



# Danube-Networkers – Network of Seniors’ Education and Social Participation along the Danube

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## 1. Introduction

The countries covered by the EU Danube Strategy face an enormous demographic change. According to the newest Eurostat estimations (1/2010), 23.3 % of the population in the Danube region will be aged 65 and over in 2030. In 2010 the rate is 16.5% and this will bring an increase of 6.8% in the next twenty years which means a growth rate of 40%. All Danube countries will be concerned by this development, their ageing rate even exceeding that of the EU-27 (average increase of 5.8 %). Many Danube regions are additionally touched by migration of the working population, aggravating the age shift. These changes imply major effects on societies, with consequences for the social, welfare and economic life as well as education and culture.

Older adults (55+) can no longer be regarded as a homogenous group of passive people or a burden in need of care. Rather, they are an active age group with various life styles and social milieus differing considerably between and within countries – just like any other part of the population. Contrary to widespread stereotypes, mental skills do not necessarily diminish in later life. Older adults just need to be stimulated by learning activities. Furthermore, brain research results show that learning improves seniors’ health and is thus an important asset in health prevention.

Elderly possess experiences and competences that are valuable to society and to younger generations, e.g. in the fields of personal, social and professional competences. Older workers and their specific knowledge are needed in the Danube region labour markets. The active participation and social inclusion of this group of the population fosters civil society and is absolutely necessary for the prosperity of society as a whole.

Ageing societies like those in the Danube region simply cannot afford to waste the enormous potential of older adults. Lifelong learning is the key to assuring that the competences and productivity of older adults aren’t lost to society. It is imperative to provide this growing share of population with learning offers stimulating self-directed learning and social participation. In a world shaped by science, technology and fundamental social changes university based education must be fostered and developed to prepare older adults to take over new challenges and new tasks in society, economy, science and culture. Formal learning offers must be combined with informal and non-formal learning environments, e.g. in self-organized groups and post-employment activities. The importance of cooperation between universities and organisations representing civil society should be acknowledged in educational policies and funding.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Danube-Networkers - a network for seniors' education and social participation

In 1995 the Centre *for General Scientific Education (ZAWiW) of Ulm University, Germany* initiated and coordinated the non-formal European network “Learning in Later Life” (LiLL). In this framework,

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<sup>1</sup> More information under: <http://www.danube-networkers-2008.eu/statement-2010-684.html>

since 1997, it has successfully conducted with many other educational institutions numerous European projects in which groups of older adults from European countries took an active part. The aim is to foster lifelong learning for older adults by utilizing their competencies in the learning process. However, many Danube-countries and the elderly from these countries had not been involved. For this reason ZAWiW initiated in 2008 a cooperation of educational and cultural institutions especially in the Danube Region to establish a network of institutions working with seniors and promoting culture and education intended to strengthen seniors' education and social participation and intergenerational co-operation in the Danube Region. This until now non-formal network operates under the name **Danube-Networkers**.

Universities and non-governmental organizations of all Danube countries working in the field of education, culture and social affairs are involved. More than 60 institutions coming from all Danube Region countries supported the statement **“Lifelong learning programmes for older adults as a societal necessity in the Danube Region”** submitted by ZAWiW in the frame of the public consultation of the European Commission concerning the Danube Strategy (see point 6). <http://www.danube-networkers-2008.eu/statement-2010-684.html>

Parallel to the development of structures, transnational projects are implemented, in which groups of seniors from different Danube countries are working together. In this context, Internet tools play an important role in cross-national communication and co-operation. [www.zawiw.de](http://www.zawiw.de), [www.lill-online.net](http://www.lill-online.net), [www.danube-networkers.eu](http://www.danube-networkers.eu)

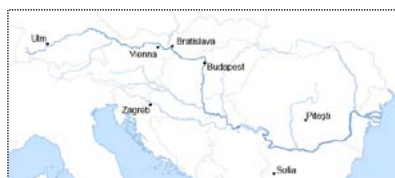
### 3. Starting point: the seminar “Home country – Danube country”

Starting point of the network was a seminar “Home country – Danube country” held by ZAWiW of Ulm University in which delegations from all 10 Danube countries participated (one representative and 2-3 seniors from each of the participating educational or cultural institution). The seminar took place from 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> July 2008 in the context of the International Danube Festival in Ulm, Germany. It aimed at laying basis for a long-term co-operation of seniors' groups alongside the Danube.

The participants shared their personal relations to their country as a Danube country, discussed about their common historical and cultural roots as well as about the dividing lines. In the course of the seminar the exhibits for the exhibition “Home in a box” was created and presented in the Dunauschwäbisches Zentralmuseum in Ulm. At the end, all participants passed a resolution that addressed issues in the area of education and social participation. An educational network “Danube-Networkers” should provide chance for transnational co-operation in the Danube Region.

[www.uni-ulm.de/uni/fak/zawiw/danube\\_seminar/de](http://www.uni-ulm.de/uni/fak/zawiw/danube_seminar/de)

### 4. Grundtvig-Learning Partnership Danube-Networkers



In September 2008 the two-year learning partnership “Danube-Networkers”, co-ordinated by ZAWiW of Ulm University started in the framework of the European Commission's Grundtvig-Programme. Senior groups from seven cultural and educational institutions from the Danube countries Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia participated in the project. In all groups, impressive texts and videos were created dealing with the topics “Bridges alongside the Danube – Bridges between people” and “Natural monuments alongside the Danube” which were shared and discussed via the internet and in four partner meetings. At the end of the project, the participants made their concerns heard in the European Parliament's Danube Forum. [www.danube-networkers-2008.eu](http://www.danube-networkers-2008.eu)

## 5. In-Training Seminar for multipliers from the eastern and the south-eastern European countries

In June 2010, ZAWiW held a one-week In-Training Seminar, funded by the European Commission's Grundtvig Programme, for multipliers in the field of adult education. It especially addressed multipliers from the Danube Region and aimed to train them as "managers of virtual learning in the field of senior education in Europe, especially the Danube Region". In the framework of the training, ideas for future co-operation were developed which were then included in future project applications (see below).

## 6. Citizens' Project "Danube-Networkers – Neighbours at work" (DANET)



From December 2010 to November 2011, ZAWiW is conducting the project "DanubeNetworkers – Neighbours at work", in co-operation with five partner groups (each group consisting of a university and a NGO) from five Danube countries (Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria). The project is supported by the European Commission's Programme "Europe for Citizens", by the Baden-Württemberg Foundation and others. In citizens' panels concerning central social topics organised in each of the partner countries, the project aims at encouraging older citizens to participate actively in the European Commission's Danube Strategy. The results of the panels are deepened in web-based discussions. The central issues of the panels will be discussed further in a transnational seminar in Croatia in June 2011. In a final conference in Strasbourg in November 2011, the results will be brought to representatives of the European Parliament. 250 participants from the five project partner countries are involved. [www.danet-at-work.eu](http://www.danet-at-work.eu)

## 7. Establishing seniors' universities alongside the Danube (DASUN)



In the project "Danube Seniors' Universities" (DASUN), which is funded from December 2010 to July 2011 by the Baden-Württemberg Foundation and the Heidehof Foundation, possibilities for science-founded education for older adults are analysed at the universities of Belgrade, Serbia, Craiova, Romania, Sofia and Ruse, Bulgaria in close cooperation with cultural and educational institutions. After the analysis, educational offers for seniors are developed and tested in each of the partner organisation. The "academy weeks" of ZAWiW, the co-ordinator and scientific lead of the project, serve as a model. Each university determines the needs and interests of the seniors with the help of a questionnaire and develops a concept for an education day for seniors at their university. These seniors' education days, in which the seniors will also be speaking up in work groups, will then be held in June 2011 [www.dasun.eu](http://www.dasun.eu).

## 8. Senior-Volunteer-Exchange alongside the Danube

In the framework of the Grundtvig-Program "Senior Volunteering Project" an exchange is realised through the co-operation of ZAWiW/ViLE e.V. and the University of the Third Age Bratislava, in which four senior volunteers are spending three weeks in the partner country in order to participate in voluntary initiatives.  
[www.svp-project.eu](http://www.svp-project.eu)

## 9. European Learning Partnership “European Women in older Age” (EWA)

The European learning Partnership EWA was initiated by ZAWiW of Ulm University and is funded in the Grundtvig-Programme from September 2010 to August 2012. Danube-Networkers Partners from Germany, Austria, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic and two groups from Italy participate in the project and exchange experiences about the lives of women in their country. [www.european-women.eu](http://www.european-women.eu)

## 10. Projects in planning

In the planning stage, in co-operation with the Danube office Ulm/Neu-Ulm: Danube-Networkers-Lectures (DALEC) – a media project for old and young alongside the Danube dealing with the topic “Values and paths alongside the Danube” (autumn 2011-autumn 2012) with partners from four Danube countries. Application is submitted to the Europe for Citizens’ programme of the European Commission. The project will be co-funded by the Baden-Württemberg Foundation.

Further project applications for the support of the Danube-Networkers educational network were submitted to the National Agencies and in Brussels in the framework of the European Commission’s Grundtvig Programme in February 2011.

In the frame of the Public consultation on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, ZAWiW provided the elaborated project proposal “University-based Lifelong Learning and Use of ICT, especially E-learning for Fostering Older Adults’ Social Participation in the Danube Region”. The project demands that civil society and especially older citizens with the competences they have earned in their job, their families and society, be included in the design of answers to the pressing questions for the Danube Region. The Danube-Networkers are willing to participate

## 11. Danube-Networkers and the European Commission’s Danube Strategy and the Danube Civil Society Forum

### 11.a. The European Commission’s Danube Strategy

The goals and activities of the **Danube-Networkers** are a concrete answer to the Danube Strategy. The European Commission’s Regional Policy Department created an action plan in 2010<sup>2</sup> which stated how the co-operation between the 14 Danube countries (9 EU-countries (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania) and 6 non-EU countries (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Ukraine and Moldavia) should be strengthened in the areas of mobility, transport, environment, socio-economic development and security. Five international conferences and a public consultation gave representatives of relevant institutions and organisations the opportunity to participate in the process. ZAWiW represented the **Danube-Networkers** in all conferences and submitted the statement “Lifelong learning programmes for older adults as a societal necessity in the Danube Region”, which was signed by 60 institutions of adult education and others from 9 Danube countries Danube-Networkers’ Statement: [www.danube-networkers-2008.eu/statement-2010.html](http://www.danube-networkers-2008.eu/statement-2010.html). Furthermore, ZAWiW submitted the above mentioned project proposal “University-based Lifelong Learning and Use of ICT, especially E-learning for Fostering Older Adults’ Social Participation in the Danube Region”.

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<sup>2</sup> Action plan [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/cooperation/danube/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/index_en.htm)

## 11.b. Danube Civil Society Forum

In the context of the European Commission's Danube Strategy-conferences a work group was formed, co-ordinated by the Austrian Foster Foundation, in order to found the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF). The DCSF wants to act as a platform for civic organisations and institutions from Danube countries who want to represent and actively involve civil society in the relevant areas of the Danube Strategy's process. The founding event of DCSF will be held on June 30<sup>th</sup> and July 1<sup>st</sup> in Eisenstadt/Austria. As the representative of the Danube-Workers, ZAWiW is one of the initiators of the DCSF.

## 12. The Danube-Workers' co-operations

The Danube-Workers co-operate with various institutions of civil society (education, culture, and environment) in the Danube Region on regional and national level. They are in continuing contact with the organisations represented in the Danube Civil Society Forum, with the Danube Youth Citizens Forum (DYCF) and the Ulm/Neu-Ulm office of the Council of the Danube Cities.

They work in close co-operation with the Danube office Ulm/Neu-Ulm and their work is supported by the Baden-Württemberg Foundation's branch office Eastern Europe (Geschäfts- und Servicestelle Osteuropa (GSO)).

## 13. Publications

Stadelhofer, Carmen: Danube-Workers: Eine Lerngemeinschaft von und für Senior/-innen, in: Europäische Donau-Akademie, Ulm, Peter Langer und Prof. Dr. Harald C. Traue (Hrsg.) 2010, Die Donau - Hauptstrasse Europas. Ulm: klemm + oelschläger, S. 126 - 131.

Stadelhofer, Carmen; Körting, Gabriela; Marquard, Markus, Westerhaus, Meike: The Grundtvig Learning Partnership 'Danube Workers' and the development of lifelong learning for older adults in the Danube Region, in: International Journal of Education and Ageing, Volume 1, Number 1, 2010, S. 93 – 99.

## 14. Joins us!

The network **Danube-Workers** welcomes all institutions whose aim is to promote seniors' education and the inclusion of the older citizens in society in the Danube Region. If you are interested in joining the network, please contact us.

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