



The Drava News

An information network for people and organisations along the River Drava

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Contents

Editorial

Fish kill at Beli kipi

Hungary-Croatia Drava co-operation

Environmental Award to Cakovec HEP

Habitat restoration event in Slovenia

Report from a visitor to the Podravina

World Water Day, March 22

Third European Youth Water Congress, Belgium

Danube Regional Project

Bird house promotion in the Podravina

Torcec, a jewel on the Drava Cycle Route

Editorial

There is a French saying that 'great spirits share the same thoughts', and I was very pleasantly surprised that some of the events of the World Water Day festivities in Koprivnica on March 22nd were – totally independently - so similar to those held, at the same time, as part of the Third European Youth Water Congress in Belgium, which I took part in. In Koprivnica there was a race, 'a drop of water in my hand'; in Belgium we had races where young people raced with water on trays, in their mouths, on their heads – the aim was the same, to spill as little as possible, thus emphasising the value of this precious resource, water. In the Congress, one of the central issues was 'access to water as a human right' - that no-one should be denied this as a result of the commercialisation of water supplies, also that help should be given to those many millions of people in the world who do not have safe drinking water. In Koprivnica, money was donated to a poor family who could not afford to pay for the connection to the municipal water supply; thus their human rights of access to water were upheld. When two unconnected groups

independently manifest such similar ideas, it's clear to me that we are certainly working in the right direction.

These are certainly times of change. On the one hand we are facing the potential destruction of beautiful Drava in Croatia at a rapid rate that has never been seen before, through badly thought-out regulation work and gravel extraction, using heavy mechanisation; on the other we have politicians and even some water authority officials agreeing with our NGOs that the Drava should be protected and the Croatian-Hungarian Drava region promoted through sustainable development and ecotourism. Personally I believe that we will eventually be successful in protecting our Drava, the issue is becoming ever more in the public eye; but the danger is that a lot of damage could be done before we achieve our aims. At present there is a large number of applications for licences to extract gravel from the village lands along the river. As long as the river itself is spared, proper environmental controls applied and companies forced to rehabilitate the sites afterwards, it might be possible to satisfy Croatia's need for this material without devastating our Podravina.

After the long, long winter, there was no real spring, suddenly it's summer, the storks and the swallows returned, the earth has erupted into sheets of wild flowers. Now the fine weather is here, the Drava League and our local ecological societies throughout the Drava region will be holding many events, many more people will be visiting and enjoying our wonderful river. There will be many opportunities to inform these visitors of the threats we are facing and the projects we plan. Good luck with all your efforts!

Regulation work causes fish deaths

The Koprivnica regional newspaper carried an article from Beli kipi: a fishermen's patrol discovered a huge number of dead fish in the river. They had been trying to swim upstream to the place they usually spawn, but could not because of the barriers across the river channel, which effectively separates it into a series of still ponds. We knew that these barriers, part of the Hrvatske Vode works on the Stara Drava, would have this effect; we have confronted HV with this possibility which they refused to consider. Now, sadly, we have the evidence

Meeting of Croatian and Hungarian Prime Ministers, April 29th, Budapest

We hear that one of the topics of this meeting was the promotion of co-operation in the development of the transboundary Drava region. This is exactly the project so many of us are working on! More details on the website shortly: <http://www.drava.sziriuszstudio.hu>

The Croatian HEP certificate award

This certificate was awarded to the Cakovec branch of HEP (State Electricity Company) for the installation and operation of their hydro-power plant, by TÜV Bayern Sava and apparently is similar to an ISO certificate for good practice. As to the identity of the awarding body, I have not found a clear web-page in English, it seems to be a German

organisation, a private business which makes these awards, supposedly as an impartial assessment.

HEP announced that they will use this certificate for their further work, in this case it is awarded on the basis of 'green power', 'producing energy from renewable resources'. In line with Kyoto it has been stated that in Croatia 22% of energy will be produced from renewable resources by 2015. Their 'further work' of course means promoting the proposed dam at Novo Virje....

The Drava League protested in the National Press against the award of this certificate, they are outraged by it. The impacts of dams on the environment are profound and not completely positive as HEP claim. The sediments in the accumulation reservoirs contain heavy metals, indigenous fish species disappear. Fishermen say that the introduction of new species is not successful and the 'fish ladders' do not work. The overall lowering of the water below the dam causes huge fish-kills. The League is against yet another hydro-power plant and so are local people and communities. Water may be a renewable resource - but the environment is not.

Novo Virje would be the biggest dam ever built in this region. People are worried. Professor Prpic states that 730ha of riverside woodland has already been lost between Ormoz and Varazdin. Indigenous sites are suffering, the Repas Forest, planned for protected status, would be devastated by the effects of the proposed new dam.

Habitat restoration on the Slovenian Drava

An event was organised on the Stara Drava by our friends Borut Stumberger and Damjan Denac, of DOPPS-Birdlife Slovenia, and Boris Kocevar, to restore the riverbank habitats of sand-martins, *Riparian riparia*. Arno Mohl of WWF-Austria, and David Reeder of WWF-DCP, also took part. This activity of cleaning banks for habitats began in Slovenia 10 years ago and Croatian partners have been taking part for the last 5 years. Borut and Boris held a press conference on site for Slovenian TV and press; it was also covered by the local press from Varazdin in Croatia.

A group of Slovenian volunteers assembled, together with some volunteers from Croatia, to clear the banks of vegetation and make them vertical so that predators, such as rats, cannot raid the nests. Two sites were cleared. Normally the river would naturally scour such banks every year during high waters, but the river's flow here is much reduced as the main flow is diverted for hydro-electric production. However, despite its smaller channel, the river here is very dynamic, and its course has changed totally over the last 2-3 years, forming new channels. It is one of the last natural fragments of the Stara Drava which survives in Slovenia.

The river here forms the basis of the border between Croatia and Slovenia and is not protected at all. We found places where the vegetation was cut back, and it was clear to us that this work had been done in preparation for some kind of extraction/regulation activity, which is part of the overall plan of Hrvatske Vode to regulate the whole of this

section, destroying extensive, beautiful and valuable natural habitats. This is the very activity which we are all currently working against.

A visitor's view of Croatian Water Mangement, by 'Oculus'

On a visit to the Papuk mountains of Croatia recently, we saw many examples of the 'over-engineering' of waterways being carried out by Hrvatske vode, Croatian Waters. It seems that such work is going on all over the country, on every tiny watercourse. The rationale is always flood-control, but the results are often illogical: huge concrete structures on tiny streams that have not flooded in living memory, little rivers crossed by great dams which do nothing, protect nothing. Many people believe the HV explanation about the necessity of such works, whereas in the rest of Europe – especially after the devastating floods in Germany and the Czech Republic last year – the water authorities have realised that this canalising system does not work. What is needed is natural wetland storage - to work with nature, not to try and control nature.

Fortunately people are beginning to realise what is going on, that HV is a very powerful lobby, draining not only the land but also the economy. Those who can see this are very angry at the waste of their money: every water consumer must pay a part of their water-bills for these unnecessary, destructive, works.

HV's regulation works on the River Drava are devastating a valuable national asset. The natural values have a very real equivalent in economic terms and can help support the people of the Drava into the distant future. This destruction of nature is damaging our children's future. On the Stara Drava upstream of Varazdin, an ecological tragedy is taking place: large areas of valuable riverine habitats, home to over 50 endangered Red List Species, are being destroyed. These works contravene many national laws and international conventions which Croatia has signed. This valuable national heritage is being destroyed irresponsibly and the true reason is not to control floods but to maximise profits from the allied gravel extraction.

Croatia's neighbours in Slovenia have in recent years cut by half the national budget for water management; next year Slovenia will join the EU and they successfully market the country as 'The green piece of Europe'. Croatia has arguably a greater diversity and richness of nature than any other country in Europe, yet much of it is being destroyed through following civil engineering plans drawn up 30 years ago in communist Yugoslavia. The engineers in Hrvatske vode are very proud of their skills and experience; no doubt they are technically very accomplished, but what about the true effects of what they are doing, the real impacts? Can they not see what is going on in the rest of Europe?

Water Day Celebrations in Koprivnica, by Tanja Novak Zdorc

Organized by the Ecological Society of Koprivnica and the Drava League, this event was held over two days. On Friday March 21 there was a lecture, 'The state of waters in Koprivničko-križevačka county', delivered in the Council Hall by mr.sc. Jasna Nemčić –

Jurec of the Public Health Institute. It was attended by about 50 students of elementary and high schools and citizens of Koprivnica.

The main event was held on Saturday around the pavilion in Koprivnica's main park and it attracted over 100 people. It was opened by Davorin Hećimović, president of the Koprivnica Ecological Society. The new Drava League logo, the 'blue hand', donated to us by Antonio Grgic, was publicly presented and our Drava League t-shirts promoted. Marijan Špoljar presented the catalogue of the Arts Workshop held at Ješkovo as part of the events during International Drava Day, Sept. 28, 2002. Gordana Gazdić Buhaneć, the head teacher of the «A.N.Gostovinski» elementary Eco-school, presented the leaflet 'Water is Life'.

Local children played a big part in the event: they read out their poems about water and there was a charity auction of their paintings, as well as a sale of little frogs made by the schoolchildren of «Djuro Ester» elementary school. The paintings are still on exhibition in the Koprivnica Youth Hall, and some of them will be sent to Zagreb for a competition organised by the Ministry of Environment. Money was also raised by selling fresh water from the Stipero v Jarek well on the Bilogora hills. There was a children's race known as 'A drop of water on my palm', where they had to run with as much water in their hands as they could, from one bucket to another, without spilling it. The winners were awarded Drava League t-shirts.

The charity auction and sale raised over 800 kunas, which was donated to a family in the city who could not afford to pay for their connection to the municipal water supply. This family has three children, one of whom is ill.

World Water Day 2003, a major event in Čakovec, by Goran Cizmesija

This was attended by Mr. Ostojic, the chief manager of the State Directorate for Water. A serious confrontation developed between NGO representatives and national authorities, making it quite clear that changes are necessary and overdue. On the same day, at another event a few kilometres away in Donji Vidovec village, Mladen Ruzman, deputy minister of the MoEPP, attended a 'round table' meeting organised by ZeuS Foundation. Others present were Mr. Baltazar Jalsovec, vice-president of the Croatian Parliament; Dr. Srećko Leiner from the National Museum; Dr. Ivo Pisl of the Green Party and Mr. Čerovec from Croatian Waters.

The theme was Quantity and Quality of Freshwater in Croatia. I have to say (GC) that there was no precise information given about any of the main topics. In general, representatives of Croatian Waters claim that the quantity of freshwater in Croatia is sufficient for centuries. It is a critical resource, but one in which Croatia is very rich. Croatian Waters are, however, strongly supporting initiatives for the construction of waste-water treatment plants and a system of canals to carry waste-water. The study on the waste-water system of Medžimurje county is almost complete: this will be the first county in Croatia to undergo such a study.

The NGOs present claimed that independent laboratory tests have shown that water from the domestic supply is not healthy, because too much chlorine is used. Also, aquifers are threatened by the illegal disposal of garbage. Over 90 % of Croatian industry uses no waste-water treatment. About 40% of consumers believe that the domestic water supply system is healthy but 52% of

Croatian people do not believe that and buy bottled water for drinking. The NGOs think that Croatia cannot finance the proposed waste-water system: the study is useful, but there is not enough money to carry out the works and the government offers only 50% of all costs, which is not enough of an incentive.

Third European Youth Congress for Water, Geel, Belgium, March 22nd-28th.

This was an extraordinary, inspiring, uplifting, event and a profound step towards greater public participation in European governance, through management of our water resources. There were over 200 foreign guests, plus an equal number of Belgian students. 44 delegations attended, from 27 countries; the Drava was well-represented, with schools from Virovitica, Barcs and Osijek.

Most of the participants stayed with host families and for a week we practically took over the city of Geel. There were many activities, cultural programmes, artistic and scientific workshops, poster presentations, a training course for teachers, sports, fundraising (for a South African cause) and social events.

The core of the week's activities was a series of 'parliamentary workshops' embodying many aspects of legislation, processes, principles and even communication techniques as related to the European Parliament. Basically we are demanding a voice for young people as an aspect of public participation. We selected 5 Youth Water Representatives to promote the work and I am delighted to announce that as well as young people from Belgium, Morocco, Russia and the UK, Zeljko Barcan of Pitomaca was elected to represent Croatia! Zeljko – we call him 'Eko' - was interviewed on Belgian national radio and spoke of the Drava and our work there, and has promised to help us in future.

Over 400 people travelled to Brussels by chartered train where a special session was held in the Parliamentary Chamber, attended by several MEPs, members of the European Commission, Belgian and Regional representatives. The proposals of the young people were properly considered and they were promised that Access to Water as a Human Right would be proposed as an amendment to the Belgian Constitution. The debate ended with a minute's silence in recognition of the suffering of the Iraqi people, called for by the Youth Representatives. The event was climaxed by surely another first: a song delivered in the European Parliamentary Chamber by Simon Nedohe from South Africa. The memory of his booming voice calling us all to action, followed by hundreds of people standing to applaud and cheer in that prestigious room, will always remain with me....

The Danube Regional Project: case study on the Drava

This is a huge project, funded by the United Nations Development Programme and the Global Environmental Facility of the World Bank, aimed at reducing pollution in the Danube and Black Sea. It involves the entire Danube Basin: the recent workshop held by Irma of Zelena Akcija and Dora Radosavljevic in Varazdin toplice, on wetland restoration and nutrient reduction was a part of the overall project.

Three wetland sites have been chosen in the Danube Basin to investigate the potential for the sustainable use of wetlands: one in Romania, one in Bulgaria, and thanks to the work of our friend Charlie Avis of WWF-DCP, a site on the Croatian Drava. We have selected a site near Pitomaca, where the river was never regulated in the past: although there is a danger of losing wetlands here because of falling water-levels resulting from recent regulation work.

This will be a 'complex study' and will involve a thorough investigation of habitats, species, history, land-use and the potential for income-generation through sustainable systems. The nearby village of Kriznica, a Croatian village on the 'Hungarian' bank, is an important element because of its ecotourism potential: already people visit the village for fishing holidays. Darko Grlica, from Virovitica, will be the local co-ordinator for the study.

Nesting boxes for birds

Two of the Drava League's most active members have been in the media recently for their efforts to promote wooden nesting-boxes for birds. Darko Grlica of Virovitica devised a project to place 30 of them in the main park of the city and another 12 in selected places around the city. The project was funded by a private company from Virovitica, Matasic Paneli, owned by Mr. Matasic Tomislav, and was featured on Croatian TV. The boxes were made from sections of tree-trunk and looked very natural when in place: many birds took up residence on the first day! Children from local primary schools observed the nest-boxes as part of their studies, and some of them even spent much of their spare time there watching their chosen bird-house. Some bird-houses were donated to children and others will be placed in local woodlands to replace the damaged trees which are essential for wildlife but which are usually removed by the forestry service.

Anyone who knows Davorin Hećimović must know of his passion for building and working with wood. Davor, independently, also engaged upon a project to promote bird-houses for nesting birds among his local community. These boxes are of a different form, finely crafted little houses. Davor also involved schools, introducing the idea on school visits and giving away boxes to the schools to form part of an educational programme. Later an exhibition was held in Koprivnica town square, where nesting-boxes were given to the public in exchange for donations to the Koprivnica Ecological Society. Advice and instructions on building the bird-houses was also given out freely, so that people can make them for themselves. This project was also featured on television and in the regional press, and over 30 more bird-houses have been ordered. So get busy, Davor!

Torcec – the village of 200 chimneys, by Helena Hecimovic

If there is an ideal village for the Biosphere reserve transition zone-it is Torcec, a village of about 700 people, 200 families, 7km north-west of Koprivnica.

A village of 700 people, with a “ Society of History and Antiquities “ started seven years ago?? This might sound odd, but not if you happen to visit it on a Sunday morning when the door of a small village museum is open and the astonished visitor can see the findings from one of the archaeological sites around the village, dating from the 13th century BC to 18th century AD. For years, local people have been helping the archaeologists of Zagreb University in their painstaking job of digging in the fields around the village and finding astonishing proof of the village’s ancient history.

But this is not the only reason to spend a few hours in this village, which is on the Drava bicycle Route. Torcec is itself a unique “ museum in the open “ with hundreds of corn-cribs, traditional corn storing structures either made of wood or woven branches, some over two hundred years old. The Podravina region has many of these corn-cribs, but they are usually hidden behind garden fences. Not so in Torcec. For some reason, only in this village, each house’s corn-crib is opposite the house, on the other side of the road. And nobody in Torcec can tell you the exact number of them, either – but there are several hundred of these beautiful examples of traditional village architecture.

Some people like to visit Torcec in the second half of August for the traditional gymkhana, attracting the best Croatian horses and riders. Others prefer the autumn fishing season when they can catch fish in the village fish-pond and have it fried in the ‘fisherman’s hut’ near the pond, to the very special Torcec recipe.

But the real jewel of the village can be seen behind the willow trees lining the old stream bank: an old mill, once almost destroyed through the neglect of previous owners, but now almost completely restored due to hundreds of hours of voluntary work by a group of village enthusiasts. There was also considerable funding support from the Croatian Ministry of Culture and the authorities of Koprivnica-Krizevci county. Next summer, the old stream will be returned to its old course and the old wooden wheel once again installed on the back wall of the mill. This will be a dream come true for so many lovers of history and tradition throughout the county – just the perfect moment to receive the first visitors to the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve, don’t you think?

Many thanks for your continuing efforts and support! If you have any contributions or queries – even critical comments! - please contact me on daimawr1@yahoo.co.uk Also if you know anyone who would like to receive this newsletter direct, please let me know. Thank you. David Reeder.