

## Comment

# The role of communication and public awareness in the integrated management within Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority

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### Introduction

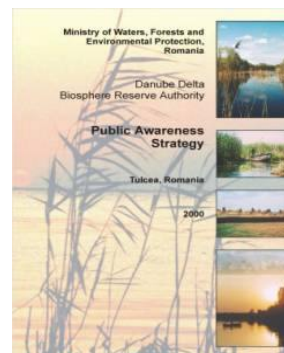
The concept of a biosphere reserve was adopted by UNESCO, within the MAB Programme, launched in 1971, in order to promote and to demonstrate the harmonious relationships that should exist between people and the environment and, particularly, to promote a harmonization model of the environmental protection needs with those of the sustainable economical-social development.

All the international conventions, the management and action plans accomplished in order to achieve the sustainable development objectives underline the great importance to establish a constructive dialogue, with impact on the long term decisions, between the decision makers and the wide public (especially with the local population).

The quality of each strategy or action plan, the quality of the institutional infrastructure and of the legal economical instruments, as well as their efficient implementation are strictly dependent on the active participation and involvement of the public in the environmental problems in relation with the sustainable development and use of the natural renewable resources. The decision makers, scientists, managers and the local population need to cooperate in the elaboration of a pattern program for the management of natural areas, that will meet both the development requests of local communities, and the protection and conservation needs of the natural environment, particularly of the natural resources.

Therefore, is necessary to have an extended program for public sensitizing, awareness and education, meant to allow access to information, understanding and correct interpretation of the information, as well as to encourage the local population participation in management decisions making. Communication, the permanent dialogue, the support gaining and particularly the public involvement, were and still are a priority objective of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority (DDBRA).

Recognition of the local communities' central role in the sustainable development, the critical status of the important natural resources of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (DDBR), the need to improve the public awareness degree, and understanding of the fact that an improved public awareness will bring greater benefits for the sustainable socio-economic development, determined the achievement of the Public Awareness Strategy of DDBRA.



Objective of the strategy is to support the conservation and sustainable management of the natural resources of the Danube Delta, improving socio-economic benefits for the local population in the Danube Delta, and the financial sustainability of DDBRA, through the implementation of an integrated and clearly targeted public awareness strategy.

The Strategy underlines the need to involve the target groups in the delta's problems, in information dissemination, but especially in the participative approach and solving of the socio-economic and environmental issues. We consider that the Public Awareness Strategy is one of the main instruments to spread the message, appropriate for every target group.

It was realized so as to cover a public as largest as possible, focusing on certain key groups, like: local population, tourists, local authorities, DDBRA staff, local NGO-s, students and children, mass-media. The people, inhabitants and visitors, cannot be separated from the nature of the Delta; their presence and activities have an important impact on the heritage of the Delta. With this in mind, the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority has as set itself the objective of raising public awareness among local people, visitors and other groups with an interest in the Danube Delta.

The integration of local people in the ecological management of DDBR and an efficient participation to the biodiversity protection and conservation activities are dependent on the best solving of the economical and social needs of the local population. Only by knowing, understanding and quantifying these needs can be encouraged the decision making that will lead to harmonization of local people and environment protection interests and determine the participation to the achievement of DDBR ecological management.

The first Public Awareness Strategy has been developed with the support and experience of international organizations, through a participatory process that has involved the key stakeholder groups in the Danube Delta. It is the first step in the development of real cooperation and communication between the DDBRA and other interested groups, and will also act to improve internal communication within the DDBRA. The preparation of the strategy has been funded by the World Bank GEF Danube Delta Biodiversity Project. The international conservation organisation, Fauna & Flora International, has facilitated its preparation. The preparation of this strategy has taken place from October 1999 - May 2000. There are a number of features about the way this strategy has been prepared that should be noted:

- this is the first public awareness strategy developed for any protected area in Romania;
- a wide group of stakeholders have been closely involved in the preparation;
- the participatory approaches used have helped to develop a more integrated, effective and agreeable strategy;
- DDBRA has acknowledged the importance of stakeholder consultation in decision and policy making;
- participatory approaches have been shown to be effective in reducing conflict, changing attitudes, building partnerships and disseminating information;
- a broad approach to public awareness has been taken, recognising the need for many different organisations and mechanisms to be used to build awareness not only of DDBRA and the Delta, but also of wider social and environmental issues;
- this is only the first step in DDBRA increasing stakeholder involvement, information sharing and dialogue, there is still much more to be done and many more improvements to be made.

### **Key issues addressed by the strategy**

A number of key issues have been identified which the public awareness strategy will address. These have been considered to be the most important issues by the organisations participating in the preparation of the strategy, DDBRA staff, as well as the experience of previous activities in the Delta (e.g. GEF project activities, DDI, BirdLife International, etc). The 12 main issues are:

- 1) Pollution
- 2) Understanding the reasons for the establishment of DDBR
- 3) DDBRA's public image
- 4) Economic and social difficulties of local people

- 5) Internal communication within DDBRA
- 6) Communication between DDBRA and local stakeholders
- 7) Different administrative bodies involved in DDBR management
- 8) Environmental education and awareness
- 9) Legislation interpretation
- 10) Exploitation of natural resources
- 11) Unfulfilled tourism potential
- 12) Maintaining local culture and traditions

### Target audience

An enormous variety of different groups of people has an interest in the Danube Delta, or influences it in some way or other. This Strategy has been designed to reach as wide an audience as possible, but it is vital that public awareness can be targeted at certain key groups. Priority audience groups were identified by those who participated in the preparation of this Strategy, including DDBRA staff. The criteria used to identify the priority audience groups include:

- the level of direct impact the group has on the Danube Delta;
- the ability of the group to influence the Danube Delta (in terms of environment, social, economic, political or legislation);
- the extent to which the perceptions or behaviour of the group need to change to allow effective conservation and maintenance of the DDBR.

Priority	Target Audience
<b>Critical</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local people (all communities in the DDBR, particularly people using the Danube Delta's resources)</li> <li>• Tourists</li> <li>• Local authorities (all legislative and executive decision makers, including Tulcea County Council, government, politicians)</li> </ul>
<b>High</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DDBRA (administrative staff and wardens)</li> <li>• Mass media (newspapers, radio, television)</li> <li>• Businesses and investors operating in the DDBR</li> <li>• Children, students and teachers</li> <li>• National and international donors</li> </ul>
<b>Moderate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local NGOs</li> <li>• Specialists</li> <li>• Religious groups</li> <li>• Tulcea inhabitants</li> <li>• Elderly people</li> </ul>
<b>Low</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International partners</li> <li>• National level groups</li> </ul>

### Key Messages

A number of key messages for the Public Awareness Strategy have been identified, based on the key issues, required changes, constraints, opportunities, and target audiences described previously. These messages expand on the twelve different issues listed above to give an indication of the specific information that needs to be conveyed to different audiences.

Issue	Key messages
<b>Pollution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pollution affects plants, animals and, most importantly, people</li> <li>• Don't pollute the Danube</li> <li>• Invest in an unpolluted environment</li> <li>• The importance of managing waste through proper disposal, recycling and/or treatment</li> </ul>
<b>Understanding the reasons why the DDBR was established</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect the Danube Delta for present and future generations</li> <li>• The people of the Danube Delta provide a unique model of coexistence with landscape and nature</li> <li>• The DDBR was established to use the natural resources of the Danube Delta according to its carrying capacity/ potential/ sustainable levels</li> <li>• A Biosphere Reserve recognises the importance of both people and biodiversity</li> </ul>
<b>Public image of the DDBRA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The DDBRA works to serve the public interest</li> <li>• The DDBRA is not a police force</li> <li>• The DDBRA is a professional and accessible organisation</li> <li>• DDBRA's main objectives are conservation, sustainable use and management of the DDBR</li> <li>• All departments are responsible for DDBRA's image</li> </ul>
<b>Economic and social difficulties among local people</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A healthy environment is fundamental to economic recovery and sustainable development</li> <li>• Promoting alternative livelihoods in the Danube Delta</li> <li>• Self-help: information helping people to help themselves</li> <li>• Promoting the potential of the Danube Delta and its inhabitants</li> <li>• The social and economic situation affects the environment in the Danube Delta</li> <li>• The need for external financial and technical support to address socio-economic problems in the Danube Delta</li> <li>• Invest in the Danube Delta</li> <li>• There is a future for people in the Danube Delta- encouraging people to return after their studies</li> <li>• Support sustainable tourism by investing and spending money in the Danube Delta</li> </ul>
<b>Internal communication within the DDBRA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People working in the DDBRA must be aware of the importance of their work</li> <li>• People working in the DDBRA must communicate effectively</li> <li>• All staff and departments are responsible for DDBRA's image and the implementation of the Public Awareness Strategy</li> </ul>
<b>Communication between the DDBRA and local stakeholders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local people and the DDBRA must work together for common benefits</li> <li>• Each member of DDBRA staff must be a tool to spread the information from the DDBRA to the Danube Delta</li> <li>• The need to work together- for common benefits in the DDBR</li> </ul>
<b>Range of different administrative bodies involved in management of the DDBR</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each important decision for the Danube Delta must be taken after a consultation with all legal bodies involved in the Delta</li> </ul>
<b>Environmental education and awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a special school curriculum concerning environmental issues in the Danube Delta</li> <li>• Involve the children and young people in the activities of the DDBRA</li> <li>• Involve children and young people in ecological activities</li> <li>• Invest in education for the next generation</li> <li>• Children can educate their parents</li> </ul>
<b>Interpretation of legislation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislation concerning the DDBRA to be understood by all interested people</li> <li>• People have both rights and obligations within the DDBR</li> </ul>
<b>Exploitation of natural resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximise local benefits from the sustainable use of natural resources</li> <li>• Promote employment opportunities resulting from alternative uses of natural resources</li> </ul>

<b>Unfulfilled potential for tourism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present the DDBR as an unique place with a huge natural potential</li> <li>• Encourage tourists to visit the Danube Delta by demonstrating its natural attractions</li> <li>• Financial support needed for tourism companies who employ local people</li> <li>• The Danube Delta is of international and European importance and requires significant support and investment</li> <li>• The Danube Delta is an ideal place to develop eco-tourism</li> </ul>
<b>Maintaining local culture and traditions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage and foster the pride which local communities have in their own area and heritage.</li> <li>• Maintain and encourage traditional lifestyles and cultural identity</li> </ul>

### Action Plan

The Action Plan describes the activities to be carried out to enable the implementation of the Public Awareness Strategy. These are grouped together to respond to the twelve key issues that the Strategy is designed to address. The activities are described by using the messages or information that the DDBRA intends to transmit to improve communication and access to information, and to increase public awareness.

For each message the target audience, or group of stakeholders has been identified. Each target audience may require a different mode of delivering or transmitting the message, this is shown by the mechanism in the action plan. The following are examples of types of delivery or mechanisms that are used in the Action Plan:

<b>Mechanism</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Leaflets</b>	Leaflets are easily produced and can provide information or promote specific issues with different audiences.
<b>Newsletter</b>	Newsletters could be produced every six months, in Romanian and English, and could contain short articles about the activities of the DDBRA, information on key issues, and articles by organisations and individuals working with the DDBRA.
<b>Radio programmes</b>	Radio is one of the most effective ways of reaching to local communities in the Danube Delta, as well as other local and national audiences. The DDBRA will use radio messages and regular radio programmes to cover information and issues relating to the DDBR.
<b>Information sheets</b>	For some issues or stakeholder groups information will need to be produced in an accessible form. The DDBRA will produce information materials as specific needs are identified, for example if local communities wanted more general background information about fishing, or if tourists needed information about facilities and transport in the Danube Delta. The format and content of the information materials will vary depending on the issue covered and the specific audience.
<b>Press releases</b>	The DDBRA will produce press releases for use by mass media on current events and issues. They will be focused on those media which target the main audience groups most effectively.
<b>Reports</b>	The DDBRA will produce detailed technical reports on particular issues, as required. These reports will usually be targeted at specific organisations or groups, and will provide essential background information for the above items.
<b>Face-to-face meetings</b>	Personal meetings will be an underlying mechanism for all of the DDBRA's work, ensuring effective and understanding communication and understanding between focal groups. This is particularly important in relation to local people living in the Danube Delta where the wardens will play a significant role in communication.
<b>E-mail</b>	E-mail will be essential for regular and effective communication and information dissemination between groups, particularly at the international level and with groups working closely and regularly with the DDBRA (e.g. project founders, national and international NGOs and other partners).

<b>Public meetings</b>	Public meetings will be useful for open discussions and presentations between specific groups – for example, local business interests and representatives of a local community. In particular, they offer a more personal forum for information exchange with opportunities for cross-sectoral discussion, which is not possible with some other mechanisms.
<b>Press conferences</b>	Press conferences offer an effective way to have direct and two-way communication with the mass media, to discuss particular issues with several groups at the same time.
<b>Newspaper articles</b>	Newspaper articles on key issues offer an additional mechanism to reach a wide audience at both local and national levels.
<b>TV programmes</b>	TV programmes on key issues also offer an additional mechanism to reach a wide audience at both local and national levels.
<b>Letters</b>	Letters are an effective way to give specific individuals key information, particularly in informing them about upcoming or recent events.
<b>Workshops</b>	Workshops offer a mechanism for relatively small groups to discuss and learn about specific key issues in depth. In particular, they allow training in key skills and achieving consensus on key issues.
<b>DDBRA or Danube Delta website</b>	The website is a potential mechanism for disseminating information at the national and international level, particularly in conveying the importance of the Danube Delta, as well as sharing lessons learnt from the DDBRA's experience. A website is an effective way to promote the Danube Delta and the work of the DDBRA outside Romania.
<b>Local and national events</b>	Local and national events offer a good mechanism for the DDBRA to have contact with a large audience at a local or national level. Initially, this is likely to be at events organised for other purposes (e.g. fishing festivals, 10 year anniversary of the DDBRA ). European or international events could also be used to demonstrate the importance of the Danube Delta in global terms.

All activities are intended to provide clear outlines for implementation, with time-scales indicating start dates and duration. The start dates also indicate the relative priority of each activity - high priority activities, including those on which further activities depend, are shown to start earlier in the Action Plan. The relative priorities of different activities were identified by the DDBRA after the consultative preparation of the Action Plan but may differ from other organisations working in the Danube Delta.

Implementation of the Strategy will benefit local people, the DDBRA and, in general terms, the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, and will help to achieve a real model of coexistence between people and nature.

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