

Waters 2040: Climate Change and Resilient Water Management in the Danube Catchment

3RD NATIONAL PARTICIPATION DAY - AUSTRIA

Time: Tuesday, April 9, 2024, 09:00-18:00hrs

Venue: BOKU Wasserbaulabor - 3 Am Brigittenauer Sporn, Wien, 1200

While annual average precipitation levels are increasing for Austria in general, the climate will be more variable, e.g. more heavy rain events coupled with periods of drought are expected. This leads to significant changes in the water cycles in Europe. Many interests and pressures are affecting the Danube River network leading to risks for human uses and a decline in aquatic biodiversity. The Danube catchment is the second largest river basin in Europe. The Danube drains large parts of central and southeastern Europe, and crosses ten countries - more than any other river on earth. Consequently, the Danube River basin is one of the most important and oldest cultural and economic areas in Europe.

The inevitable need to adapt to the new challenges will lead to changes in the ecological conditions of aquatic systems and the availability and utilization of water. As hydrological processes change, water will not always be available to all users in the same quantity at the same time as it used to be. The current diverse human interventions in the water cycle, such as the need to use hydropower, supply drinking water, irrigate agricultural land, to ease navigation, the use of rivers as waste/waste-water recipients while considering the ecological conditions at the same time will have to be adapted to the new circumstances and challenges.

The results of these changes will affect each and every human being in the basin, the economy, agriculture, culture, and social life. Conflicting interests of the many users of water will arise on all levels, locally, regionally, nationally and in the transnational arena. This will lead to conflicts of interest, as all users have an undisputed right to use water in their own interests. Who will have first access to water in times of water scarcity? Which sector should be prioritised, hydropower, transport, irrigation, drinking, culture or leisure? How can biodiversity be linked to these challenges? Will the stakeholders in the Danube catchment act in solidarity between the sectors? Thus, we need to prepare to manage and reconcile possible conflicts, and the EUSDR has to define and prepare for its role in these processes.

Furthermore, in times of war and conflict, the impacts of climate change are exacerbated. For example, the Russian war on Ukraine brought severe damage, pollution, and negative impact on the water systems in Ukraine, among others at the Danube delta region at an unprecedented scale. This issue also needs to be addressed to manage water in the Danube river basin.

Another future feature of the Danube catchment will be defined by the EU enlargement process. Virtually the entire catchment is territory of EU member or applicant states.

This will lead to an almost complete internalisation, of the expected disputes and conflicts of interest in the EU. Managing disputes, reconciliation of interests, will be a constitutive part of the EU accession processes.

Since the Danube is subject to various regulatory systems due to its international character, these regulatory systems will have to adapt to the coming challenges. At the same time these regulatory systems offer the potential to mitigate not only the climate change impacts on the water circulation in the Danube basin but also to manage a balance of recurring legitimate interests nationally and transnationally.

The EUSDR is a central actor in the realm of regulatory systems in the Danube catchment, based on soft power, coordination, and consensus. Thus, the expected challenges related to the climate change impact on water circulation in the Danube catchment are of pivotal relevance for the EUSDR and the EU. EUSDR has addressed the issue of Water and climate change in recent times.

The conference Waters 2040: Climate Change and Resilient Water Management in the Danube Catchment will focus on the expected future challenges in the realm of water management. The conference will analyse the expected challenges in selected areas. It will address possible areas of conflict of interest among users and stakeholders. The conference will give voice to the younger generation of researchers by including the HR21 doctoral school. Furthermore, it will actively involve the Civil Society and reach out to all participants by asking for input for co-creation and co-design of strategies and action to adapt to the expected challenges.

The conference will present recent research from doctoral researchers and establish experts. In the deliberations we will debate what the EUSDR can contribute to mitigate the negative impacts from the expected changes in hydrology and how the EUSDR shall adapt and react to provide the best services for European citizens. The conference strives to provide a set of clear and practical recommendations to the strategy to better react to present and future challenges. As the driving factors in nature as well as in the European political landscape are changing, the organisers strive to provide information on the climate change impacts to the water cycles and aquatic systems and the suggested actions in a bi-annual forum.

This conference may serve as another step for a deepened exchange of academia, experts, international bodies, civil society and interested public (including media) on improved water management and a new perspective for water utilisation in the Danube catchment.

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