



Danube Day 2008 in Slovenia

The Mura unites nations rather than divides

The historic sight of 30 traditional boats travelling down the Mura, adorned with flags of four nations, greeted those celebrating this year's Danube Day. Along with a hotly contested Art Master contest and environmental activities in both the beautiful Kranjska gora region and on the streets of Ljubljana, Danube Day reached a wide audience.

The stunning Mura valley was the setting for a major two-day voyage of traditional wooden boats. The event reached an est. 10,000 people in four countries. Transporting 220 people, the flotilla set off from a sunny Cmurek in Austria - to Slovenia, Hungary and Croatia - finishing 100km downstream in the village of Dekanovac. The paddlers were motivated by a desire to articulate their solidarity with fellow Danubites and highlight rivers as forces for unifying people, rather than, as they are often portrayed, lines that separate them.

It was also a beautiful reminder of the Mura's past, and the ways in which Danube people once lived. Along the route, craftspeople demonstrated traditional processes such as boat building, basket making and flour grinding – in fact all the skills one needed to make a trip down the Mura 100 years ago. One paddler described the boats as "beautiful treasures of our forefathers." En-route, over 110 performers transported people back in time with traditional songs and dances.

The trip and numerous events along the way were coordinated by the Federation of Ecological Movements of Slovenia (SEG) with Pomurski Ecological Centre (PEC) and partners from four countries. It attracted much media interest including debate over the controversial plans for hydropower stations. The latter was also discussed at a meeting in Izakovci on protection of the Mura, where an audience of over 200 people were informed about the river's ecological value on a European scale and pressing need to protect it from inappropriate development.

Artistic creativity also flowed in the Danube Art Master contest of 2008. With every Slovene primary school in the Basin invited to participate, competition for the coveted title was strong. This year's theme was sculpture, focussing on the animals that live in and along rivers. The quest reached its climax with the crowning of the 'Master' at Kranjska gora, where all 140 entrants were invited to participate. At the Planica Ski Jumping Centre, the excited children met with Slovenian Olympic ski jumper and national record holder, Robert Kranjec. Surrounded by the wonderful landscape and wildlife of the region, they enjoyed a packed day of fun environmental activities, visiting the Zelenci wetland (the

spring of the Sava). Three winning teams were selected to receive prizes: Eva Zgrabljíč, Lars Somi, Grega Ferenc and Anamarija Pojbič from Lendava School came first with their beautiful sculpture "Nesting Egrets."

Among other events in 2008, 100 Ljubljana children inspired adults to take action on international Sava Day. Under the banner 'With Good Will for Water', secondary school students from BIC took to the streets on a mission to promote the importance of water and the Danube Rivers. The pupils were supported by the DPPVN/Danube Environmental Forum, the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning and the Global Water Partnership. The State Secretary for the Environment, Mitja Bricelj, attended a press conference, which was followed by a rafting trip across the Slovenian-Croatian border.

"The River Mura helps us to bridge our diversities. Bringing together our nations is one of its most important roles."

A Danube Day participant taking part in the voyage on the Mura.

Danube Day Partners

Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning • Federation of Ecological Movements of Slovenia (SEG) • Pomurski Ecological Centre (PEC) • DPPVN - Society for Bird Research & Nature (Danube Environmental Forum) • Global Water Partnership • The Institute for Tourism and Culture, Beltinci • Secondary Educational Centre of Biotechnology, Technical Grammar and Veterinary Nursing • City of Ljubljana • Tourist Club of Bad Radkesburg Umgebung, Austria • Austrian communities of Bad Radkersburg, Halbenrain and Mureck • Organisations and communities from Tišina, Apače, Gornja Radgona, Radenci, Veržej, Ljutomer, Beltinci and Črenšovci • Members of Croatia's Tourist Association in the community of S. Martin and Štrigove • Members of the *Kerkamenti telepulesek sovetszegemuraszemenye* Association, Hungary • Coca-Cola Slovenia • ORF Austria • MAXI Radio • Vestnik (Croatia).

The Danube rivers: let's use them – not abuse them!

For general information about the 14-country Danube Day celebrations, view www.danubeday.org or email the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River: jasmine.bachmann@unvienna.org.