



AUSTRIA: CELEBRATING CONNECTIONS ALONG THE DANUBE

A gigantic puzzle in Vienna's Maria Hilferstrasse got residents and visitors alike inspired this year by the many connections and influences that exist between the countries of the Danube river basin. The huge 10m by 5m puzzle of the Danube basin was put together at a grand opening on June 26 by representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, the City of Vienna's Councillor for the Environment, and Ambassadors of the Danube Basin countries. Over the next three days, hundreds of visitors got a chance to have a close look at the Danube River Basin, covering fourteen countries. They were entertained by a group of artists, who drew passers by and visitors into the intriguing puzzle. Visitors could also go on a mystery tour of Vienna, to see those places where the hidden influences of the Danube could be seen at work in the city.

If visitors to Vienna connected all the Danube countries while staying in one place, the IAD cyclists had to do it the hard way, by pedal power! The now annual International Association for Danube Research (IAD) cycle tour left from Krems and travelled through Austria, Slovakia and Hungary, publicising the importance of the Danube and the need to work cooperatively between countries of the basin, before finally reaching their destination in Győr. The start of the tour was especially marked this year by the presentation of a mobile flood protections system by the city of Krems.

The historic city of Krems was also the site of a discussion forum organised by the Water Section of the regional administration of Lower Austria on the MS *Austria Princess*, moored on the Danube. The discussion involved representatives of different stakeholders groups, from the navigation sector, flood defense units, tourism and nature conservation. Regional Ministers Josef Plank and Ernest Gabmann participated at the discussion, which was hugely useful for promoting cooperation and inter-agency links.

To further underline the importance of the Danube region to Austria, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs, Ursula Plassnik, invited the Diplomatic Corps in Austria to an excursion in the Wachau region including a boat trip on the Danube, where she discussed with them the huge cultural, political and economic potential of the region for the future of Europe.

This year, Austria also took part in the annual "Greeting the Danube" ships horn blast on June 29, creating a wall of sound to travel down the Danube. Information and displays at the Lentos Museum in Linz (in association with IAD) informed visitors about both the ships' greeting and Danube Day to further publicise the celebration. IAD also promoted Danube Day with a fireworks display, "Danube in flames" at

Wilhering (Upper Austria) where tourists and local municipal officials from both Bavaria and Upper Austria were invited to celebrate the Danube.

In all, Danube Day in Austria brought puzzles, spectacle, thought-provoking discussions and inspiration in many areas and to many people, bringing the Danube and its cultures firmly into centre stage.

“The Danube River is a European lifeline that also binds us in joint responsibility: ...[to] do everything possible to preserve this common living and cultural environment”

Ursula Plassnik, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs

ORGANISERS AND PARTNERS

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