting this image** to the visitors (will be reflected in the experiences of the story):

- *Encounters* (personal encounters with local people as well as encountering historic personalities through the stories, also via myths and spirituality, the connection between Orient and Occident)
- *Slow travel /sustainable pace* (travelling sustainably at a slower pace, taking time to listen/to reflect/to feel)

## Challenges and things learned:

The meta-topics are represented in every story prepared. The authors tried to combine this way of thinking with the topics of the stories and this is a fact, which connects the stories and give travelling along the river Danube a contemporary meaning and feeling.

We suggest considering the mentioned meta-topics also in product development and so become tangible for the guest in experiences and travel products.

## 2.3. Defining the trails

We call the routes, that follow the stories “TRAILS”, to differentiate from the cultural routes also involved in this project (like the St. Martin of Tours-Route, the Route of emperors and kings, the Route of Jewish heritage, etc.). According to the partners’ areas of responsibility we defined trails along which the stories should be told. As travelling along the whole Danube in one trail would not lead to serious products, we decided, to have the six trails splinted throughout the whole length. We tried to create two stories on the upper Danube area, two in the middle and two at the last part. Each trail follows a different story.

However, the topics are not limited to these defined trails. The topics affect every spot in the Danube area and can be experienced in destinations that are not on the trail.

Defining the areas that should be included to the several stories and covering the cultural routes involved in the project, was the first step in the story writing. Destinations that define a content-clue were collected as well as points of interest that are necessary to tell the (hi)story.

## 2.4. Authors writing the story (lecturing)

Before writing-work could start, we defined what a story should look like and tried to make it clear for each author what we expect the stories to be in the end. Therefore, a [guideline for story-writing](#) was accomplished throughout the partners, covering definitions and purpose, as well as formats and structure.

For preparing the narratives and guiding the authors through the process of story-creation different papers were presented, that you find as downloads here:

- [Approaches to narratives](#)
- [Guidelines for story-writing](#)
- [Danube-excerpts collected by Georg Steiner out of 30 different Danube books.](#)

The authors collected in working group meetings the details of each topic, they were responsible for. They defined the parts that were important and had an eye on the destinations defined to be in the trail, to include them content wise. It was a real masterpiece to combine trails and stories.

A lecturer was correcting translation mistakes or wording, unified expressions over the different stories and tried to unify the formats.

WPTI Leader, Georg Steiner then wrote an introduction and for each story a short version (kind of a summary), read them in the next chapters as well as in the realized **E-PDF-Book** downloadable [here](#).

## **Challenges and things learned:**

We found out, that taking care of a good structured and exact guideline for the authors, on how the stories should be formulated and look like, was an important step. The understanding of a narrative or story is very inconsistent between the acting persons and a good structure for a story helps afterwards to standardize on common preparation of the six stories.

## **2.5. INTRODUCTION and Summaries**

### **The Danube's many shades of blue**

An idealised river, renowned throughout the world via the melodies of Johann Strauss, the Danube can hardly complain of a lack of publicity and all the familiar clichés. But such overriding impressions also distort insight into deeper associations, into an understanding of this European river that should go far beyond the heady whirl of the waltz, Vienna, wine, the Wachau, and Sisi, the tragic Empress Elisabeth of celluloid fame. Besides this superficiality – which also ensures the Danube's success as a tourist attraction, especially cycling and cruise ship tourism – there is another factor warping the perspective onto the overall dimension of the Danube region. It relates to the many borders, cross-border tales and narratives propagating tourist programmes and the motivation to travel through multiple countries – a factor that has hitherto prevented diverse issues from being fully addressed.

Descriptions of the Danube in travel guides are almost all “course-oriented” or “biographical”. However, we want to embark on a narrative excursion along the Danube that is literary, cultural, ecological, personal and political. The Danube is also the very region that can lead us to a deeper and more fundamental European narrative. In the Danube region, Europe can be found in all its manifestations – its philosophical and religious roots, its cultural diversity and, finally yet importantly, the problems and challenges of our day, including climate change, migration, regional development, the future of our liberal democracy and of our growth-oriented economic system.

As part of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, the project “Transdanube Travel Stories” covers the entire Danube region, which consists not only of ten nations, but also the major tributaries of the Danube from 14 countries. The project endeavours to foster a feeling for the river in relation to six thematic categories – two in the upper reaches of the Danube, two in the middle stretch, and two in the Danube's lower course. The images and stories outlined here are intended to generate a dynamic in the leitmotif of the Danube that resounds and reverberates as in a symphony. We want these narratives to strike up a resonance in visitors and guests and so help to prevent the Danube from being reduced merely to a few hotspots and superficial impressions. We must free the Danube of its clichés.

Mankind's traces have been cropping up along the Danube for over 30,000 years; particularly in recent centuries, upheavals and human catastrophes on the one hand and the flourishing of

cultural achievements on the other – all in the narrowest dimensions of space and time – transform a trip along the Danube into a magnifying glass of human highs and lows. The same experience applies to the river landscape, where the most brutal interventions have taken place while far-reaching protected areas of the highest quality have emerged. The Danube is divided between a state of violation and one of pre-human origin. Life along the river shows that diversity – whether ecological, economic or cultural phenomena – will not be suppressed in the long term, nor be able to proliferate unchecked. The Danube is thus also a symbol and an appeal to the culture of humanism, tolerance and wisdom: namely, that progress for the land and its peoples should be accomplished in such a way that quality of life, peace and development may exist side by side in harmony.

We shall discover “hidden places” and encounter contexts that not only make the history and culture of the Danube region accessible, but also elucidate our contemporary issues; contexts demonstrating that art and culture are not just for prestige, pomp and circumstance, but that beauty and sublimity have always contributed to making human life more tolerable, better and richer. All these contexts and phenomena will yield travel experiences that are worthy of the name. Sightseeing alone does not do justice. It’s about encounters, it’s about cuisine and music, it’s about people and customs; it’s about getting back to nature and sounding out multiple dimensions with all our senses. The Danube is neither a nature reserve nor a tourist leisure and pleasure ground. It is a living environment for people, and every journey should make this a palpable reality. It is not about perfection but about improvisation. It is about surprise and emotion, rather than quasi-industrial procedures that mass tourism tows in its wake every now and again.

The image of a symphony should always be our guide: forte and pianissimo, allegro and adagio, nature, culture, cuisine, architecture, folk culture, joie de vivre, but melancholy too, religion, and spirituality. The Danube is as many-faceted as its shades of blue.

Text by **Georg Steiner** (Director of the Tourism Boards Linz, and Route of Emperors and Kings)

The following summaries for each story/tail also written by Georg Steiner, are also published in an pdf-e-book, by the end of the project. It will be published customer-sided on the webpage of the previous project: <https://www.danube-pearls.eu/en/danube-travel-stories> and in German: <https://www.danube-pearls.eu/danube-travel-stories>

The whole stories are also available on the website of the project: <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/transdanube-travel-stories>

As well as on many other webpages from the project partners – here also translated into German: e.g. <https://www.linztourismus.at/freizeit/linz-entdecken/aktivitaeten/donau/transdanube-travel-stories/>

## **Summary of Trail #1 - Danubian Europe: the discovery of a “liquid space” between West and East**

*Coordinated and written by Márton Méhes*



The story begins in Linz, Austria, and we shall tell it as far as Timișoara in Romania. On the way are Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, and Serbia, as well as two more European capitals of culture: Pécs and Novi Sad. At the heart of the Danube journey is Hungary with all the expansions, divisions, and upheavals seen by this region and caused by religions, ideologies, or claims to power that have repeatedly divided Europe and brought it together again. Whereas Europe along the Rhine can be experienced as a continuum, the experience here is more one of disruption, which has resulted in enormous richness in art, culture, religion, tradition and language. Danubian Europe has – quite literally – become a funnel of influences and therefore a region that has suffered a lot from wars, expulsions, and annexations, but it has also become a melting pot of cultural processes that we are proud of today since they underly its fascination. It was not only the crusades in the Middle Ages and the constant conflict between Ottoman and Christian rulers that cost a lot of blood and suffering. In the 20th century, the region suffered particular turmoil, caused, for example, by the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire and the First and Second World Wars, with all their consequences. The Eastern European countries suffered greatly from the resulting division into communist and democratic worlds. It is precisely in this space that Jewish life managed to flourish again and again in a formative, inspiring and innovative way, despite the most difficult conditions. Only against this background is it possible to keep pace with current debates, often focusing on Hungary, on self-determination, the dominance of Europe, and the flow of refugees. Coming to terms with history in a systematic way has often been neglected. The transitions were too sudden, too unexpected, and sometimes too unpredictable. The fall of the Iron Curtain on the Austro-Hungarian border, for example, surprised most people. Travelling along the Danube can help us make up for lost time. New connections emerge, not so much in the political arena as in the fields of business, science, art, culture, and creativity – areas that have always been a source of vitality. For it is always the people that shape a region. No region has had to accommodate a greater number of diverse nationalities and cultures, which often only found common ground after long phases of exclusion, combat and intolerance. This process of finding common ground still poses major challenges today. The roots of the conflict in the Balkans stretch back centuries, and they still feed this explosive region today. Change, a constant theme in many cities and countries in the Danube region, can now be experienced in a particularly fascinating way. The European Capitals of Culture in this area are dynamic and impressive examples of this.

## **Summary of Trail #2 - Returning to the last Danube**

*Coordinated by Eszter Buchert, written by Zsófia Joó*

In the beginning was the Danube – thus begins this story, echoing the biblical account of the Creation. Water and nature have defined the landscape. But mankind has changed it, “cultivated” it, and, in the end, abused it. This is the scenario of this trail, which takes us from the triangle formed by the countries of Hungary, Croatia and Serbia to the grandiose estuary flowing into the Black Sea. It explores the fascination of the river landscape, but also the many problematic changes caused by human intervention – whether through power stations,

urbanisation, or misuse and exploitation. The last section of the Danube forms the largest surviving natural wetland in Europe. Experiencing the Danube here means reconnecting with nature in its most primal form, and with our very selves. Here, the idea of border-crossing is a multidimensional one. Here, travel means winding down, coming to terms with the wilderness and with oneself. While cities are moving closer and closer to the river, people are becoming more emotionally alienated from nature than ever. In the balance between man and nature, commodity has elbowed its way to the forefront. The closer the Danube gets to its estuary, the better this balance. For this is where we sense most tangibly that man is part of nature. In this stretch of the Danube, nutrition, movement and traditions are still in harmony with the river. The actual destination of tourists experiencing this section of the Danube should be sensing this synergetic unity and discovering it individually for themselves: the Danube as a mirror of a new symbiosis between man and nature, a mirror of all the senses. Nature as lived here is a great symphony scored with all forms of expression available to human emotion. The Danube Delta presents nature as it once was, and in its most consummate form – the world before mankind, as it were. A vast area of water and reeds, a spectacular landscape, a world of tranquillity and mystery teeming with countless forms of life – a great symphonic finale echoing out from this European river.

Thus, the lower part of the Danube signals a new intimacy with the river, with nature; also, the urgent message that we should be cultivating a sensitive, respectful and caring tourism that cherishes the values of nature. The Danube is neither a zoo nor a static exhibition. It is Nature herself, in all her multifaceted beauty, vulnerability, wildness, and diversity, but also in all her demands and tribulations, which not only have to be overcome but also to be understood and accepted in their significance. Herein lies the fascination of the “last Danube”.

## **Summary of Trail #3 Roman legions on the Danubius – the river that attracted cultures**

*Coordinated and written by Guido Pinkau*

In 2021, the Roman *limes* was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This recognition by the World Heritage Organisation, extending from Regensburg or, more precisely, from Eining all the way to Hungary, provides the coordinates for this trail. The trail follows the course of the Danube where the river once marked the Roman border and acted as a line of orientation. It leads through Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Serbia. But the Danube was already an axis of development and infrastructure prior to Roman times. Traces of human settlement go back 70,000 years. Archaeological treasures have been found and presented to the public in the Wachau region (e.g. Venus of Willendorf, 40,000 years old) and in Serbia. They prove that, from time immemorial, the Danube has always been the central European axis for economic and cultural activity. The Romans brought a great deal of culture with them, but also prospered from Celtic and Germanic customs and techniques. Their main concern was the art of living and surviving along the Danube. Agriculture, urban culture, urban development – for example in Regensburg or Carnuntum – and ultimately philosophy were discovered, practiced, and fostered along the Danube. In particular, viticulture has its roots here, from the Wachau all the way to Serbia. The Danube formed the hub of trading routes converging from North and East

(e.g., the Amber Road) and leading further southwards via Sopron, Szombathely, and Ljubljana, all the way to Aquileia in Veneto. While Emperor Marcus Aurelius in the second century AD resided in Carnuntum and was an intellectual still grounded on the spiritual world of the Roman gods, the final period of the Roman world along the Danube was increasingly shaped by Christianity. Leading religious personalities like St Florian, who died a martyr, and most notably St Martin and St Severin came to be pivotal figures in a world of dissolution and decay. Following the Roman Trail along the Danube opens up an astonishing perspective of achievements in logistics, architecture and culture. Roman culture was neither domineering nor exclusive; it was open to mixing with other cultures, to progress and friendship across its own borders. In this respect, the trail shows that “borders” are transitory and ultimately remain fluid. The Danube as a fluid border was therefore always a connecting force as well.

## **Summary of Trail #4 - “Cultural harvest” along the Danube: art, music and architecture – a look at formative eras and their influence, wealth, splendour and landmarks**

*Coordinated and written by Andreas Rathberger-Reiter and Roland Kastler*

Vienna is undisputedly something like a magnifying glass if we're looking for an overview of all cultural developments and phenomena in the Danube region. However, this trail along the upper half of the Danube follows a history that starts out from prehistoric traces, continues through the Middle Ages and the Baroque era to the 19th and 20th centuries and shows that everything originated along the Danube that is, or at least reflects, the very essence of Europe. The journey launches out in Ulm and continues via Regensburg, Linz, Krems and Vienna to Hungary, Romania, Serbia and back via Croatia to Murska Sobota in Slovenia. Nowhere else have so many ethnic groups lived together, and still do, whose reciprocal fertilisation, even if under compulsion, bequeathed a cultural richness that has made the Danube into a treasure trove of human culture and ways of life – whether for reasons of religion, or individual identity, or simply for the demonstration of power, as has haunted us alarmingly once more particularly in modern history in the figures of Stalin or Tito.

Starting in Ulm, where the so-called “Lion Man” sculpture suggests a kind of mysticism or perhaps even a religion of more than 30,000 years ago, in the Middle Ages we subsequently encounter the “Holy Roman Empire”, which was founded on a Catholic universalism initiated by Emperor Charlemagne. The latter gave rise particularly in the Danube region to secular, ecclesiastical and monasterial structures and architecture which, in combination with Jewish influences reverberating from Regensburg to Hungary, shaped the region's identity and can still be seen today.

Furthermore, painting in the time of the Renaissance – even inspired by Chinese traditions – revolutionised the depiction of landscape in the form of the so-called “Danube School”. This arc was spanned further to include later art movements – Baroque, Belle Époque, Historicism, Art Nouveau and so forth. In Vienna, “blueprints” were created for the corporate architecture of the Habsburg Empire.

Hot spots of cultural history have always dynamised the Danube region down to the present day. Examples include media arts in Linz, the new Museum Mile in Krems, and the European

capital of culture in Serbia, Novi Sad. Vienna continues to radiate its brilliance – the works of Sigmund Freud, philosophers and scientists, the First Viennese School in music, composers such as Mahler, Bruckner and Johann Strauss in the 19th century ... all of these prove that here the multi-ethnic heritage of the Danube region continues to yield a rich harvest.

Hungary as well can present a magnifying-glass view of Europe and the Danube – with the conversion to Christianity around 1,000 years ago, the constant partitions and fusions between Islam and Christendom, and the consequences of the Cold War, where Stalinist architecture, above all, left its traces.

Serbia and Romania were in their turn marked by the repeated fusions and divisions of Orthodox Christianity and Islam and affected by crucial impulses from Jewish life. Orient meets Occident: this defines many phenomena, whether architecture, cuisine, music or literature. The people and the ruling élites along the Danube were networked in all directions, hence the attributes that are attached to distinctive places: Belgrade as “Paris of the Balkans”; Sremski Karlovci as “provincial Rome” for the Serbs living in the Habsburg Monarchy; Petrovaradin as “Gibraltar on the Danube”, and Novi Sad situated opposite as “Athens of Serbia”.

Accordingly, a trip from the source of the Danube to the far reaches of the Balkans is a demonstration of the resilience of cultural achievements, but also a fascinating manifestation of what can be brought about by fusion and re-invention over the centuries when catalysed by so many diverse influences.

## **Summary of Trail #5 - Danube trade: the exchange of goods and stories**

*Coordinated and written by Jörg Zenker*

Apart from military and religious movements, eventually followed by tourism, the Danube region has always attracted – and been dynamised by – trade. Trade has inspired the cultural and regional exchange of goods and people in the Danube region: raw materials have been exploited or processed there, markets developed, businesses founded, and people brought together ... The Danube is one of Europe's oldest trade routes, providing ample material for cross-border stories, encounters and experiences. Merchant families have expanded across countries through marriage and business relations; trading practices, currencies, payment systems, and even culinary specialities have spread in the region through trade. But the Danube has also seen the darker sides of trade – namely in the form of human trafficking, drugs, prostitution, and organised crime. The Danube writes countless stories. These include the shrewdness, rapacity, smuggling, and of course the honourable trade in the Alemannic source area of the river; a “live-and-let-live” philosophy in the Catholic/Baroque Bavarian-Austrian region of the Danube; and the bazaar mentality that still characterises trade in the Balkans and fascinates tourists.

Merchants have brought cultures together and have had a formative influence on them. Families – many Jewish families, too – have acted as patrons of arts and culture and have built impressive private and commercial buildings for many generations. Along the Danube, you will come across stories about merchant dynasties of the Buddenbrooks type. However, some of the most fascinating and most dramatic family stories were written not by trade, but by love, separation, success and failure.

Today, the first steps of business are increasingly made in digital form. In the old days, on the other hand, business relations were primarily established through charm, esprit, cultural and ethnic exchange, or simply through the magic of wealth. Trade also took the shape of meetings and gatherings at markets, celebrations of culinary and cultural traditions, and political conventions like the Perpetual Diet of Regensburg or the Vienna Congress. Businessmen were always present at such events to establish relationships or fathom their options for new markets.

## **Summary of Trail #6 - Danube for the soul**

*Coordinated and written by Dominik Heher*

This Danube trail stretches from Hungary to Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania. It presents us with impressive, shocking, sometimes heartbreaking witnesses of a past ranging from the Stone Age to the 20th-century Holocaust; witnesses reflecting the people's pursuit for dominance and exclusiveness, and their tolerance or intolerance in the realm of faith. Religions and their adherents have no doubt done a lot of good, but their striving for supremacy and their claim to exclusivity of faith has also caused a lot of grief. All of these can be found in the Danube region. The pre-Christian era was characterised by the quest for divinity and the desire to comprehend spiritual and supernatural phenomena. With the Christian faith came socio-cultural claims to power, exclusiveness and authority of interpretation. These went hand in hand with monuments, rituals, narratives, and historic figures such as saints, martyrs, and dynasties like the Habsburgs or Ottomans, who – invoking Catholic or Muslim creation myths – regarded themselves as divinely gifted powers. They could be very tolerant, or discriminatory against other ideologies. In any case, the synergy between secular rulers and religious structures yielded magnificent periods of art, and buildings such as domes, abbeys, and monuments. Art and public spaces in the Danube region reflect the fact that faith has been a source of meaning and a means of hegemony. Contemplation on the one hand and demonstration of power, pomp and representation on the other developed in the context of something higher, something supernatural that impressed people and gave them pride and orientation, or in fact frightened and humiliated them.

Catholicism, Protestantism, Orthodoxy, Islam, and of course Judaism – all these religions solidified in the Danube region in such a way that not only individuals, ethnic groups and nations identified with them, but that entire states and territories split up and repeatedly reunited because of them. Rome and Byzantium met here as rivals in proxy wars. The 20th century saw unprecedented atrocities sparked off by atheist or alternative religious movements oscillating between National Socialism and Communism. The Danube region and its inhabitants have always been at the heart of these developments. Faith brought exchange and relations, whether through pilgrimage, crusades, expulsion or resettlement. Which begs the question: Will capitalist and neoliberal Europe bring about a sense of togetherness and a new heyday, or will it cause alienation and hardship in the Danube region?

Make no mistake: The Danube for the soul is still out there! It takes the shape of impressive churches and monasteries, where spiritual life is characterised by retreat and contemplation; also the shape of historic buildings; the shape of the customs and rituals of numerous religious

and ethnic groups; the shape of people who defy secularisation and adhere to their faith, and will continue to do so for generations to come ...

Against this background, any journey along the Danube shows that there are many shades of grey (or blue, as it were) between social commitment and social withdrawal, between personal reflexion and missionary zeal, between community building and marginalisation. That is to say that any journey along the Danube is a journey to a great number of – often forgotten – customs; a journey of self-discovery.

## **Challenges and things learned:**

**How can the stories be connected?** They are connected by the topics, that are characteristics for every destination of the Danube and by the meta-topics defining the sense of the Danube travellers. Every destinations offers experiences for each trail and so can guide interested travellers also to other topics and trails.

Each author, when writing the story, was also encouraged to bring out **what the reader** and traveller **can take away from his experiences** and the story for his own life.

When defining the guidelines and quality-standards for experiences we also were including this fact to be necessary. The traveller only has a **real good experience**, when it is in a way life changing – in the best sense.

## 3. The Trails

### 3.1 The points of interest/destinations

Destinations were chosen not to be just the obvious ones, the first row-cities, but the hidden places, the destinations and points of interest following the different cultural routes involved to the project and destinations being connected to the so-called meta-topics. The points of interest were chosen following the stories, offering the best experience for the visitor to explore the story and giving the storytelling a better meaning.

### 3.2 Sustainable mobility – The Sustainable Travel and Mobility Plans (STOMPS), the Danube Travel Information Database, the Travel Time Maps and Touristic Information Material Including Sustainable Mobility Services

After finishing, the story and fixing the destinations and points of interest the responsible partner researched and analysed the trail on possibilities for sustainable travel and mobility: How can the conscious traveller follow each trail by travelling sustainably via train, bike, bus, by foot as well as by ship.

In order to create a standardised basis for the detailed research on the sustainable mobility offers along the Danube, a guideline for the creation of the Sustainable Tourism Mobility Plans (STOMPs) was developed in a first step.

**The Guideline for the creation of a STOMP is available here: [Transdanube Travel Stories - Interreg Danube \(interreg-danube.eu\)](https://www.interreg-danube.eu)**

The so-called **STOMPs (Sustainable Tourism Mobility Plan)** provide the strategic background for improving mobility services and the communication of the offers to tourists on trail and destination level. The project partners have received the newly developed and detailed guideline and accordingly researched all information on sustainable mobility offers along each of the six trails. Different means of transport, travelling within one destination and travelling from one destination to the next are taken into account. In addition, there is information on mobility centres, bicycle rental and ticket systems in public transport, to mention just a few. Detailed information on travelling possibilities are collected and screened with a SWOT-Analysis.

Besides that, the STOMPs provide a valuable collection of information which can be used to design green travel products

### **Find the different STOMPS here:**

[STOMP - Linz-Timișoara](#) - following the story: “Danubian Europe: the discovery of a “liquid space”

[STOMP - Danube Delta - Lonjsko Polje Nature Park](#) – following the story: “Returning to the Last Danube: nature and mankind”

[STOMP - Regensburg - Zajecar](#) following the story: “The Danube Adventure – Legions Heading for the Danubius The river that attracted cultures.”

[STOMP - Ulm - Murska Sobota](#) – following the story: “Cultural harvest” along the Danube: Art, music and architecture – a look at formative eras and their influences, wealth, splendour and landmarks”

[STOMP - Ulm - Bucharest](#) - following the story: “Danube Trade: The exchange of stories and goods”

[STOMP - Budapest - Slava Rusa](#) – following the story: “Danube for the soul”

Each STOMP includes a multitude of links to the information collected. For an easier overview, these links are structured in the Danube Travel Information Database. It consists of a worksheet for each of the nine Danube countries through which the six trails run. It summarises sustainable means of transport in order to have better information on how to travel along the trails and between the destinations in a sustainable way. In the upper section, sustainable mobility offers are listed on a national level, such as train providers, long-distance buses and international (Danube-) cycle paths. Below that, sustainable mobility offers are listed for the respective national destinations of the trails, such as public transport and bicycle rental stations. The direct online link and further information is available in each case. The database is shared with multipliers, like tourism- and mobility-centres, along the trails in order to promote easy information finding and to inform tourists about sustainable mobility offers.

**Find the Danube Travel Information Database here: [Transdanube Travel Stories - Interreg Danube \(interreg-danube.eu\)](#)**

As a further activity to promote sustainable mobility, so-called Travel Time Maps were created for all project partners. These show a selection of good and fast train and bus connections with a maximum of one change to city/area in which the respective project partners are located. The

aim is to show which good and fast sustainable travel options already exist and to motivate tourists to use them.

**The Travel Time Maps can be found here: [Transdanube Travel Stories - Interreg Danube \(interreg-danube.eu\)](https://www.interreg-danube.eu)**

Last but not least, all project partners were motivated to integrate these Travel Time Maps on their own organisation's websites and share them with their network. The project partners also learned about good practice examples of how to integrate and emphasise information on sustainable mobility offers in tourism information material. These examples were implemented and, for example, the information on how to get to the project partners' organisations was updated.

### 3.3 Infocards for Travellers – An additional possible Communication-Tool

The so-called infocards were designed as an extra communication-tool, not requested by the project, but by the project partners felt as a possibility to help individual travellers to find their way along the trails in a sustainable way, and to maybe step into the trail by finding out about the project while exploring. The info cards may be available at an info-center along the way. Every destination has the possibility to print the related info-card for their tourist information center. Find the layout here:

<https://www.interreg-danube.eu/media/download/52326>

The Information on the card would have to be created following the information in the related STOMP.





### 3.4 The mobility management training

The mobility management training was necessary to train also inform persons on the possibilities and necessities of sustainable travelling through the Danube region. Thus, the main objective of the training was to introduce the importance of sustainable mobility with the focus on the tourism sector. It consisted of a theoretical part and a practical part to make the participants feel how travellers do. Beside the mobility expert who gave lectures on the theory on sustainable mobility, there were several practitioners from the field of sustainable mobility and transport involved who gave practical input. The participants from six different Danube countries learned about the basics of mobility management (illustrated with best solutions) and the main functions of regional mobility centres. They had also the chance to learn about local/regional challenges and good practices in sustainable transport in each of the participating countries. The participants could obtain an in depth understanding of the functions and services of a mobility centre and the skills and competencies needed to become a mobility manager. Besides learning theoretical knowledge, they were also a practical part were the participants could experience sustainable means of transport. Therefore, they went on a canoeing trip on the Danube and had a travel challenge to Bratislava by train or bike. Moreover, the participants had a city travel challenge in Bratislava, where they had to find different sights in the city by using sustainable mobility. The training enabled the participants to gain knowledge in the field of sustainable tourism mobility and more so to act as a multiplier in their home countries and for their region.

Agenda: <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/media/download/52327>

### 3.5 The E-learning course

The **E-learning course**, which aims to ensure that knowledge generated in the project is consolidated and accessible to the public in the long term, is implemented in the form of a recorded learning video series. Much of the project results are captured in three learning videos. With those one can expand your knowledge on sustainable tourism in the Danube region, benefit from examples and get inspired. The videos can be used individually or as online learning series. There are three parts, each of which provides information on different topics and aspects of the project.

The focus topics are: Thematic Tourism, Sustainable Mobility, Story Telling. One video focuses on sustainable mobility in tourism. Mobility expert Andreas Friedwagner will present the theoretical background, practical applications and best practice examples. Furthermore, Danko Cosic presents what needs to be considered in thematic tourism and how a tourism product club can contribute to a successful overall experience for tourists. In the third learning video, Jasmina Beljan Iskrin takes a look at storytelling. She explains how to use storytelling in tourism, including the project related Danube narratives as examples.

Trailer for the E-Learning course: [Interreg Transdanube Travel Stories E-learning Trailer - YouTube](#)

## **Challenges and things learned:**

The **development of the Guideline and the STOMPs** has shown how many aspects have to be considered with regard to the large topic of sustainable mobility. As there are not only big differences between countries, but also between cities and regions, it is important to find information in a simple and transparent way. The project partners sometimes had to do intensive research to find the information they were looking for. Especially for tourists, there is often a lack of information in English. However, after the finalisation of the STOMPs, many project partners were positively surprised about the sustainable mobility offers that exist (in their region), as these are partly unknown even to locals. Unfortunately, the researched information is not really durable, as mobility-offers change quickly over time. For this reason, however, the links to the corresponding websites were researched and collected in the Danube Travel Information Database, as the information on the websites is usually up-to-date.

Nevertheless, it would need more international cooperation on this information. Some appearing Europe-wide web-platforms can help by navigating, like [www.trainline.com](http://www.trainline.com); [www.rome2rio.com](http://www.rome2rio.com), <https://www.raileurope.com/> etc. But the platforms guests are searching for connection do not contain all modalities of transportation and it makes it for travellers very difficult to proceed. Especially when changing means of transport, for example from long-distance trains to local transport in a city, there is usually a lack of summary information and opportunities to purchase tickets, especially in English.

National authorities unfortunately cooperate too little Europe wide to find a good standard. The borders are still obstacles for travellers.

So there is at the one hand a lack in information transparency and on the other hand a lack in the infrastructure itself in some areas. At the local level, further development of sustainable infrastructure is highly desirable in some communities and regions.

The partners noted that a competitive mind-set hinders the development of new guest opportunities, so these resentments should be reduced as much as possible. Furthermore, the partners demanded that municipalities, regions and nations think "outside the box". Seeing oneself as a municipality in the context of the region is the task of future development. Making sustainable tourism services visible and being able to use strong labels for communication as well as USP for service-providers and communities is wished.

The **Travel Time Maps** are a very good way to show particularly good and thus motivating sustainable travel options. Since care was taken to ensure that the project partners also receive the graphical data, the Travel Time Maps can also be adapted and revised in the future if necessary.

The focus on the layout of **Information Material for Tourists** has shown that there are many different ways to inform about sustainable mobility offers. With relatively little effort, a change in awareness can take place and, for example, through the use of QR codes, printed materials can be used for a long time without becoming outdated.

The **Mobility Management Training** was a great success. Special attention should be paid to the targeted selection of participants. Participants should come from stakeholders in tourism and mobility or from municipalities, so that they can optimally support the promotion of sustainable mobility at the regional level. Moreover, they should and act as a promotor and ambassador for sustainable mobility in their region. The combination of theoretical inputs and practical tasks has also proven to be important and correct, as it has given the participants a better feeling for the situation of the tourists and the usage of sustainable transport in general.

As far as the **E-Learning tool** is concerned, the problem was that the platform of the Routes4U site turned inactive during the project duration. Accordingly, no classic E-Learning tool could be developed and integrated into the Routes4U site. Generally, it is difficult to find a suitable platform or sites on which to upload the tool to reach the specific target group and a broad public. Therefore, the aim is now to use platforms such as YouTube with a large reach on the one hand and to use specific platforms for the target group on the other. With this approach of using different platforms in parallel, the aim is to reach a broad and interested public as an audience for the E-Learning course. Also, the project partners will share the E-Learning Videos with their respective stakeholders and with all Tourism Product Club Members.

## 4. The Experiences

### 4.1 Defining Experiences Quality

Before starting to develop experience, it was important to define, what an experience is like. A normal guided tour would not be sufficient for the quality-standard that was defined in the project. Due to the fact, that tourism is changing, guests expect more from their trip than they did 10 years ago. To make a trip sustainable, you need experiences that impress guests and, at best, add value to their lives. Building Bridges from history to today's matters, and make it more understandable, surprise guests with the unexpected or seduce them to open up for new thoughts or things.

A Guideline for Experiences was elaborated and presented in a workshop with the project partners, the owners of the product clubs. Have a look at them [here](#).

### 4.2 The product clubs, Experience development and Guides Training

At the beginning of these activities, we defined quality standards for experiences in the project. An experience is not only a tour or a special place, point of interest, but an it leaves a sustainable impression for the visitor. In a **workshop** with an expert **on experience-creation** we trained the partners to be able to work with the product-clubs on experience-creation in a proper way.

[Guidelines for story-creation](#) were prepared, that can be used by every experience-creator.

([https://www.interreg-danube.eu/uploads/media/approved\\_project\\_output/0001/53/b6ef3eefbb0c7dfda60c9a864b779e3fef97fa02.pdf](https://www.interreg-danube.eu/uploads/media/approved_project_output/0001/53/b6ef3eefbb0c7dfda60c9a864b779e3fef97fa02.pdf))

Building **Product Clubs** in different regions related to the project partners helps to develop experiences fitting the stories and the quality standards defined.

As a product club different people were brought together that are responsible and able to create an experience or have access to others making tours, or coordinating experience-providers. Consequently, 19 Product Clubs are formed along the Danube, in Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania

According to the application form of the project, some partners realized special experiences over the project period.

Danube ParksTools for a section of the Danube parks network:

1. New edition of the "Natures havens on the Danube"-Book
2. Danube Cook-Book
3. The Festival of living history and gastronomy TIKfest at Tikveš Castle Complex (Croatia) 7th of May, 2022."

Slovenia & DCC	Virtual guided tour through mosaics covering Roman Emperors and Danube Wine route- different 360° VR-Videos
Slovenia	Self-guiding application presenting Jewish cultural heritage sites
Croatia	Tool for a section of Inter Vitis route
Romania/Oradea	Augmented reality tool, which would plunge the tourists visiting the main square of Oradea into the time and atmosphere of the beginning 20th century
Westpannon	Digital Tool providing geo-located information and experience background to pilgrims/walkers/tourists
Danube Office	Interactive City tour on trade "Ulmer Geld regiert die Welt". The tour is focusing on the topic of trade along the Danube through history, with a special focus on the development of the trade relation of the region of Ulm along the Danube. The interactive tour can be booked either as a guided city tour with a regional guide or as a self-guided tour via the Future History app. It is available in English and German and is offered on a long-term basis by Ulm/Neu-Ulm Touristik, which was involved in the project as ASP. The tour includes historical coins and trade goods corresponding to a specific period. There is also a small puzzle with questions answered at each stop. Thus, the tour is interactive, entertaining and exciting. You can book the live tour here: <a href="https://tourismus.ulm.de/de/entdecken/sehen-und-erleben/stadtfuerungen/oeffentliche-stadtfuehrungen/#/erlebnisse/ULM/3faa1fdb-5539-40ae-87e2-a70bfb1b43db/ulmer-geld-regiert-die-welt">https://tourismus.ulm.de/de/entdecken/sehen-und-erleben/stadtfuerungen/oeffentliche-stadtfuehrungen/#/erlebnisse/ULM/3faa1fdb-5539-40ae-87e2-a70bfb1b43db/ulmer-geld-regiert-die-welt</a>

**More information:** <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/transdanube-travel-stories/section/experiences-along-the-danube-travel-stories>

## THE DANUBE COOKBOOK

In the cookbook, you can find 1 recipe from each of the 10 Danube countries (from Germany to Romania) and 2 ancient Roman recipes. However, you can also find some information about DANUBEPARKS Network and its 18 Protected Areas.

"One river, ten countries, countless flavours" is finally out!

Author of the cookbook - prof. Ivan Gašpić - a great expert on the connection between culture, identity, and gastronomy- selected 12 amazing recipes that tell the story of Danubian identity shaped and inspired by the river.

You can download it for free [HERE](#)

## NEW EDITION OF THE "NATURE'S HAVENS ON THE DANUBE"-BOOK

„Book "Nature's Havens on the Danube" looks at the protected areas from a refreshingly new angle, linking colourful local highlights with glimpses of folklore and lesser-known moments of local history. During the TDTs project, new narratives (stories) are developed together with 6 new tourist trails. One of these new trails and stories is „Returning to the Last Danube“ whose development was coordinated by Eszter Buchert and written by Zsófia Joó. The story and trail are presented in the second book edition, with a focus on the last (Lower) section of the Danube river: protected areas from the triangle formed by the countries of Hungary, Croatia and Serbia to the Danube Delta. Link to the other 5 trails developed within the project is also provided at the end of the book.

[https://danubeparks.org/sharepoint/public/1655195154\\_uploads.pdf](https://danubeparks.org/sharepoint/public/1655195154_uploads.pdf)

## TIKFEST - FESTIVAL OF LIVING HISTORY AND GASTRONOMY, IN KOPAČKI RIT NATURE PARK – TIKVEŠ

In the framework of the Transdanube Travel Stories project, in the area of the renovated Tikveš Castle complex, DANUBEPARKS will organize the [TIKfest - Festival of Living History and Gastronomy](#) every year. In addition to the rich gastronomic offer of the festival, visitors can expect a free interpretive walk through the Tikveš castle complex led by Archduchess Von Habsburg (Nikolina Baškarad) as well as numerous other workshops and exhibitions related to the living history and Baranja gastronomy.

Find the photo gallery here:

<https://www.facebook.com/lastdanube/posts/pfbid02UpDnyknTeC2aY68UzBBxeLP3GtQqvn5NYHLTG5Btjw4vKbDyqHuphchEqMGndKBwl>

And more about the event here: <https://danubeparks.org/news/tikfest-07052022-tikves-transdanube-travel-stories>

## VIRTUAL TOUR ALONG WITH THE ROMAN EMPERORS AND DANUBE WINE ROUTE

DCC worked closely with its stakeholders, and members of the local Product Clubs, to present cultural, gastronomic, and touristic offerings along with the Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route, putting them together in a comprehensive 360 virtual experience. Besides experience in the virtual world of Roman heritage, other attractions within the destination, where to sleep and eat, and other nearby attractions worth visiting, the tourists now have direct

contact with local ground agents. All videos are listed on the YouTube videos channel

<https://www.youtube.com/c/RomansWineDanube>

Subscribe and experience Ptuj (SLO), Pecs (HUN), Sremska Mitrovica (SER), Zajecar (SER), Alba Iulia (ROM) and Russe (BUL).

## **DIGITAL TOOL PROVIDING GEO-LOCATED INFORMATION AND EXPERIENCE BACKGROUND TO PILGRIMS/WALKERS/TOURISTS**

Westpannon developed a complex digital tools with Via Sancti Martini Culture Route. The aim is to enable pilgrim cyclists to cycle the route between Bratislava and Szombathely via Győr/Pannonhalma, either organised or individually. The tools allow the pilgrim to cycle the route individually and discover the sights. The digital tool provides all the necessary information on how to cycle the route. During the journey, travellers can not only find information about the right route, but also learn about the history of the sights and their significance (spiritual location). The route is linked to the history of the Danube for the Soul. During the 7-day journey, the traveller will receive a daily prayer/spiritual exercise included in the tools.

<https://viasanctimartini.build-r.hu/>

The fitting green travel product VELO MARTINI can be found here: <https://viasanctimartini.build-r.hu/en/tours?limit=12&order=random&display=mosaic-view&areas%5B%5D=21&duration%5B%5D=0&duration%5B%5D=168&length%5B%5D=0.00&length%5B%5D=368.00> or find it here: [www.viasanctimartini.eu/en](http://www.viasanctimartini.eu/en)

## **SLOVENIA: SELF-GUIDING APPLICATION PRESENTING JEWISH CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES**

Institute for Culture, Tourism and Sport Murska Sobota developed a novel, multifaceted mobile application for self-guided visits to explore the tangible and intangible Jewish cultural heritage elements within the sites in Slovenia, as well to expand the already-existing touristic cities portfolios. The aim of the application is to enable those interested to discover the Jewish heritage of Maribor, Murska Sobota and Lendava destinations on their own and to get acquainted with former Jewish communities and stories of their families that significantly contributed to the development of these cities. Mobile application that is developed for the Android and iOS operating systems and includes an interactive map with customized display of POI's as well geolocation of the user enables an interactive experience, guidance and presentation of selected POI's with information distributed by text and a photo gallery.

## **TOOL FOR A SECTION OF INTER VITIS ROUTE**

Product is an internet news portal named „HRVATSKI RURALNI TURIZAM“ (CROATIAN RURAL TOURIMS) available here: <https://ruraltourismcroatia.com/hr>

The portal consist of several major sections, divided in rubrics. All information are related to the vine tourism in the Croatian section of Danube River, and accompanying infrastructure.

The main menu contains information about the „The Village Membership Club“, Iter Vitis network and the project Transdanube travel stories.

In the second rubric, there are general information about DANUBIAN REGION, Baranja region and main towns included in the green travel products selection.

Following section is about HISTORY and consist of articles related to the geography of the Danubian region, history of grapes and wine production since the antique times, articles and photography of historical artefacts. Articles about the wine production from 1930-s of the last century, illustrated with original photography from personal collections.

Rubric INTERESTING consist of the four major sections (GASTRO, ACCOMMODATION, CULTURE AND ADVENTURE, CICLOTOURISM), each containing description of several providers and their contact information.

Following section is called WINE REGIONS and, at the moment, it covers only two regions – Baranja and Erdut. The third region, Ilok wine region, is uploaded but still hidden since we are waiting for the clearance regarding photography's ownership. Each wine producer is presented with a short story about their wine yards and sorts of wine they produce; contact details are included.

SUCCESS STORIES is a rubric which contains opinion articles written by renowned Croatian wine authors and journalists.

NEWS is the next rubric which brings information about projects, visits and conferences, and any other relevant event of interest for tourists and stakeholders in tourism.

All articles are available in the Croatian and English language.

## **AUGMENTED REALITY TOOL, WHICH WOULD PLUNGE THE TOURISTS VISITING THE MAIN SQUARE FO ORADEA INTO THE TIME AND ATMOSPHERE OF THE BEGINNING 20TH CENTURY.**

The application "Immersive Oradea" uses augmented reality to show tourists various periods in the history of Unirii Square. Users can engage themselves in a unique experience by immersing themselves in the ambiance of a bygone era. Once in Unirii Square, look for three interest points with placards that may be scanned with the app on your device (phone, tablet) to join a virtual presentation that includes narration of historical facts and visual representation of the surroundings. After completing the three historical panels, the visitor is alerted that he has received a gift and is instructed to submit his name and email address to receive a present via email (completion is optional). The app is available on google play and in Apple app-store

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.colorfulcoding.oradeaar&gl=RO>

Video presentation of the app: <https://storage.rcs-rds.ro/links/6b4b6338-65ff-449a-5365-169680bea2d1>

Furthermore **Product Clubs** were working on **experiences**, and presenting them in a collection and to a small extent they also were tested with the green travel products.

The 19 product clubs collected the experiences developed in an excel-list, available for tour operators, with info on the experience, booking-information as well as contact-persons.

Available here: <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/transdanube-travel-stories/outputs>

## Challenges and things learned:

In this project, special attention was paid to the creation of experiences. It was not easy to communicate the understanding of a good experience to the partners and product clubs. So we hope the elaborated guidelines can help others from the very beginning.

However - the creation of experiences in the sense of our project was very well adapted by the guest-related service-providers. It would be necessary to go on talking to them about the stories, the necessity and the experience-quality to get more of a continuous chain of experiences, or to be able to offer something in each of the places mentioned - for individual travellers and tour operators.

It should become a network of experience-providers that know about the Danube Travel Stories, that see the added value of our approach and together with us develop the Danube further as a travel destination for sustainable travellers on land.

This needs more time than the project duration and is maybe a topic for another following project.

Be careful with forming a **product club**, and have the goal in mind. Then choose the right persons who are necessary to create a product or know the right people who can help and decide. Make sure, that all partners in the project know about the goal and standards, and have an idea who can join the product club.

Due to Covid19 pandemic some of the tools were a bit delayed, as the services needed, were not available in time. Also new ideas came up through the process of creation and were included to the tools. In a further step of work, the implementation and promotion of the tools will be desirable.

Each of the tools has been developed with a Danube story in mind, helping the traveller to experience the story.

The **Guides Training** was handing on Information on the project and the experience-development and quality to guides working along the Danube in the regions involved. It offered on the one hand theoretical information on marketing and content-communication, as well as practical training. The marketing experts talking and trainers on dramaturgy and the practical training were appreciated very much by the participating guides.

The aim of the event was to train Danube guides sharing a vision of Danube tourism and supporting visitors' sustainable travelling using a standardized approach. The workshop was attended by tour guides, journalists, curators and marketing managers from Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Austria, Serbia, Hungary and Croatia. Participants learnt about new tourism trends and methods and developed jointly their storytelling and visitor guidance skills in theoretical and practical sessions. The event offered a good possibility for networking and opened up further opportunities for joint action and the expansion of the Danube Region's tourism offer. **Agenda -Winter School for Tour Guides**

## Challenges and things learned:



The participating guides were very interested, but there should be an ongoing training for others, a well-designed “School” in the sense of our project – maybe the task for another tourism-related project in the Transdanube program. For another Winter School for guides (guides-training) we suggest a destination where the stories take place and actual experiences are already installed/implemented. To have a best practice-example and let the participants explore it.

We saw, that working on the mind-set of people having contact to guests and travellers is especially important – these are the ambassador that make the experience “Danube” in all its facets work.

Meeting key-persons along the trail and getting in contact with inhabitants, interesting persons who can tell about their work and life makes a sustainable difference for the travellers. That is what they take home – impressions out of personal contact and relations are the strongest ones – hopefully in a positive sense – but also in a negative, one if happens.

It is also important to get the opinion/suggestion of the tour guides on what the experience we create is like for tourists, and their opinions and comments can be very useful for the development of our product.

### 4.3 The green travel products, Tourism Panel and Testing

Finding tour operators who develop sustainable trips for the Danube that follow our stories and trails is certainly a key activity in the project. The Danube stories will first become visible through tour operators and their promotion of products. Since there is usually too little money available for marketing in the projects, these partners can be used for promoting the Danube and stories. In the project, it was as a first step to establish contacts and getting the tour operators excited about the benefits of this new tourism approach.

Several Danube-Products were created with tour operators and tested by journalists, bloggers and tourism pro's. Newly created Products were presented on the [danube-pearls.eu Webpage](https://danube-pearls.eu) to make it visible to the public and individual travellers, how they can experience the stories in a sustainable way.

The [tourism panel](#) in March 2022 was a good possibility to connect tour operators, guides and other experience creators and partners with the project and with each other. Interesting discussions and presentations gave an overview on conscious travel and sustainable mobility, on the work of tour operators and where the project should and could lead to. Unfortunately, it had to be changed into an online meeting, but on the other hand the participants were well structured probably more than if it would have been in person. See the recording here: <https://youtu.be/aMB8SKFZUow>

The **testing of green travel products** was a way to find out, if the products created for the project, could really meet the target groups expectations and the quality standards. The testers had to fill out a questionnaire and take picture for a reporting. They were over all asked to publish their experiences along the way over social media and other media available. (eg. Newspaper).

More information about Green Travel Products developed find on the website: <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/transdanube-travel-stories/section/green-travel-product>

## **Challenges and things learned:**

Some innovative tour operators could realize fitting products, for others, contacted within the time plan of the project it was not possible to put new products on the market – also due to the covid 19 pandemic-situation they were hesitating or were on short-time-work and had no personal resources.

Be careful with the time plan in a situation like that: Usually tour operators have their products ready nearly a year before selling them. So the creation has to start in time at the latest 1,5 years before the season.

Across the board, however, they were taken with the idea of the Danube stories and also with traveling along the river. Products crossing more borders and going along a trail like the Danube could hardly be found with sustainable tour operators. A further challenge after the end of the project will be to push this intention further and to serve the tour operators with regard to the Danube travel products and experiences.

Some of the products unfortunately could not be sold, because of the war-situation in Ukraine, and the following energy-crises hindered people from booking travel offers. But it is a first step and the interest and the market for the Danube-trips is existing.

Problems tour operators faced by creating the products:

- finding accommodation that is sustainable;
- finding the right key-persons at the spot to be able to offer a good meeting-experience.
- Train trips are rarely offered by tour operators, because the booking of tickets abroad is still not well regulated and difficult for groups. There are a few tour operators who try to do this for individual travellers, but then they have to come back to people who buy the tickets for them at the counter abroad and send them! In a world where everything can already be handled almost digitally. And the Situation is worse with public busses.

In general, it seems useful to have a list of key persons, who can make the right contacts, recommend the right people to meet, or have enough knowledge about different experiences to be able to recommend them.

## **4.4 The Danube travel challenge**

The Danube travel challenge was an activity to promote the Danube travel stories throughout the individual travellers on their sustainable way along the Danube. Six participants (with their companions), casted by a pre-campaign, were sent along parts of the six trails to face the story and to be challenged by the travelling, different tasks to fulfil and to tell their community about the trips. Around 7-8 days they were on their way and commented on social media platforms and collected video material for the documentation and presentation in the post-campaign.

With the hashtag: **#danubetravelstories** and **#danubeconnects** find many infos and links on Facebook and Instagram.

Find the report on the Danube Travel challenge and the Videos of the bloggers travelling here: <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/transdanube-travel-stories/section/danube-travel-challenge>

The experiences they had were summed up in a Video for each Trail as well as for one promotion video, what you can experience in the Danube region:

Trail 1: [www.danube-pearls.eu/en/danube-travel-stories/trail-1-europe-of-contrasts](http://www.danube-pearls.eu/en/danube-travel-stories/trail-1-europe-of-contrasts)

Trail 2: [www.danube-pearls.eu/en/danube-travel-stories/trail-2-nature-love](http://www.danube-pearls.eu/en/danube-travel-stories/trail-2-nature-love)

Trail 3: [www.danube-pearls.eu/en/danube-travel-stories/trail-3-in-the-footsteps-of-the-romans](http://www.danube-pearls.eu/en/danube-travel-stories/trail-3-in-the-footsteps-of-the-romans)

Trail 4: [www.danube-pearls.eu/en/danube-travel-stories/trail-4-arts-culture-architecture](http://www.danube-pearls.eu/en/danube-travel-stories/trail-4-arts-culture-architecture)

Trail 5: [www.danube-pearls.eu/en/danube-travel-stories/trail-5-danube-trade-route](http://www.danube-pearls.eu/en/danube-travel-stories/trail-5-danube-trade-route)

Trail 6: [www.danube-pearls.eu/en/danube-travel-stories/trail-6-danube-for-the-soul](http://www.danube-pearls.eu/en/danube-travel-stories/trail-6-danube-for-the-soul)

Moreover a few participants did blog posts on the topic, which are also shared on the Danube Pearls Website.

**Travel Inspiration:** Based on the travel programme of the participants, we elaborated a 7-Day-Travel-Inspiration for individual travellers for each topic, with helpful links to experiences & mobility, which is possible to download under the different trails [here](#).

### **Challenges and things learned:**

The Danube travel challenge organization was much more work than planned, so keep in mind to plan enough time for those who arrange the trips and manage the bloggers, as well as preparation-time for the casting and elaboration of the output.

In the end it was a good activity and related to the costs it had a relatively high level of diffusion.

From the feedback of the travellers/bloggers we recognized similar things:

Through the organization concerning transportation-problems and language-obstacles the trails had a very tight time plan. We suggest to choose shorter routes or have more time flexibility to enlarge the traveling-time. In the lower Danube-area the security was a topic for the bloggers, that should be taken in mind when planning trips in that area.

If you wish, that the participants to produce good content, the programmes should be filled with max. two experiences a day, so that they have time to produce the content. Moreover, we would suggest to send/hire experienced bloggers/influencers, if you want them to post on a regular basis.

The overall feedback from the participants was pretty good, and that they were all surprised how much there is to experience in the Danube region and impressed of the variety and the people they met. From the most participants we also got the feedback that the programme was too fully packed sometimes and the travels could be expand, to really immerse yourself in one destination. On the way they realized they would have liked to see more of the respective

cities. For a "normal" tourist, however, the programmes per route would probably have to be stretched to 10 to 14 days, so that you can really enjoy the beautiful spots in peace. Also travelling with sustainable public transport was challenging by time and you have to be flexible. Travelling by bicycle needed sometimes longer than it was calculated. Also by time guides on site had no real time frame in mind and exceeded the time, so the participants had to less time to produce content or had to break off tours in between. As they had to rush to the next programme point. **So briefing the guides on site & train them to give needed information in a certain amount of time would be necessary.**

#### 4.5 Communication activities:

Besides the posters, the Website for the project, a Facebook-page, etc. a newsletter was sent every half a year to **64 addresses**. (<https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/transdanube-travel-stories/campaigns>)

Besides the official homepage of the INTERREG-program, the partners created also their own languaging pages for the project, translated to the languages of the countries. Eg.

<https://www.linztourismus.at/freizeit/linz-entdecken/aktivitaeten/donau/transdanube-travel-stories/>

<https://www.strassederkaiserundkoenige.com/kontakt-service/transdanubetravelstories-2/>

<https://www.donaubuero.de/transdanube-travel-stories-projektinfo>

<https://www.donaubuero.de/transdanube-travel-stories-presse>

<https://www.facebook.com/Donauportal>

<https://www.instagram.com/donaubuero/?hl=de>

<https://westpannon.hu/projects/transdanube-travel-stories>

<https://www.donauregion.at/en/service/artikel/detail/6042/transdanube-travel-stories.html?mdrv=www.donauregion.at&cHash=e2840ac7b150f7ac4d85126bc0cf657a>

[www.danube-pearls.eu/en/danube-travel-stories](http://www.danube-pearls.eu/en/danube-travel-stories)

<https://www.zkts-ms.si/turizem/projekti>

<https://www.klubselo.hr/projekti/hrvatska/transdanube-travel-stories>

<https://danubeparks.org/projects/transdanubetravelstories-2020-2022>

<https://danubeparks.org/projects/transdanubetravelstories-2020-2022>

The communication-team was creating a leaflet, some nice icons for each story that were integrated on different pages and documents, in the books of the tools for experiences and so on.

A colour-scheme was created to help other graphic designers to have everything in one look and feel – this was used for the customer-addressed webpage on [www.danube-pearls.com](http://www.danube-pearls.com), see: [www.danubetravelstories.com](http://www.danubetravelstories.com) and at pdf-e-book containing the stories. Every trail was illustrated by a graphic containing the different relevant destinations.

Promotion materials on the project website: <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/transdanube-travel-stories/section/promotion-materials> - including the final brochure with an overview on the stories and activities.



Danubian Europe: the discovery of a “liquid space”



Returning to the Last Danube: nature and mankind



The Danube Adventure – Legions Heading for the Danubius The river that attracted cultures. Or: A realm of thriving culture without borders



“Cultural harvest” along the Danube: Art, music and architecture – a look at formative eras and their influences, wealth, splendour and landmarks



Danube Trade: The exchange of stories and goods



Danube for the soul

For the communication on social media platforms the following hashtags were used especially for the project: **#danubecconnects #danubetravelstories #visitdanube**

The Final Conference took place in Linz on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 2022– the most important thing therefore was a network-meeting for all partners, official representatives, Danube-workers, like guides, service providers and many more. Due to covid the networking in the project was lacking and the final conference could help catch up a bit.

The conference was designed like a Danube journey from the source to the mouth and further to the sea. In discussion rounds, the idea and the genesis of the 6 Danube stories were explained, then it went on to the flow, i.e. the sustainable travel routes, the experiences that were created and finally in the delta to the products that were created and the Travel Challenge that tested them. Looking out to sea, the partners closed the conference talking about what needed to be done now and what framework conditions would be needed to achieve this. Around the discussion sessions there was plenty of time for networking and all kinds of activities that have been developed in the project were exhibited in the form of a small fair. In a Planet Linz experience, following the conference, we presented the Danube themes of nature & art and culture as it can be experienced in Linz - with a visit to the AEC's Deep Space and a Danube flight, with an introduction to the Herbert Bayer exhibition in the Lentos, a short organ concert on the Bruckner organ in the old cathedral and finally a visit to the winter magic

of the Klosterhof.

The programme was very well received, all partners who collaborated contributed to the success, everything worked out great. The Danube network has expanded and strengthened again as a result. 106 participants were registered for the event, only a few did not come. There is a stream on the conference available here: <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/news-and-events/programme-news-and-events/8016>

## **Challenges and things learned:**

**Keypersons** – Networking: We only could find the relevant persons to work with us, because we are working in the field of Danube-development and advertising since many years and know lots of key-persons in the different fields, that know us and are also Danube-minded. They were happy to get a voice to participate the process and will carry on the work for the Danube travel stories-essence. We think this is an important fact for the work in that process.

The **network**, that was built during the project is the most important for the ongoing work – as a pool of knowledge and contacts for tour operators and partners along the river.

The online-meetings, hybrid workshops were due to the COVID19-pandemic a necessary tool for making the project work at all – but the personal interaction was missing and we are proud having done our best – still wanting to go on working together, we found a way to hold the team together – hopefully to be able to go on working in that field using our group of partners.

Especially in the field of communication it is important to define who is the target-group. Communicating with the guest (individual traveller) or the tour operator with very different needs and preparation of information has to be defined clearly to avoid misunderstandings or double work.

It is, if possible by the funding-scheme, desirable to plan budget for some extra product communication and promotion activities. Also the work with tour operators needs some promotion-financing to have a good basis for product development. The problem is, that communication is so much restricted in the project financing-plan.

The **Final Conference** went out very well, the budget would have been sufficient, but the working hours for the preparation were underestimated. Unfortunately communication/management was limited with 35% - and the conference belonged to communication.

## **4.1 More things learned on the project-preparation:**

### **Challenges and things learned:**

Take care when preparing an application and the project in focussing on the wished outcome(s) of the project – will it have the purpose of idea-selling or the purpose of service-selling. The activities can be refined in their output when posing these questions in the very beginning.

An integration of the national, regional and local authorities in tourism and traffic would have a big advantage in a project like this. To be in the position to have also an impact on the ongoing development of tourism and traffic matters.

When preparing such a project - for having a stronger voice and more impact on the authorities caring about transportation and tourism – a concentration on more promotion and press-work/PR is good to also bring in the financing-plan.

When having the possibility to go on working with the project outputs, it would be good to hook up with an education-concept. Getting the message to service-providers, closing lacks in service-quality and guest-orientation, which seems to be essential for a Danube experience as a valuable and sustainable vacation.

An ongoing communication of the stories and the ideas of the project would be necessary to implement it in the regions and nations. National Tourist Organizations will have to open up to the neighbour-counties and ideas that cross borders and commit themselves more intensely to the Danube-topic.

Regions should therefore act as interface to National Destination Management.

For further project we suggest the implementation of a pilot-region, where the different activities find a practical testing within the project.

At the national level, it is important to first get attention for the project, explain the needs and then discuss infrastructures in the country and across countries. In any case, the EU tourism strategies can be helpful. There needs to be a funding scheme for the development of sustainable travel – but: across countries.

The DANUBE must also reach out to national tourism organizations and be actively involved in marketing.

We see the task from the national level as follows: coordination of transport offers with regard to tourist travel and connections as well.

The task for tourism is to overcome the national, regional or declinational way of thinking on to a look beyond the horizon. Tourism responsible should take advantage of the project-results and use the Transdanube Travel Stories actively in product development. Creating real and new experiences and new products in the quality standards of the project can opens up new promising guest strata and will make tourism more resilient in the future.