

PRESS RELEASE

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“coop MDD” project visits best practice Biosphere Reserve on Elbe River in Germany

Learning about best practices in management of UNESCO biosphere reserves will help project partners in developing the Transboundary Management Programme and engage local stakeholders through the network of Rivers Schools

Havelberg, Dessau – Last week project partners in the “coop MDD”, project financed by EU through the Interreg Danube Transboundary Programme 2014-2020, visited Biosphere Reserve on Elbe River in Germany. Biosphere Reserve *Flusslandschaft Elbe* is known in the Europe and the world for its restoration projects, joint development of the destination brand and successful inclusion of local business in the touristic offer of the region.

Elba River, or Laba in Czech, where it has its source, is one of the major waterways of central Europe. It runs from Krkonoše Mountains near the border of the Czech Republic and Poland, makes a wide arc across Bohemia and enters eastern Germany flowing all the way to the North Sea. For centuries it has been used for transport of goods across central Europe on cargo ships and has been heavily modified throughout the history.

With the establishment of UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and joint efforts of national and regional governments, NGOs and specialized companies through extensive, several-years long restoration projects, the life has returned to the river Elbe and its tributaries like Havel River. Joint touristic destination brand has been created and a network of local business offering local products and services enriched the touristic offer of the whole area.

“To the delight of local fishermen, the number of fish species has increased substantially since the establishment of BR *Flusslandschaft Elbe*. Number of tourists has been growing steadily thanks to joint destination brand and local businesses have growing to satisfy the needs of tourists with restaurants, hotels, camps and other services. This also helps increasing support of the local people for further nature conservation projects that offer the basis for this sustainable development”, said **Magdalena Wagner**, “coop MDD” project manager from WWF Austria.

Full engagement of local, regional and national governments and their bodies is of vital importance and Biosphere Reserves also need quite big capital investment, especially in tourist infrastructure like bike trails, info and educational centres.

“The kind of success we saw in Biosphere Reserve on Elbe River is only possible if all stakeholders and the government come together and find best solutions for sustainable development in the framework of Biosphere Reserve. We will look to implement the same approach in the establishment and management of TBR Mura-Drava-Danube and learn from the best practices on joint restoration projects, management program and engagement of local public through the network of River Schools,” concluded **Wagner**.

For more information about the project co-funded by European Union funds (ERDF, IPA) please visit the [project website](#).

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About “coop MDD” project

The 2.5-year EU Interreg “coop MDD” project aims to synchronise management practices in protected 12 areas and raise awareness of public about the unique natural value of the future *one-of-a-kind* 5-country UNESCO Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube (TBR MDD). In protected areas and Natura 2000 sites along the TBR MDD different management practices exist as protected area authorities don't have many opportunities for regular contact and exchange of experience. To overcome these obstacles “coop MDD” brings together the authorities to establish long-lasting transboundary cooperation for joint restoration and management of the TBR MDD. 8 *River Schools* will be established along the TBR MDD to support environmental education and offer new experience to school children while also creating the understanding about the need to protect the natural values of the “Amazon of Europe”. Also, several events will be organised in all 5 countries of the TBR MDD.

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