

SLOVENIA: Setting sail with a message of unity

The historic sight of 20 traditional boats sailing down the Mura greeted those celebrating Danube Day in Slovenia this year. With the building of a green water dragon for the Sava and the creation of beautiful artworks inspired by rivers, Slovenia's events were a feast for the eyes; and a focus for uniting children, adults and nations across the region.

The beautiful Mura valley was the setting for the two-day voyage by traditional wooden boats. Beginning at Cmurek in Austria, crowds cheered off the flotilla as it set sail for Slovenia, Hungary and Croatia, finishing at Novakovec. 3000 visitors joined in this reminder of the Mura's past, which brought together residents and 160 activists from the four countries. Coordinated by the Union of Slovene Ecological Movements (SEG) with municipalities from the four countries, the trip involved raising awareness about the condition of rivers and plans to build hydro-electric plants. An inventory of illegal tipping areas was also made. The event nurtured ecological thinking and reminded people of the great sense of well-being that can be achieved by being in natural surroundings. Rivers are no respecters of national boundaries – the Mura brought together people and towns, usually separated by such restrictions.

Ljubljana Town Hall was the location for the building of a startling water dragon by 50 students. The students, from the city's Biotechnology Educational Centre, have been inspired by the Sava and Danube Days and the international decade of water protection (2005-2015) to find ways to communicate environmental messages to the general public. Their wish is to get everyone to understand that the way we live our lives has an impact on nature and the purity of water. The dragon sculpture, the symbol of Ljubljana, was visited by the city mayor, Danica Simšič and international media.

The quest to find the Slovenian *Danube Art Master* reached its climax on International Sava Day. With every Slovene primary school in the Basin invited to participate, competition for the coveted title was strong. 300 pupils entered sculptures of fish made from wood, clay, stone, wire and vegetation. The contest was organised by the Society

Danube Day: more than just water!

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for Bird Research and Nature Protection (DPPVN) with the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, Global Water Partnership and the National Education Institute. Entrants enjoyed a day of outdoor activities at Cerknica Lake as part of the awards ceremony. The winning school, *OŠ Toma Brejca* school in *Kamnik*, received their prize from the Environment Minister, Janez Podobnik.

“Why not throw your rubbish into the river? Everyone else does!”

The thought provoking title of the Ljubljana Water Dragon artwork, created by students from the Biotechnology Educational Centre to raise awareness about the way we treat Danube rivers.

Partners

Society for Bird Research and Nature Protection - DPPVN Slovenia (Danube Environmental Forum - DEF) • Union of Slovene Ecological Movements (SEG) • Pomurje Eco Centre (PEC) • Biotechnology Educational Centre of Ljubljana • Municipality of Ljubljana • Ministry of Environment & Spatial Planning • Global Water Partnership • National Education Institute • Municipalities of: Tišina, Črenšovci, Razkrižje, Beltinci, Moravske Toplice, Gornja Radgona, Radenci and Mestna občina Murska Sobota • Municipal Tourist Board of St. Martin na Muri (Croatia) • Tourist Board of Croatia • Municipal Tourist Board of Medjimurje (Croatia) • EOL Čakovec (Croatia) • Municipal of St. Martin na Muri (Croatia) • Tourist Board of Mursko Sredisce (Croatia) • Municipal Podturen (Croatia) • Lenti Culture Centre and Library (Hungary) • Austrian municipalities of Bad Radkersburg, Halbenrain, Gosdorf, Mureck, Radkersburg and Umgebung • Tourist Society of Bad Radkersburg - Umgebung (Austria) •

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