

Guidance Paper for identifying and listing Danube Strategy Flagships

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Abbreviations

CF	Cohesion Fund
DSP	Danube Strategy Point
DTP	Danube Transnational Programme
EC	European Commission
EIB	European Investment Bank
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
EUSDR	EU Strategy for the Danube Region
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
MRS	Macro-regional Strategies
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (former ENI)
NC	National Coordinator
PA	Priority Area
PAC	Priority Area Coordinator
SG	Steering Group
WB	World Bank

1. Introduction

“Macro-regional strategies are delivering a significant number of results, ranging from internal capacity effects and coordination/cooperation processes among countries and regions, to concrete transnational projects and activities being implemented or facilitated. However, in practice, it is challenging to report on these achievements”¹.

Previous efforts have been made to identify Danube Strategy Flagships ('EUSDR strategic projects/processes') and thus making the EUSDR's achievements more visible. However, according to the findings of the EUSDR Operational Evaluation², there is still 'homework to be done related to [...] the communication of results to the public and the political level'. Further considering the adoption of the revised EUSDR Action Plan³ in 2020 and the process of embedding the EUSDR into EU programmes⁴, a slightly adapted approach is necessary to take into account these processes and developments. The criteria for defining Danube Strategy Flagships need to be adapted to both internal and external developments and conditions. Consequently, the Danube Strategy Point (DSP), in line with its approved working programme⁵ and based on the concept of 'EUSDR strategic projects' from 2016, proposes the following approach as support for identifying and listing Danube Strategy Flagships⁶. The *Guidance Paper for identifying and listing Danube Strategy Flagships* was elaborated by the DSP in cooperation with the EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators (PACs).

2. Definition

The EUSDR is implemented, among others, through Flagships. Danube Strategy Flagships are projects or processes that exemplarily highlight the implementation of the EUSDR Action Plan, have a clear macro-regional dimension and a multi-level governance approach (see detailed criteria in chapter 4).

Danube Strategy Flagships are of high importance for the Danube Region's economic, social and territorial cohesion and for improving the quality of life in the Danube Region. Danube Strategy Flagships are to strengthen internal and external communication and the visibility of the topics, initiatives and prospects in the Danube Region. They illustrate the progress achieved in implementing the EUSDR and shall demonstrate exemplarily and non-exhaustive the achieved changes in the Danube Region that are induced by cooperation.

¹ COM(2020) 578, Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies. [Online](#).

² Metis 2019, Evaluation of the effectiveness, communication and stakeholder involvement of the EUSDR. [Online](#).

³ SWD(2020) 59, EU Strategy for the Danube Region – Action Plan. [Online](#).

⁴ <https://danube-region.eu/projects-and-funding/embedding-2021-2027/>

⁵ Work packages and deliverables are part of the approved project and are to be implemented during the project period. Here especially: a) 'Update guidelines for identifying and listing Strategic Projects/Flagship Projects/Light Tower Projects', b) 'Assistance to PACs for identifying strategic projects', c) 'List of projects of strategic value'.

⁶ Please note that different **terminology** can be used to describe projects and processes of strategic relevance. In a joint process of finding a terminology for the EUSDR, several terms have been discussed and assessed according to basic principles, PROs and CONS, and taking into account where and how the term should be used. Subsequently, the PACs selected 'Danube Strategy Flagships' as the most representative and appropriate term.

3. Purpose

The identification of Danube Strategy Flagships aims at:

- Demonstrating good practices;
- Providing a practical tool for stakeholders and particularly the EUSDR participating states, to explicitly foster projects and processes with a strategic character;
- Producing regional, national and international/transnational visibility for the EUSDR and its actions and targets while creating awareness among the general public and the EUSDR stakeholders;
- Highlighting the progress achieved in implementing the EUSDR and thus strengthening the internal and external communication⁷;
- Strengthening a sector or branch, or generating value chains or model solutions to important common challenges faced within the Danube Region;
- Contributing to support activities and efforts undertaken within the EUSDR Priority Areas as well as highlighting the ambition a PA has in a certain policy area;
- Paving the way for future orientations / activities of the PAs
- Supporting and further encouraging cooperation among EUSDR participating states and/or regions, as well as potentially beyond the EUSDR;
- Strengthening the ground to further embed the EUSDR strategic topics – jointly agreed by all participating countries of the EUSDR – into EU funding programmes 2021-2027 and beyond;
- Promoting the EUSDR and – through the implementation of Danube Strategy Flagships – the idea of transnational cooperation and cohesion policy in Europe and the Danube Region.

4. Scope and criteria for Danube Strategy Flagships

The label of a Danube Strategy Flagship is to be awarded to a project and/or process of strategic relevance that fulfils all of the following criteria:

- a) **Connection to the EUSDR:** Links or contributes to one or more targets and Actions of the respective Priority Area as described in the EUSDR Action Plan⁸.
- b) **Macro-regional dimension:** Involves at least two EUSDR participating states and has a high macro-regional impact (effect) in at least two participating states from the Danube Region.
- c) **Multi-level governance approach:** Involves different actors (e.g. policy makers, policy implementers, research institutions, civil society etc.) and/or several levels (supranational, national, regional, local) in the development/consultation and/or implementation process.

⁷ See [EUSDR Communication Strategy](#) for more information on internal and external communication (stakeholders).

⁸ The project/process should preferably be linked to the revised EUSDR Action Plan of 2020; SWD(2020) 59, EU Strategy for the Danube Region – Action Plan. [Online](#).

The project to support PACs in the DTP is not to be added to the list of Danube Strategy Flagships.

In terms of **structure**, a Danube Strategy Flagship can be, but is not limited to, one of the following types (or a combination of them):

- a) project (single or interlinked/continuous⁹)
- b) process
- c) network
- d) platform

In terms of **implementation status**, a Danube Strategy Flagship can be in one of the following phases:

- a) In planning/preparatory phase (substantial activities for preparing future projects/processes are still ongoing¹⁰ or a project is under application¹¹; there is no funding contract signed yet)
- b) In implementation/ongoing phase (preparatory activities are completed, the project/process has been approved for funding or has secured funding sources; the actual implementation is about to start soon, has started or is ongoing)
- c) Completed (project/process is finished with published outcomes)¹²

In terms of **funding**, the implementation of a Danube Strategy Flagship depends on the use of existing financial sources. As EU macro-regional strategies do not have an own dedicated budget (3 NOs¹³), the funding of Danube Strategy Flagships is generated from and supported by existing funding instruments (EU, national, regional, private, etc.). Danube Strategy Flagships may utilise support from INTERREG programmes (e.g. the INTERREG Danube Region programme or cross-border cooperation programmes), ESIF and other programmes (e.g. ESF, ERDF/CF, IPA or NDICI), centrally managed programmes (e.g. Horizon Europe, Life+) and other funding (e.g. national funding) and financing sources (e.g. EIB, WB), which all have their own eligibility rules, selection criteria as well as communication and implementation modalities that have to be taken into account. However, the label of a Danube Strategy Flagship does not follow the aim to guarantee funding and/or financing.

⁹ Specific attention should be paid to single projects funded by several programmes, groups of coherent/interlinked projects funded by one or several programmes, different parts or phases of a project funded by one or several programmes, and projects resulting from a synchronized call as established in the embedding process.

¹⁰ E.g. forming consortia, identifying the type, scope and size for future activities/actions/targets, preparing the necessary documents etc.

¹¹ Submitted within a call for proposals

¹² For completed projects/processes, preferably a follow-up is ensured or is planned for the future

¹³ MRS are underlying the 3 NOs: no new legislation, no new funding and no new institutions

5. Course of action

The course of action is made up of the four steps summarised below, which are elaborated in detail on the following pages:



Guidance paper for identifying and listing Danube Strategy Flagships

- Guidance paper – including definition, purpose and criteria for Danube Strategy Flagships – drafted by the DSP in consultation with the PAs, endorsed by the NCs



Identification of Danube Strategy Flagships

- Selection of Danube Strategy Flagships by the PAs based on SG decision
- Submission of the Danube Strategy Flagships template by the PACs to the DSP (via online form)
- Support and collection of templates from all PAs by the DSP



Labelling completed

- Listing the Danube Strategy Flagships on the EUSDR main website¹⁴, yearly updated and maintained by the DSP
- 'Certificate' for Danube Strategy Flagships provided by the DSP
- Distribution of Danube Strategy Flagships among NCs and other EUSDR stakeholders by the DSP



Communication measures for more visibility

- Promotion of Danube Strategy Flagships at all levels by the DSP through website, social media, publications and/or other communication tools
- Potential promotion on local, regional/national and transnational level by EUSDR stakeholders

Icons: Flaticon.com

This guideline for identifying and listing Danube Strategy Flagships was drafted by the DSP in consultation with all PAs. After endorsement of this paper by the National Coordinators (NCs), each Priority Area (PACs in consultation with their Steering Groups) is asked to identify a minimum of one and maximum three projects and/or processes that are of strategic importance for implementing the PA's actions/targets. Each PA will choose relevant projects/processes according to the criteria and course of action defined in this guideline and sets up its own selection process¹⁵ within the Steering Group and/or with other relevant stakeholders where necessary. The final decision on the selection of Danube Strategy Flagships is made by the Steering Group/PAs. If necessary, they can consult NCs and/or other relevant stakeholders during the process.

¹⁴ <https://danube-region.eu/>

¹⁵ E.g. set up stricter/narrower criteria to facilitate the selection process

When selecting the Danube Strategy Flagships, the PAs can also decide to put focus in their selection on cross-sectoral projects/processes, covering several (two or more) PAs. It is up to the PAs to decide on these projects/processes and PACs have to inform and consult the other concerned PAs, e.g., in a EUSDR PAC meeting. Upon request, the DSP can facilitate the (joint) decision-making process for (all) PAs or on concerned cross-PA level.

The identification process is to be completed with the elaboration of the Danube Strategy Flagships template (Annex I), which is to be submitted by the PACs to the DSP once a year. For efficiency purposes, the template will be accessible on the website as an online form. The DSP supports the PAs throughout the entire process and consolidates the results from all PAs. In order to guarantee the best possible promotion and high visibility, the number of Danube Strategy Flagships per PA is limited to a maximum of three per year. In case no new projects/processes of strategic importance within certain PAs are selected, the respective PAs can decide to update a previously labelled project/process instead (e.g. status, activities/deliverables, involved stakeholders, pictures etc.). Therefore, each year a minimum of one and a maximum of three new and/or updated projects/processes per PA will be added to the list of Danube Strategy Flagships.

A Danube Strategy Flagship proposal is considered as having received the label, when it is included in the up-to-date list of Danube Strategy Flagships. In addition, the DSP creates a 'certificate' (see Annex II) with a corresponding label (stamp) for each Danube Strategy Flagship, which can be used for promoting the respective project/process.

The DSP in its function of an institutional memory for safeguarding continuity at EUSDR level¹⁶ collects and keeps all submitted templates, prepares and maintains the list of Danube Strategy Flagships, and creates the 'certificates'. The DSP publishes the list and the certificates on the EUSDR website and presents them to the National Coordinators whenever new projects/processes have been added. The list of Danube Strategy Flagships may be presented at Steering Group meetings upon request.

Furthermore, based on the information from the template, a description of each Danube Strategy Flagship can be developed and published on the different EUSDR online channels as well as on the individual websites of the PAs. The DSP will promote Danube Strategy Flagships at all levels (local, regional, national, transnational, EU, other MRS, worldwide) on a regular basis. In order to raise the interest of the respective target groups (see also the EUSDR Communication Strategy on internal and external stakeholders¹⁷), publicly effective and easy to read reports should be developed by making use of the storytelling techniques¹⁸. For instance, communication on social media platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube – if videos are available) and the EUSDR website can consist of brief articles/updates about the Danube Strategy Flagships, delivering a clear and easy to digest narrative, using plain language and following a central message that can also be well understood by external stakeholders. The future EUSDR communication and promotion campaigns may also bring forward the Danube Strategy Flagships in order to provide them more visibility within the relevant target groups

¹⁶ Metis 2019, Evaluation of the effectiveness, communication and stakeholder involvement of the EUSDR. [Online](#).

¹⁷ EUSDR (2020), Communication Strategy. [Online](#).

¹⁸ EUSDR (2020) Communication Guide. [Online](#).

and beyond. Mailings, publications or other communication tools, either printed or digital, may include articles about Danube Strategy Flagships written in an easy-to-understand language aiming at ensuring them as much visibility as possible. Upon request by PACs, the DSP can offer tailor-made promotion in collaboration with the PAs.

The DSP will also support the European Commission, the incumbent EUSDR Presidency, the EUSDR TRIO Presidency and the NCs to promote Danube Strategy Flagships on transnational level and, upon request, also on national levels. The stakeholders' responsibilities regarding communication are outlined in the EUSDR Communication Strategy¹⁹ and the Governance Architecture Paper²⁰. The roles and responsibilities of NCs e.g. include raising awareness for the EUSDR and the Danube Region within relevant ministries, for possible stakeholders, as well as the broader public. Danube Strategy Flagships can serve as a practical tool for promoting the Strategy. EUSDR participating states may consider to explicitly foster Danube Strategy Flagships in the EUSDR through, for instance, dedicated funding opportunities, enhanced communication and/or promotion at political/ministerial level.

Danube Strategy Flagships should have a high visibility and bring the selected activities more into the focus of policies, politics and the public. They should exemplarily demonstrate the progress achieved in implementing the EUSDR, strengthen and improve the strategic communication of the EUSDR.

¹⁹ EUSDR (2020), Communication Strategy. [Online](#).

²⁰ EUSDR (2020), Governance Architecture Paper. [Online](#).

Annex I: Template

The following table is to be filled out online for each Danube Strategy Flagship and submitted by the PACs. The DSP as facilitator collects the templates from all PAs, adds the respective project/process to the list of Danube Strategy Flagships, and creates the 'certificate' for each project/process. With that, the labelling on EUSDR level is completed.

Danube Strategy Flagships Template

Priority Area(s)	<i><Please include your Priority Area. In case the selected project/process addresses several PAs, please indicate them all></i>
Action(s) and target(s) from the EUSDR Action Plan	<i><Please include the number and title of the action(s) and target(s) as indicated in the revised EUSDR Action Plan that are connected to the selected project/process. In case the project/process delivers on the targets of several actions, also from different PAs, please indicate them all></i>
Project/process title	<i><Please indicate the project title or (provisional) title for a project idea or process></i>
Project/process type	<i><Please choose the project/process type by ticking the corresponding box(es)></i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Project (single or interlinked) <input type="checkbox"/> Process <input type="checkbox"/> Network <input type="checkbox"/> Platform <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):
Current phase	<i><Please indicate the current implementation status of the project/process by ticking the corresponding box></i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Planning/preparatory phase <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation/ongoing phase <input type="checkbox"/> Completed
Duration	<i><Please indicate the (expected) timeline/duration of the project/process></i>
Short description	<i><Please describe the selected project/process in a few sentences></i>
Objectives	<i><Please indicate the objectives of the project/process and how it contributes to the actions (and targets) above></i>
Need and (expected) impact	<i><Please briefly describe the initial situation for the project/process and its need together with the relevance/added value/impact for the Danube Region (Strategy)></i>
Macro-regional dimension	<i><Please indicate how many and which countries (and regions, if applicable) are cooperating for the project/process and on how many and which Danube Region countries it has an (expected) impact></i>

Stakeholders involved	<p><Please list the type and level of stakeholders which are involved in the project/process. In case that in different countries different stakeholders are involved, please indicate so></p>
Budget and (potential) financial source	<p><Has the project/process been approved for funding or has secured financial sources? Please tick the corresponding box></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partly <input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><Please indicate the (estimated) total budget and (potential) funding instrument(s) for the project/process. In case the project/process is (expected to be) financed by different sources, please list them all (type and name of the sources plus amount)></p>
Contact person	<p><Please provide contact details (name and e-mail) for questions regarding the project/process, e.g. project leader></p>
Website	<p><If available, please provide a link to the project's/process's website, social media etc.></p>
Other	<p><Are there any other issues or relevant information? If yes, please indicate them here></p>
Image/logo	<p><If available, please insert a picture (including copyright information) and/or logo of the project/process (min. 300 dpi)></p>

Annex II: Certificate for Danube Strategy Flagships



PA logo

Certificate

DANUBE STRATEGY FLAGSHIP

This certificate is proudly awarded to

Project/process title

Danube Strategy Flagships are projects or processes that contribute to the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), have a clear macro-regional dimension and a multi-level governance approach. They are of high importance for the Danube Region's economic, social and territorial cohesion and for improving the quality of life in the Danube Region.

Danube Strategy Flagships strengthen internal and external communication of the Strategy and the visibility of the topics, initiatives and prospects in the Danube Region. They illustrate the progress achieved in implementing the EUSDR and demonstrate exemplarily significant improvement in the Region that is induced by cooperation.

EUSDR National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators with the respective Steering Groups, in their capacity as representatives and key implementers of the EUSDR, as well as the Danube Strategy Point, are committed to contribute to and promote Danube Strategy Flagships in accordance with the Guidance Paper for identifying and listing Danube Strategy Flagships.

Date: XX XXXXXXXX 2027

Priority Area(s): PA X