



IUCN
The World Conservation Union

Living Floodplains



Integrating Local Communities and Nature Protection in the European Green Belt

is one of the first projects coordinated by the IUCN Programme Office for South Eastern Europe. Its field activities are directed to the transboundary floodplain area that spans Croatia, Hungary and Serbia, and that represents one of the few large flooded areas along the Danube. The main objectives of this project are to strengthen transboundary cooperation, to raise awareness of local communities about the significance of biodiversity conservation, as well as to build capacities of all stakeholders associated with the protected areas in this region. In that way the project contributes to a harmonization of management plans in the three adjoining nature protected areas, and likewise to the involvement of the local economies in the programs of protected areas management. Considering the transboundary character of this area, it is clear that cooperation and coordinated management measures are the key solutions for its sustainable future.



The World Conservation Union

is the world's largest conservation network. The Union brings together 82 states, 111 government agencies, more than 800 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and some 10,000 scientists and experts from 181 countries in a unique worldwide partnership. Since 1948, the Union has been guided

by its mission ***to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.***

The IUCN Programme Office for South Eastern Europe, was set up in Belgrade within the IUCN Regional Office for Europe (ROfE) in 2004, and it has two main programme directions:

- ***Protected Areas Management and Transboundary Cooperation, and***
- ***Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use of Natural Resources.***

The Office encourages and improves cooperation among the local stakeholders in the region by working as a center for exchange of information and initiation of activities associated with nature conservation.

Our strategy is to strengthen and enhance ***Conservation Without Frontiers among South Eastern European countries.***



The European Green Belt

In 2004, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and its partners launched the European Green Belt initiative, focusing on the creation of an ecological network that runs from the Barents to the Black sea. The initiative has the vision to create the backbone of an ecological network, spanning some of the most important habitats for biodiversity and almost all distinct biogeographical regions in Europe.

By following a course that was in large sections part of the former east-western border, it symbolizes the global effort for joint, crossborder activities in nature conservation and sustainable development. Moreover, the initiative shall serve to better harmonize human activities within the natural environment, and to increase opportunities for the socio-economic development of local communities.



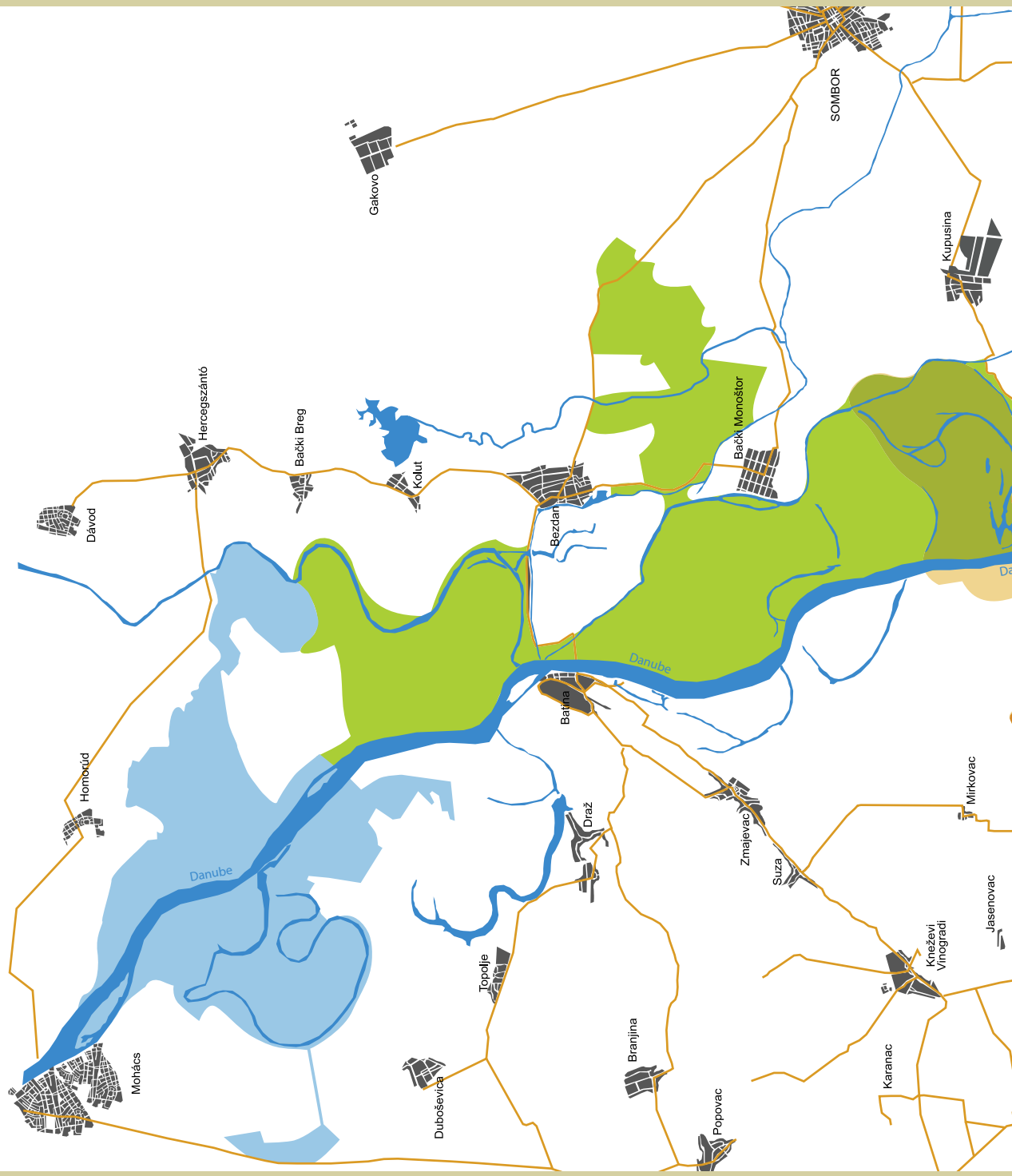
Nature

The preserved habitats of the trilateral Danube floodplain in Croatia, Hungary and Serbia represent a unique oasis of biodiversity in the Danube River Basin

The large transboundary floodplain in the middle Danube, in the area of the Drava mouth is one of the best preserved wetlands in the Danube River Basin. This natural complex embraces three preserved areas: the Kopački rit Nature Park in Croatia, the Danube-Drava National Park in Hungary, and the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve in Serbia. As one of the last integral floodplains of the Danube, it contains some of the most valuable wetland habitats and it is therefore a sanctuary for many species that are closely connected to the river. Natural willow, poplar and oak forests, as well as occasionally flooded wet meadows or numerous oxbows and swamps – which were once widely spread in the Danube wetlands – are today rare and fragmented habitats. Looking a little bit like a secluded island of preserved nature surrounded by dams, fields and settlements, this transboundary area is home to a large number of plant and animal species. Among them we have some very important wetland habitat indicators like the white-tailed eagle and the black stork, but also numerous fish species which find ideal spawning conditions in the oxbows and shallow shoals of the emanated river, or rare and endangered mammals like otter and wild cat. Besides that, there is a population of European deer in its natural wetland habitat living here. Although it suffers a certain pressure of numerous human activities, the area still remains very authentic, and it represents natural living space for the many species.



The Central Danube Floodplains





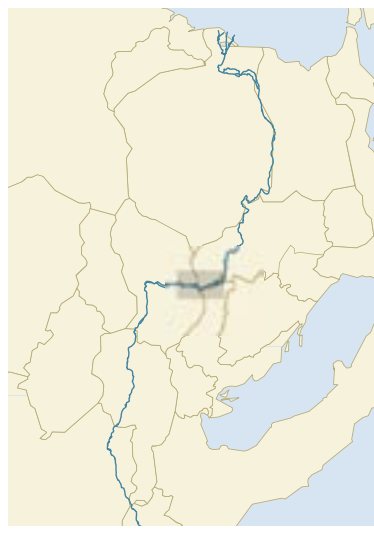
Danube-Drava National Park (Hungary)



Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve (Serbia)



Kopački rit Nature Park (Croatia)



People

The centuries-old tradition
of living by the river created
a unique cultural pattern all
along the floodplain

People have always found suitable living conditions and built their homes near large rivers, as they did along the Danube. Life by the river offered the use of numerous resources, but it also brought many difficulties and risks in an occasionally flooded and inhospitable area. There are many maps which confirm the existence of a medieval settlement named Bodrog, or the archaeological remains of Bartanj near Bački Monoštor. Many social and cultural patterns, traditional ways of using the resources, the customs, music and the food processing survived despite the floods, and today represent a very rich cultural inheritance of this area. Traditional ways of using resources retained until nowadays not only as an inheritance – but also as the main income for the local population. The similarity of ecological conditions in the whole floodplain created unique social and cultural models based on the use of its natural assets in all three countries. Traditional ways of fishing retained to this day, as well as the use of natural materials like reed and cattail. The design of wooden boats and specific ways of preparing food are common for the whole floodplain. Although being suppressed by modern ways of living, traditional activities have to be preserved, not only as a heritage and a uniqueness of the Danube area, but also as a contribution to local economies and natural environment conservation. In a word: Tradition developed from complex intertwined relations between people and nature gives the main significance and authenticity to this area.



Efforts

Integration of local communities and nature conservation, as well as transboundary cooperation, are the challenge which we are facing when working in this area

The steady increase of human activities in this area started more than two hundred years ago by digging channels and drying the wetland, building dams and regulating the main Danube stream. In the twentieth century, the pressure on nature increased by building new dams, by agricultural modernization, and by cutting natural forests and planting artificial ones. Most of these activities had a direct negative influence on the biodiversity of this area. Along with the vanishing of natural values, traditional ways of living began to change. Nevertheless, this area kept part of its authenticity – owing to its size and difficult accessibility. Activities associated with biodiversity conservation have been intensified only in the last few decades. A major section of the floodplain has been put under protection in all three countries. According to that, the use of natural resources is intermitted in some ecosystems, while in others it is permitted but in a limited way. At the same time, numerous measures aiming at nature conservation were put into practice. Establishing cooperation with local communities and building joint programmes with stakeholders stimulated the preservation of local traditions and activities that do not harm the natural values. Prerequisites for the conservation of this area and its sustainable development – as the project Integrating Local Communities and Nature Conservation in the European Green Belt anticipates – are an active role of local communities in its management and, at the same time, the strengthening of transboundary cooperation. Creating partnerships with local communities is therefore of great importance for carrying out seminal projects that assure development and simultaneously improve the natural surroundings.

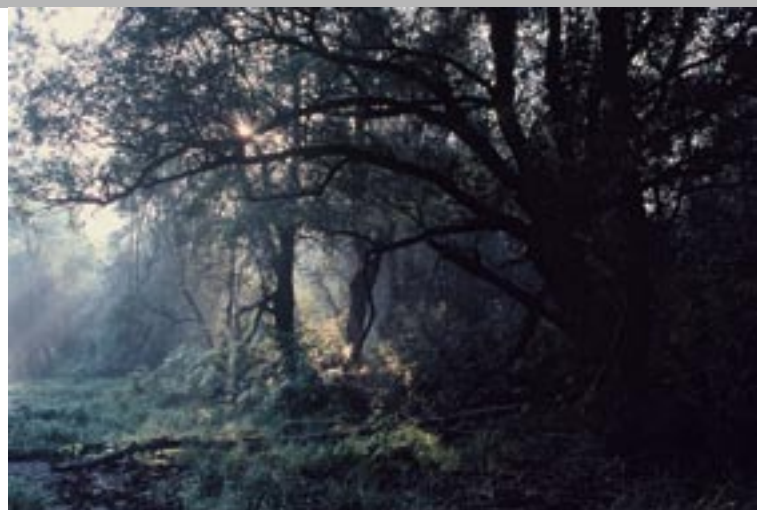


The World Conservation Union (IUCN)
Programme Office for South Eastern Europe
Dr Ivana Ribara 91, 11070 Belgrade, Serbia
www.iucneurope.org • www.europeangreenbelt.org



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For a just world that values and conserves nature



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