

The Panel *Mayors' Perspective on the Danube eRegion Development Suggestions*

Suggestions by Gunter Czisch, Mayor

City of Ulm, Germany

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region has been developed by the EU Commission and was presented to the public at the end of 2010. It has become a priority for both the presidency of the EU and many participating member states. The main focus of the strategy will be on the better use of the economic potential of the area, which has a population of 115 million.

Regions and Cities are the ultimate service providers for people on the ground. They can provide concrete solutions for everyday problems as much as sustainable alternatives for a better quality of life for their citizens, locally as much as transnationally. They make the European ideas concrete and visible.

The cities Ulm and Neu-Ulm are the first big urban district on the Danube. Both cities have a long history along the river: 2012 is the 300th anniversary of the "Departure down the Danube". The first of the "Ulmer Schachtel", boats filled with emigrants, set off downstream in 1712. Many descendants came back to the region of Ulm after the Second World War. Therefore personal relationships are kept up till this day. Cultural exchanges as well as economic relations have a long tradition in the Danube region. Even during the Cold War, the contacts between the Danube countries in east and west did never cease, thanks to civic engagement.

For this reason, the city of Ulm supports the project DRIBE - Danube Region Internet Based Exchange (planned by the Danube Office Ulm), that will contribute to the installation of efficient governance structures with new media. ICT involvement improves the attendance of the board members in cities and communes. The main objective of the project is to implement an innovative communication instrument in order to bridge heterogeneity and geographical distance. Therefore the transnational competence of local and regional stakeholders will be strengthened.

Suggestions by Mag. Rupert Gole, Mayor

Municipality of Šentrupert, Slovenia & Teaching Assistant, Faculty of Architecture, University of Ljubljana

What makes a local community innovative?

No.1: Recognition of local specifics on which a local community can base development on (in combination with a creative touch).

No.2: Avoiding copying other (successful) local communities (have enough courage and knowledge to develop your own vision, be the first).

No.3: Global vision, local action (have broad focus, be open outwards and build global networks to reach local innovative breakthroughs).

Suggestions by Dr. Miha Japelj, Professor & President

Dolenjska Academic Initiative, Slovenia

The association Dolenjska Academic Initiative was formed in the year 2007. Over 140 university professors and professionals with Ph.D. or M.Sc. degree having roots in the South East Slovenian region (Dolenjska, Bela krajina, Kočevsko-Ribniško and Posavje) are the members of the association. The main and most important goal of the association's members is supporting active and synergetic cooperation, collaboration and assistance in all forms and steps in the formation of new and modern university studies and, of course, to accomplish the desired own university. It is worth mentioning that the region possesses respectable old tradition in education, science and art. The second gymnasium in Slovenia was created in Novo mesto by a decree of the sovereign Maria Theresa in 1746. Many of famous and important Slovenes were educated in Gymnasium Novo mesto. For example, scientists Josip Plemelj and Fredinad Zeidl, poets Oton Župančič, Dragotin Kette, and Simon Jenko, painters Vladimir Lamut, Božidar Jakac, and Bogdan Borčič, composer Marjan Kozina, olympic and world champion in gymnastics Leon Štukelj, choreograph and ballet dancer Pino Mlakar.

The region possess an outstanding economic potential since it is the fastest growing in Slovenia offering an excellent and realistic future for further development of modern industry. The Dolenjska Academic Initiative has organized two conferences on cross-border collaboration in March 2011 and March 2012. The impressive public and political attention has been dedicated to both events. Each conference has delivered a document in a form of a Memorandum which was mutually accepted by the participants representing academia, government, and enterprises.

The conference organized last March was orientated towards creation of a cross-border eRegion of Excellence. The representatives of Karlovac region, Croatia were invited to Novo mesto, Slovenia. Importance of significant and successful Cross-border eCollaboration was discussed and further collaboration between both regions has been proposed in the field of education, better relationships and cooperation between the two neighboring geographical regions.

Suggestions by Dr. Matej Gomboši, Mayor

Municipality of Beltinci, Slovenia

Very often the municipalities develop their own procedures and solutions without a possible cooperation with the municipalities in the country, or across the border. Experience and best practice sharing is not exploited. This is why the Municipality of Beltinci is a member of the Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia as well as the Association of Municipalities of Slovenia with its eBusiness Committee.

Our intention is to offer good services and particularly e-services to our citizens, to visitors, tourists and others by a provision of an interactive social media.

In order to avoid paper, all municipality council members are equipped with the laptops and trained accordingly. Nowadays all communication is provided e-way using open source code in order to save money: operating system, office applications, e-mail and browsers. An outsourced service is used for the cloud computing applications providing for safe mobile access and archiving.

There are numerous challenges in front of us. We need a solid IT infrastructure; currently we are installing broadband internet to all households in the Municipality of Beltinci. It is our feeling that the municipalities are too often left alone as far as equipment and software are concerned. More countrywide coordination is needed. The eGovernment should be considered a broad, nationwide platform with a single interface to local and national data sources and web services allowing for a simplified business of municipalities and local and national governmental institutions.

Cross-border collaboration may allow the municipalities to gain the European and global horizon. To us the INTERREG programs of the European Commission are important although sometimes the projects may have a soft content and not concrete enough investments. In the area of tourism we are cooperating with the municipalities in Croatia and Hungary sharing common locations upon the Mura river. Our Love Island is one of often visited sites in a natural environment. We are active also in the area of effective energy use for which a potential of IT is not exploited yet.

The municipality is open to joint projects and collaboration with the academic institutions. For example, with the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, University of Maribor a joint IT project has been created to provide an innovative free of charge e-service to the public to explore a photovoltaic potential of any given parcel of the land (solar energy exploitation for electricity). Software developed for that purpose is highly innovative. Many such projects and ideas exist. What we need is just enough people with innovative drive and persistence.

Suggestions by Dr. Jože Gričar, Professor Emeritus

University of Maribor, Slovenia & Program Coordinator, Inter-Municipality Initiative: Cross-border eCollaboration in the Danube eRegion

A natural entity of the cross-border eCollaboration effort is a municipality with an executive mayor's level involvement. In an e-municipality, a special focus should be devoted to cross-border eCollaboration of the SMEs. The municipalities situated along the borders may play an important role in demonstrating what and how could practically be done in a cross-border environment.

Experimenting (prototyping) in innovative ways of cross-border eCollaboration will accelerate new eSolutions & eServices of a higher level of acceptance to be developed and implemented sooner. They will contribute to a higher competitiveness of the participating organizations, the municipalities, the countries, and the macro region as a whole, as well as to a better life of their citizens.

Opportunities for a cross-border eCollaboration are numerous. Numerous and diverse are also the stakeholders which have to engage in order to represent all aspects which have to be considered. Important is an agreement on what are the

most relevant cross-border e-problems which have to be addressed. The mayors are invited to ask a question "What will be our joint prototype developed in next 12 months" and to support the actions needed. The participants are encouraged to courageously engage in prototypes development in order to be able to respond in-time to the related national and/or EU calls for project proposals. A project proposal may be focused at a pilot based on experience gained by the joint prototype development and testing.

Mayors in the Danube Region countries are invited to eCollaborate in innovative e-problems solving of a joint interest. Traditional friendships between municipalities/towns of the neighboring countries may be expanded and interconnected by using e-technologies. Clusters of e-municipalities/towns are suggested.

Suggestions by Tanja Drobnič, Secretary, Head

Internationalization Department, Public Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Entrepreneurship and Foreign Investments

Public Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Entrepreneurship and Foreign Investments in cooperation with the partners (municipalities and companies) at local and regional level executes the activities supporting foreign direct investments into the municipalities and companies. The Agency is very interested in close cooperation with the designers of innovative and advanced products and services. Such companies are the prototypes creators and actors of future projects' proposals and business consortia for obtaining financial resources within the new EU programme Horizon 2014-2020.

Cooperation of partnering companies and municipalities in the Danube Region is recommended. Together they will come to new products, solutions and services which will improve quality of life of the population in the region, as well as contribute to manufacturing and marketing opportunities on the emerging markets like China, India, Russian Federation and South African Republic. A survival and future growth of the European economy is dependent upon integrations within the global market. It is relevant that the Danube eRegion is at the crossroad of the ancient Silk and Amber roads.

ICT is the industry which represents an important part of the Slovenia's economy. In addition to that it supports practically all other industries for which innovative and advanced technology solutions are required for a breakthrough into a global economy. Since ICT operates borderless, also cooperation of the development professionals has to be borderless in order to provide cross-border, or borderless solutions.

Over 20 prototype proposals have been presented during the conference by the representatives of the companies and institutions in Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Germany, Serbia, Slovenia and Romania. Over 150 business-to-business meetings have been organized for companies and institutions in Austria, Serbia and Slovenia. They have demonstrated that the Danube eRegion is very relevant to the companies

and municipalities. Prototype presentation and meetings have reconfirmed a need for an accelerated usage of ICT in numerous areas such as eHealth, eGovernment, eLearning.

Europe as a whole, and the Danube Region as its part are facing economic and financial crisis for some years. For a successful economy recovery eKnowledge and digital industry are of crucial importance. Together they may create new jobs. The Danube Region has to fully exploit the capabilities of the digital industry which generates the economy growth and provides for efficient connectivity with the growing markets. The region may benefit from its strategic geographic position on the New Silk Road connecting China, Iran and Turkey with Western Balkans and Slovenia in one, and with Hungary and Finland in the other direction.

Suggestions by Dr. Bror Salmelin, Policy Coordinator, Adviser to the DG

European Commission, Directorate General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology – CONNECT & OISPG - Open Innovation Strategy and Policy Group
European Commission Contact, Founder

The promise of the Danube Strategy can be fulfilled only when we see it beyond ordinary. It can cover the necessary cross-border infrastructures but what is rather weak so far is the development of attractive innovation spikes, i.e. that kind of innovation ecosystems which attract talent by making innovation faster, and scale up of the results faster. This requires understanding of modern innovation processes, especially from knowledge society perspective.

Critical is to make in the innovation region (or city) the interaction between all stakeholders as fluid as ever possible, by creating interaction culture and sharing culture. The citizen's role is important being an active agent in the development, not only being the object for products and services.

Looking at the strategy as whole we need to share common development beyond exchange of knowledge of best practices. The commitment grows only when doing common projects cross-border. To begin with I suggest networked innovation camps between interested cities on selected topics, in order to find common projects to be executed together, beyond the political keywords. These camp and innovation culture can then develop further into innovation ecosystems, remembering that the key is co-creativity and drive. Too often local innovation is seen as broadband and buildings only. The processes are too often forgotten, like the courage to experiment and prototype new things. When commitment exists, it is easier also to create the financial engineering packages needed to interlink the means available for the region. It is not about diffusion or cohesion, it is much about creating spearheads to bring the area to its full potential. Beyond political keywords.