

RENDERING THE DANUBE BASIN AGRICULTURAL REGION MORE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY

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New political and economic relations create new conditions for development of the Danube region. The axis of the Danube region development corridor is the Danube river, which has indisputable potential advantages in using inside as well as outside resources available to the area.

The Danube is a very important water source and waterway with natural ecological and economic potential, such as obtaining cheaper energy sources. The Danube region, as it is defined by the working association of the Danube region countries, consists of the territory of nine principle countries and two additional countries which are associated as observers.

Land usage - especially usage of soil - structure and intensity of agricultural production, varies considerably in each of the Danube region countries and depends mostly on climate and vegetation zones, and to those zones referred to as agricultural areas in Europe. Another important factor affecting agricultural production is agricultural heritage, as well as forms and ways of agricultural management. All of these factors are responsible for the number and size of agricultural enterprises and farms in these individual countries.

In the Slovak Republic, a very strong agriculturally-oriented community lives on agricultural land, which accounts for 49.5% of the county's total land area. Slovak society has been dealing, due to the necessity of a continual process of transformation, with a long list of new problems, possibilities and proclamations that aim to change the Slovak countryside from an objectively adaptable, mono-functional agricultural area to a native, beautiful, diversified and ecologically stabile countryside, using sustainable development principles.

The typical example of the region where an effort was made to restore the native function of the countryside was the area between the Danube river-bed and the derivation channel that was built as part of the Gabčíkovo waterworks project and created an artificial island with three settlements and an area of 5,300 hectares. This seems to be a relatively small area of high quality ecology and a well-developed organisation of bio-centres, bio-corridors and interactive elements, with a specific orientation given to the structure and intensity of agricultural production.

The development of socio-economic activities in this area is limited in considerable measure due to the protection of water resources, unique meadow forests, natural parks and the existence of low communication accessibility. For this reason the main focus of regional development should be the environment. Agricultural management and soil usage must be close to the needs of organic agriculture, coexisting with natural systems rather than being superior to them.

The present base of agricultural production is the required re-planting of grass on arable land for the new Charolai cattle breed, which does not produce milk for the market. Another objective of agricultural production is to move the breeding pigs from the island. New centres of agro-tourism are being built on an island with beautiful natural scenery and many native inhabitants. The island requires not only transformation to sustainable development but encouragement to develop a considerably higher level of co-operation, exchange of information, better schools and public education, practical use of positive examples from other countries or regions, and a stronger democracy.

This is the reason why these basic conditions for successful development have to be discussed and why opinions from the leading personalities in the fields of bio-diplomacy, biopolitics and bio-ethics have to be heard.

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