

Going with the flow – easing inland shipping on the Danube

Europe's second-longest river is one of Europe's most under-exploited transport resources, and the EU has been investing in realising its huge potential as a link between East and West.

PROMOTING COOPERATION

At present, only 10% of the Danube's capacity as an inland waterway is used. This is partly because international shippers run into administrative and technical challenges as the river winds its way through nearly a dozen countries. Each country with a stake in the river's control has its own rules and regulations.

In response, the EU created a Network of Danube Waterway Administrations – known as NEWADA – to promote cooperation between waterway administrations, and to overcome some of the divergences that have hampered use of the river for inland navigation.

The result is that it is becoming easier to exploit this environmentally-friendly mode of transport in a cost effective manner.

A STRATEGIC ROUTE

The Danube has already been designated as a strategic European Transport Corridor. But the countries on its banks differ widely in their political, economic and social conditions, and in South-eastern Europe the disparities are even more evident. Fragmentation of administrative frameworks is reflected in the long absence of joint cross-border and regional strategies.

This is what NEWADA is starting to change. Barbara Kerl of via donau, the lead organisation on the project,

points out that responsibilities for the river had been defined by national law, and differed widely. It was logical to bring everyone together because what they all have in common is a river that is vital not only for transport but also a critical element in policies relating to agriculture, flood protection, waste water and fisheries. She said NEWADA is all about increasing the efficiency of the Danube as a transport corridor.

One of the most evident results so far is that information and communication technology is being upgraded, with better-quality networks and a wider range of services. A single portal now contains all the relevant information – fully updated – on navigation conditions, and a network of Wi-Fi access points along the river has been set up. This makes it easier for waterway administrations to meet their responsibilities, and for shippers to use the river.

The cooperation covers charting – creating new maps of water's depths and currents, to make navigation safer, by indicating more precisely where there are shallows or changes to the flow of the river. Electronic navigation charts are being refined and harmonised to provide unrivalled data.



Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA)

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In some places, the physical access to the waterway is being improved by new infrastructure projects. New facilities have been provided for reception of ship waste – since the cooperation also extends to issues of water quality. And joint guidelines have been agreed that enhance waterway maintenance and river engineering.

In addition to linking administrations, the project has brought together development agencies and ministries of transport, infrastructure and energy into the picture too, along with port authorities, shipping companies, and civil engineering faculties, so that seamless services can be offered to meet user demands.

Overall, the daily work taken on by waterway administrations is becoming more efficient as a more strategic approach is developed and as experts exchange their local knowledge and identify the best ways of avoiding problems – or tackling them when they arise.

And the work is set to continue long after the end of the project, with plans already in hand for further strategic cross-border-cooperation in hydrographic surveys, waterway maintenance, and wider administrative collaboration stretching up to 2020.

“With our partners we are improving electronic navigation charts. Agreement on the common border areas and ensuring the partners all apply the same standards are the aims,” says Johannes Nemeth, an engineer with via donau, the lead organisation on the project. “EU funding helps information flow across the borders of Serbia, Croatia, and Hungary”, according to Laszlo Szabo, Deputy Customs Commander, Mohacs, Hungary. This helps speed up legitimate traffic, while improving the detection of illicit consignments.

PROJECT DETAILS –

NEWADA – Network of Danube Waterway Administrations

Partners:

via donau, Austria
Slovak Water Management Enterprise
National Association of Radio Distress-Signalling and Infocommunications, Hungary
Environmental Protection and Water Management Research Institute, Hungary
Central Directorate for Water and Environment, Hungary
Agency for Inland Waterways, Croatia
Directorate for Inland Waterways, Serbia
Administration of the Navigate Canals, Romania
River Administration Office of the Lower Danube, Romania
Executive Agency for Exploration and Maintenance of the Danube River, Bulgaria
State Hydrography Service, Ukraine
Odessa National Maritime Academy, Ukraine

Total cost in €: 2.86 million

EU Contribution in €:

Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance: 208,404
European Regional Development Fund: 2.22 million

Contributions by project partners in €: 431,182

Start date: April 2009

End date: March 2012

Results: Easier commercial navigation on the Danube

Techniques: Training, upgrade of ICT equipment, infrastructure improvements

Project website: www.newada.eu