

Book review: Lower Danube Basin - approaches to macroregional sustainability

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BOOK REVIEWS

LOWER DANUBE BASIN. APPROACHES TO MACROREGIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

DAN BĂLTEANU (ed.),
The Publishing House of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, 2017, 227 pp.,
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Contemporary society is facing two major global phenomena. First of all, at a level never attained in all its previous history, Terra has reached an unseen level of development translated in prosperity, health and safety. Secondly, this socio-economic dynamics comes with many environmental costs. In this context, maintaining and advancing economic progress is closely linked with the capacity of countries/regions to promote development models capable to address these particular issues generated by our economic uptrend.

The Danube basin (812 000 square kilometres) is part of the aforementioned global process. It is the subject of important transformations triggered by climate change, i.e. temperature increase, especially in the summer and in the South-Eastern part of the areal, and decreasing rainfall etc. The volume *Lower Danube Basin. Approaches to Macroregional Sustainability* (coordinated by Dan Bălțeanu) comes to respond to these contemporary challenges. It is based on the selective communications of the fourth edition of the international symposium entitled: "Interdisciplinary Research-Innovation Related to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region".

The volume comprises three chapters. The first chapter, "Global Change Context: Transdisciplinary and Capacity Building", includes four papers focused on toolkits, i.e. high supercomputers, IT services, numerical simulation tools, in relation to the climate change context in the region. Under this

umbrella, the chapter aims to explore and decipher the interaction between the human society and the environment. In addition to the applicative functions of such technologies, these computer tools have facilitated connections between researchers from different scientific areas with similar IT requirements (p. 63). In order to scrutinize the environment transformations, several tools are applied in the four papers. They are represented by software programs, such as the Danubia or IMPACT2C web-atlas and the Global Atlas of the Danube Valley. With the help of these tools, the authors aim to provide accurate information on the dynamics of environmental changes due to human activity. For example, the simulation system showed that the overflow in the Upper Danube basin will be reduced from 1450 m³/s to a value between 1 000 and 1 300 m³/s by the year 2060. The low flow will have a negative impact on shipping, irrigation and aquatic ecosystems along the Lower Danube (p. 22). In short, the information is crucial for the decision-makers and the researchers' scientific approaches that seek to provide information for the stakeholders.

The second chapter focuses on environmental impacts and biodiversity. The themes of the articles are diverse, ranging from the impact of Danubius-RI (pan-European research infrastructure) on hazard and risk maps alongside the Danube, to ecosystem services in Romania and the migration and protection of sturgeon. The first paper of this second

chapter, entitled “Public Perceptions and Socio-Economic Analysis on the Impact of Danubius-RI”, is at least problematic. The first issue comes from the selection of the participants, all of them being located in Tulcea County. So that, the authors expected that out of 1 067 respondents, many of them would be able to answer to the questions framed within the “International Centre for Advanced Studies for River – Sea Systems – DANUBIUS-RI”. The second issue targets the methodological choice, the authors deciding to collect the data through computer assisted telephone interview. The problem with this approach is that it is somewhat counterproductive as people are asked to speak about a technical project. Why did the authors not use the structured or semi-structured interviews, with the help of which the researchers would have had the opportunity to better interact, explain the project, and understand the views of the respondents? The authors do not clearly detail the reasons (a more facile and comfortable way?) of why they chose this interviewing method and how it addressed the development of the project. Furthermore, although the questionnaire contains eight questions and 44 items, only three questions were taken in the authors’ analysis: i) if citizens have heard about the DANUBIUS-RI project (“Have you heard about the developing of the DANUBIUS-RI?”); ii) which will be the main three benefits resulted from the implementation of the project (“What would be the main advantages obtained as a result of the existence of the DANUBIUS-RI hub?”); and iii) how important this project will be in terms of creating new jobs, attracting foreign tourists to the area, attracting foreign investors to the region, and so on and so forth. Overall, the selected questions are rather vague, superfluous, and not really worth anything. Rather, it would have been interesting to analyse the problems these people are struggling with. Simply said, to ask what people think about a technical project about which, taking into account the objective reasons, they knew too little, is a waste of time

and resources.

The last chapter of the volume, “Regional and Local Perspectives of Territorial Development”, is the most eclectic one. The constellation of subjects wanders through a cross-sectorial collaboration in the Adriatic - Danubian region, including tourism development in the lower Danube, the Romanian Danube Valley economic evolution (not surprisingly, deindustrialization, a post-communist economic process, has increased poverty especially in small and medium-sized towns), and a literature review of the research carried out in the Danube area.

Revisiting the chapters, one asks himself in the end what the volume is about. Of course, it represents an analysis of the Danube basin, particularly the Lower Danube sector, as part of global processes, such as climate change, economic, population and technological dynamics. Attempting to explore the climate transformations in the region, the volume uses a multitude of methods and it targets a whole array of directions. Throughout informatics software and statistical analyses, the interdisciplinary research provides the stakeholders with overdetailed and mainly technical information about the nature of these changes (including the environmental ones) of our societies. However, how this information reaches to them and how it is transferred into practice, remains to be seen. In short, by showing the problems of our neighbourhoods, the researchers are doing just half of this complex job. It remains for the decision-makers, the national, regional or local public authorities, to attempt to apply these analyses, research and findings when they define and implement public policies, and when they develop capabilities based on such solutions. Therefore, despite the many flaws that the volume contains, its presence helps, nevertheless, as it is a useful volume for all those who want to overview the dynamics of changes not only in the Danube basin, but also in our society in general.