

 reviewed paper

“Attractive Danube” – Improving Capacities for Enhancing Territorial Attractiveness of the Danube Region

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1 ABSTRACT

Since the launching of the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPON) programme in 2002, as the initiative for territorial monitoring of the EU Cohesion Policy implementation and results evaluation against the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) goals, the number, variation and specialization of the territorial monitoring systems for development policies implementation in Europe have been growing steadily. And, although these territorial monitoring systems are differing among themselves in respect to the specific goals they are aspiring and/or territorial units they are using for analyses, common for all of them is support to the vision of cohesive, smart and sustainable territorial development throughout EU and its cross-border regions up till 2020.

The purpose of this paper is to present the Attractive Danube project, which aim is to build a territorial monitoring system to support the transnational territorial attractiveness policy priorities identification, implementation and evaluation within the Danube Region. Implementing in period 2017-2019 under the Interreg's Danube Transnational Cooperation (DTP) programme, this project has a goal to improve the transnational governance and institutional capacities of 11 countries (Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina) to enhance their competitive advantages by the better understanding and management of the national social, economic and environmental development potentials within the Danube macroregion.

Thus, in this paper, after the Attractive Danube project's background, aim, goals and methodology description, the territorial attractiveness concept, indicators and monitoring tool would be presented. Afterwards, the approach to improvement of stakeholders' capacities for the territorial attractiveness understanding and management as well as national and transnational policies integration is described. Finally, along with the information on current project status and planned activities in future, conclusions on the expected project's outcomes is made.

Keywords: Attractive Danube project, territorial attractiveness policy, territorial attractiveness monitoring system, cohesive development (EU regional policy), territorial attractiveness

2 BACKGROUND

In 2002, the ESPON programme has been launched as a tool for measuring, monitoring, understanding and comparing the spatial impacts of various EU policies against the ESDP objectives. (URL1) The launching of this programme has motivated since then a number of the other territorial monitoring initiatives for the development policies implementation support to emerge. (Faludi, 2006) These initiatives are differing among themselves concerning their specific objectives (KITCAPS (ESPON, 2013a); INTERCO (ESPON, 2013b); etc.), territorial scopes (AIRO (Walsh et al., 2012); ETMS (ESPON, 2014); etc.) and other analytical elements, but common for all these monitoring systems is the support to the cohesive territorial development goal achievement by the sustainable living and working conditions implementation (OECD, 2004; Soria-Lara et al., 2015).

Therefore, the ESPON programme success as the knowledge and information framework, which using the ETMS tool observe, evaluate and geovisualize territorial policies in Europe (ESPON, 2014), has triggered a large proliferation of the different monitoring systems or observatories for the territorial development domain (Soria-Lara et al., 2015). Soria-Lara et al. (2015) research confirmed that spatial planning observatories' maps are excellent tools for territorial development planning, since they can improve the process of learning and understanding of the different focus groups (like decisions makers, planners and the public) on the present and future problems within the spatial planning process. Lindberg and Dubois (2014) agree that visualization is “a key feature supporting spatial visioning and the co-production of a shared transnational understanding of the spatial planning in Europe”.

Further, Lindberg and Dubois (2014) and KITCAPS project results (ESPON, 2013a) confirm that selection of the appropriate set of indicators is critical for the capacity of the territorial development monitoring systems to secure the meaningful communication between the focus groups, as well as to support the policy needs for the evidence-based or informed development management. (Fig.1) However, besides importance of the choice of the territorial development indicators for the success and usability of each monitoring system, Lindberg and Dubois (2014) emphasize also the need for geovisual presentation to be interactive and accessible online (ESPON, 2014) (Fig.2), while territorial development monitoring systems should secure their own longevity.

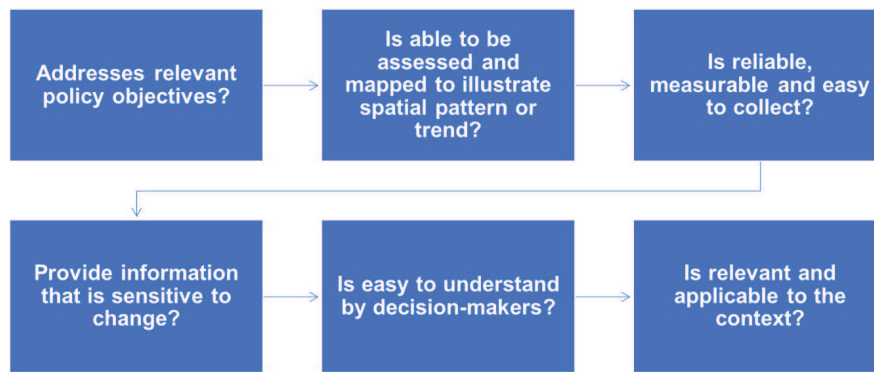


Fig. 1: Territorial development indicator: selection flow (source: KITCAPS (ESPON, 2013a))

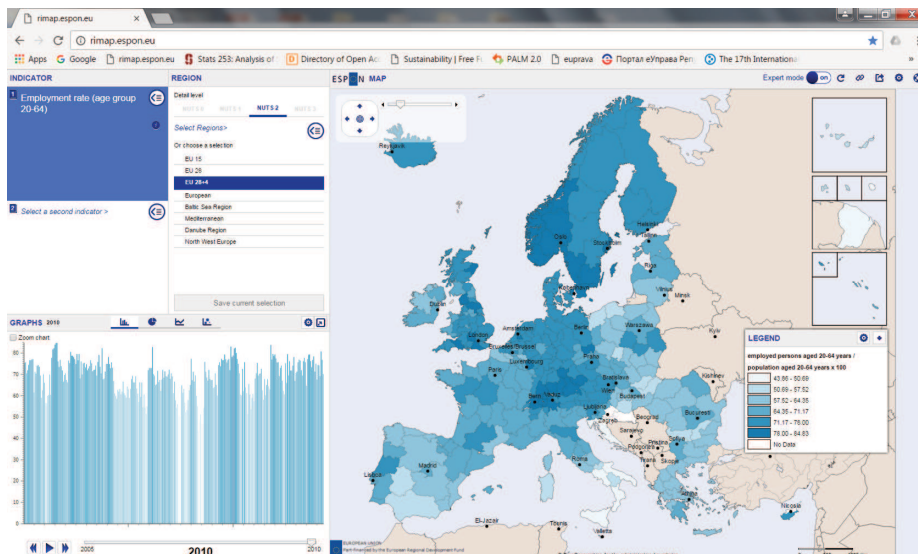


Fig. 2: ESPON Online Mapping Tool: Key ESPON indicators at regional level – Employment rate (age group 20-64) (figure is for illustrative purposes only) (URL1; ESPON, 2014)

In order to secure balanced and sustainable development throughout Europe, by relying on the already developed concepts, tools and best practices of various initiatives, like ESPON, Infrastructure for Spatial Information in Europe (INSPIRE) and others, the European Union (EU) is committing its regulating and funding supports to remove existing structural disparities within its territory. Thus, in order to stimulate better policy integration needed for the cohesive development within the Danube Region, EU has launched the DTP programme (URL7) as a financial instrument of the European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg) programme, which supports the joint actions and policy exchange between national, regional and local actors in the Member states. The aim of the DTP is to promote social, economic and territorial cohesion by the selective policy integration within the Danube Region, and thus tackle the principles of EU Cohesive Policy as well as goals of EU Strategy for Danube Region (EUSDR) on all levels.

After the successful definition of the framework for monitoring system for territorial attractiveness (TA) policy coordination in South-East Europe during the project Attract-SEE (URL5) (4th Call of the SEE Programme), the aim of this article is to provide overview of the follow-up project “Improving Capacities for Enhancing Territorial Attractiveness of the Danube Region“ (Attractive Danube) (URL4), which is implementing in period 2017-2019 within the 1st Call of DTP. Thus, relying on the results of the Attract-SEE project, the Attractive Danube project aims 1) to establish GIS-supported territorial monitoring system for TA policy management on national and transnational level, and 2) to build capacities on the side of relevant stakeholders to understand TA concept, and to integrate and implement TA policy through the Danube Region.

3 ATTRACTIVE DANUBE PROJECT

EU development policies and strategies implementation, like EU Cohesion Policy (URL8), Europe2020 Strategy (URL3), Territorial Agenda (TA) 2020 (URL3) and others, rely on the growing number of data, information and knowledge management programmes, like INSPIRE (URL2), ESPON (URL1), etc. However, despite the number of various tools and initiatives launched for the improvement in domain of efficient and effective management for competitive, smart and cohesive territorial development in Europe, some European regions still lag in predefined social, economical and environmental targets and goals accomplishment up till 2020.

Thus, in order to improve the territorial development planning and policy management in the SEE region, 9 countries in period 2012-2014 implemented the Attract-SEE project. The main results of this project included:

- Recognised and defined importance of the TA as competitive advantage for cohesive development;
- Identified relevant national and transnational TA indicators and existing TA trends;
- Developed common territorial monitoring framework for TA status monitoring; and
- Established multilevel and cross-sectoral stakeholder networks for informed decision-making and TA policy coordination on both national and transnational –SEE region- level.

The developed project results provided valuable insights into TA feature throughout SEE region and within participating countries themselves. However, since the Attract-SEE project outputs were prevailing just description of the framework or elements needed for the territorial monitoring system establishment in SEE, project partners thought that they could be a good platform for the new project activities, where the main result should include GIS-based tool for supporting TA decision-making and policy management (Živković et al., 2015), i.e. an information platform for more efficient public administration in general.

Thus, relying on the Attract-SEE project results for facing development challenges within the Danube Region, like a brain drain of talents, democratic deficit and lack of sufficient capacities of stakeholders involved in territorial development planning, relevant representatives from 11 Danube countries has launched the Attract-SEE follow-up project –namely, the Attractive Danube project- to support and/or enhance their TA for residents, visitors and companies/investments.

3.1 Aim and objectives

In the 1st Call of DTP, under the priority for ‘Well-governed Danube Region‘ and targeting the specific objective ‘Improve institutional capacities to tackle major societal challenges‘ with the total budget of 1,860,000 euros, 11 Danube countries with 12 financing project partners (Slovenia (Geodetic Institute of Slovenia - Lead partner), Hungary (Lechner Ltd., EMFIE), Czech Republic (CENIA), Slovakia (TUKE), Germany (aifora GmbH), Bulgaria (BIFORUM), Romania (URBASOFIA), Serbia (IAUS), Croatia (KCKZZ), Montenegro (ISSP), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (FMPU)) have launched the Attractive Danube project to strengthen their policy and democratic capacities for the efficient and effective TA management.

Therefore, the aim of the Attractive Danube project is to strengthen multilevel, cross-sectoral and transnational governance and institutional capacities of the policy planners involved in territorial development of the Danube Region.

Identifying as the common challenges a) general lack of quality data on TA, and b) insufficient or absence of territorial development policy planners cooperation, both within national boundaries and in the Danube Region, partnering countries specified as the project objectives:

1. *To make territorial data available to policy planning stakeholders* – To make harmonised, quality and updated TA-relevant data and indicators available to all territorial policy planning stakeholders and public in general, by establishment of the TA monitoring platforms on transnational and national levels;

2. *To improve and strengthen multilevel and cross-sector territorial development planning* – To improve and strengthen the participatory approach to the territorial development planning process within the partner countries, i.e. on national level, and further transnational level, involving policy planners, civil society, companies and academia; and, to integrate TA goals and monitoring results into the territorial development policies on regional, national, cross-border and transnational levels through the policy integration process; and

3. *To increase the skills, knowledge and capacities of policy planning stakeholders* – To increase the capacities of policy planning stakeholders responsible for the TA capitals and assets, especially in the spatial planning, regional development, business and tourism domains, to understand territorial potentials and get knowledge and skills to utilise them in informed decision-making and policy management, both on national and transnational level, in order to attract and retain residents, visitors and companies/investments.

Innovative approach of the Attractive Danube project relates to the combined capacity building and activities for establishment of the user-friendly GIS-based Web platform for TA monitoring. On the other side, sustainability of the project results is secured by the planned signing of the Memorandums of understanding on behalf of project partners for delivering TA data up to 2021, i.e. 3 years after the project ends.

3.2 Methodology

In order to achieve the competitive and cohesive development in the Danube Region by building common TA monitoring framework to evaluate previous EU and national policies (2007-2013), monitor current (2014-2020) and plan new ones (2020-2027), and thus to achieve the project aim and specified objectives, methodology of the Attractive Danube project includes next steps and outputs:

Step 1 – Building of 11 national TA monitoring platforms (national TAMP)

Output 1.1 Training for project partners on development of national TAMP

Output 1.2 11 national TAMPs built

Output 1.3 Established participatory planning process for national TAMP building

Step 2 – Establishing common –i.e. transnational- TA monitoring platform (CO-TAMP)

Output 2.1 Transnational TAMP established

Output 2.2 TA atlas of the Danube Region prepared

Step 3 – Capacity building for TA policy planners

Output 3.1 Handbook for policy planners on TAMP utilisation prepared

Output 3.2 Capacity building programme for promoting TAMP prepared

Output 3.3 National memorandums for sustaining national TAMPs signed

Step 4 – Policy integration process establishment

Output 4.1 Transnational TA policy coordination workshops held

Output 4.2 TA policy recommendations and capitalisation action plan adopted

Output 4.3 Transnational memorandum for sustaining CO-TAMP signed

From the socio-technical system perspective, the Attractive Danube project implementation could be divided into the 2 main groups of issues: 1) building tool, i.e. Web GIS platforms for TA data/indicators collection, storing, analysis, trend monitoring, geovisualization and dissemination, and 2) building capacity of policy planners and other stakeholders to utilise the Web GIS platforms for informed decision-making and TA policy management. In next chapters (4 and 5) planned project activities, methods and expected results within those 2 groups are described and explained.

4 TERRITORIAL ATTRACTIVENESS MONITORING

4.1 Territorial attractiveness definition and indicators

The definition of TA for the Attractive Danube project relies on the ESPON's ATTREG and SEE Programme's Attract-SEE projects' definitions (URL6), as well as Europe2020 and TA2020 goals, and it describes

“territorial attractiveness (as) capacity of certain Territorial Capitals and Assets to attract and retain target groups (tourists, residents, migrants and companies/investments) by already existing or developed advantages (environmental, economic and human, anthropic, socio-cultural, and institutional), imposed by relevant policies and their goals.” (Živković et al., 2015)

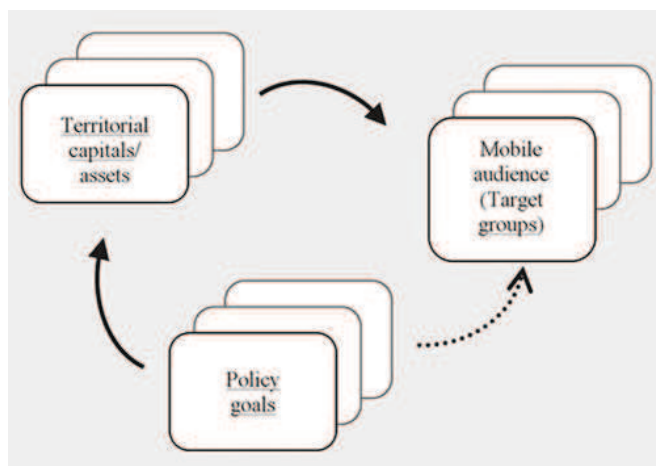


Fig. 3: Territorial attractiveness concept (URL5)

In order for the above identified TA concept (Fig.3) to be measurable and manageable, each territorial capital and asset is described with the several indicators (Table 1.). These TA indicators were found by the Attract-SEE project partners to be relevant as and data available for the regular TA monitoring and policy management, both on national and transnational -SEE region- level. (Živković et al., 2015)

During the Attractive Danube project, here identified 22 TA indicators would be applied for standardized and consistent monitoring and management of the common, transnational territorial development advantages in the Danube Region, through the relevant social, economic, cultural and environmental TA development goals identification and selective policies integration.

Besides listed 22 common TA indicators, project partners would identify, define, collect and process according to the agreed standard also data needed for country-specific set of indicators, which would support preservation and enhancement of the unique local TA assets.

Identification of these specific indicators would be one of the objectives for 3 planned national workshops (NWS). The main goal of these NWSs is to build the national TAMP by strengthening the participatory approach to the TA-relevant territorial development planning process within the each partner country.

Finally, in order for the Attractive Danube project results to be sustained and available to support the next EU programming cycle for period 2020-2027, TA indicators data would be collected by the project partners for period 2008-2018 during project duration, and up till 2021 after its (project) ending.

4.2 Territorial attractiveness monitoring platform

During the Attractive Danube project 11 national TAMPs and transnational CO-TAMP would be established for the TA monitoring, informed decision-making and relevant territorial development policy process management in the Danube Region.

Comparing to the Attract-SEE project results, data collected during the Attractive Danube project for both country-specific and 22 common TA indicators would be stored, analysed, managed, geovisualised and disseminated using the interactive and user-friendly Web GIS application STAGE II.

From the technical point of view, STATistics&GEOgraphy or STAGE II application is integrated platform for dissemination of the geospatial statistics. This application is developed and maintained by the Geodetic

Institute of Slovenia, the Lead partner of the Attractive Danube project, in association with the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia funded by the EUROSTAT. For purpose of the Attractive Danube project, existing registry with 4 types of aggregating spatial units for Slovenia (Cohesion regions, Statistical regions, Municipalities and Settlements) would be extended with the territorial units for project partner countries stored within the Eurogeographics database.

No.	TERRITORIAL ASSET	INDICATOR	TARGET GROUP
ENVIRONMENTAL CAPITAL			
1	Environmental quality	Air pollution: Ozone concentration	tourists, residents, migrants
2		Population connected to urban waste water treatment with at least secondary treatment	
3	Natural resources and energy	Electricity generated from renewable sources	companies/investments, residents
4		Consumption of water per capita	
ANTHROPIC CAPITAL			
5	Landscape quality	% of terrestrial area protected (total and by ecological region)	tourists, residents
6	Infrastructures	Population (or households) with accessibility to high-speed broadband (1 Mbit/second up and down)	companies/investments, tourists, residents, migrants
SOCIO-CULTURAL CAPITAL			
7	Culture	European cultural sites on the Unesco World Heritage List, 2010	tourists, residents, migrants
8	Quality of life	Life expectancy at birth by sex (Europe2020 indicator)	companies/investments, tourists, residents, migrants
9		Gross disposable household income	
10		People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Europe2020 indicator) or % in risk of poverty	
ECONOMIC/HUMAN CAPITAL			
11	Knowledge & Innovation	Population aged 25-64 with tertiary education	companies/investments, residents, migrants
12		Research & Experimental Development expenditure as % of GDP (Europe 2020 indicator)	
13	Employment	Employment rate 20-64 years by sex [%] (regional) (Europe2020 indicator)	companies/investments, residents, migrants
14		Youth unemployment rate	
15	Specializations / Key sectors	Share of employment by sector	companies/investments
16	Tourism	Number of overnight stays of tourists per capita per year	companies/investments, tourists
17		Share of tourism related employment in total employment	
18	Investment promotion	% of GDP of foreign direct investment	companies/investments, migrants
19	Population	Population growth rate	residents, migrants
20		% of population in age 20-64 years	
21		Ageing index	
INSTITUTIONAL CAPITAL			
22	International relations	Number of foreign students and/or professors	companies/investments, migrants

Table 1: List of common territorial attractiveness indicators compiled by the Attract-SEE project partner-countries from different sources/databases, like Eurostat, OECD, European Commission, European Environmental Agency, United Nations, UNESCO, World Bank, ESPON projects (URL5)

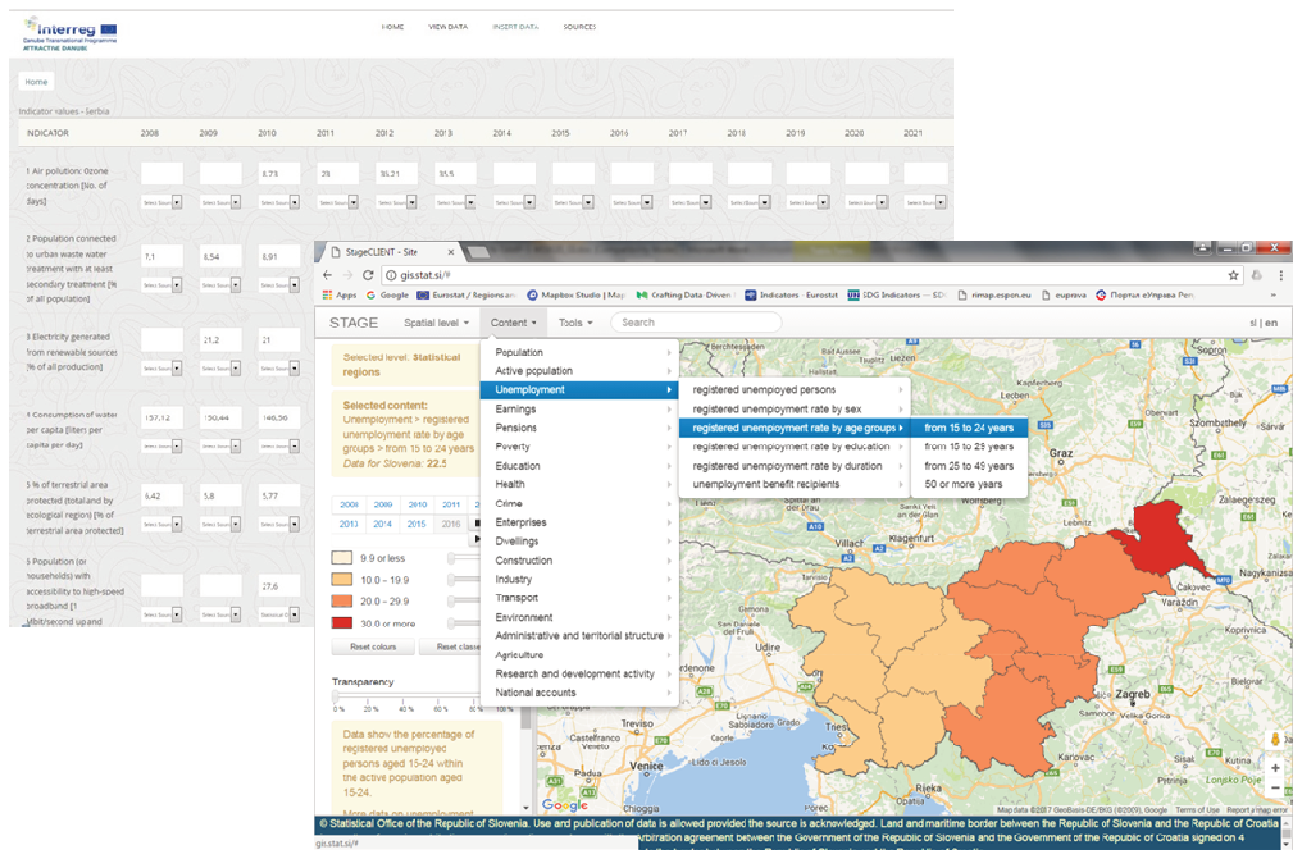


Fig. 4: STAGE II Web-based GIS tool for inserting, monitoring and geovisualization of TA status in the Danube Region

Once the data for national and common TA indicators are collected and processed according to the commonly agreed definition and methods, indicators data input would be performed by the one of two methods: 1) by keying-in indicators data directly to the Web GIS application as attributes of the spatial units (NUTS regions) (Fig.4), and 2) by filling indicators data into the Excel table for their later conversion, i.e. migration to STAGE II.

National TAMPs and transnational CO-TAMP are aimed for the TA monitoring, geovisualization and dissemination of the Attractive Danube project's results, and STAGE II would provide needed user-friendly, online and interactive platform functionalities, like: adjustable legend, different colour palettes, adjustable time slider, adjustable transparency, spatial queries, metadata and methodological data, data export (as image (PNG), SHP file or CSV), and sharing the maps. In other words, it is expected that the TAMP monitoring system would provide the reliable platform for efficient and effective decision-making and territorial development policy planning and integration process, directed to the enhanced TA and cohesive development within the Danube macroregion.

5 STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND POLICY MANAGEMENT

Besides the lack of quality data for TA management, one of the main challenges in the Danube countries is the lack of capacity on side of the policy planners and other stakeholders within the territorial development planning domain, to use and base their decisions on the evidence when preparing territorial development policies. Thus, a great importance within the Attractive Danube project is given to the strengthening of institutional capacities and enhancement of multilevel and cross-sectoral governance, which are targeted by the project's Objective 3.

This approach to social capacities improvement of the future Danube TA monitoring framework for reaching national and transnational TA cohesion goals, in parallel or combined with establishment of the previously described Web GIS application, i.e. national TAMPs and transnational CO-TAMP, presents the innovative element of this project.

5.1 Capacity building for TAMP employment

In other words, the project activities for building institutional capacities on the side of each project partner would run combined with the participatory planning approach establishment, planned to be implemented during and for the building of national TAMPs. This approach includes involvement of the stakeholders in the early phase of selection and weighting importance of the each TA indicators for description of the partner-countries specific TA as well as common TA advantages within the Danube Region. (Fig.5)

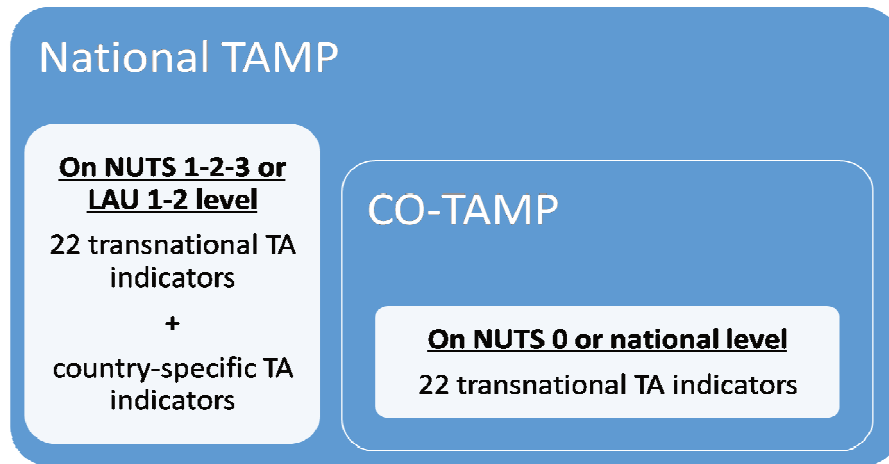


Fig. 5: National TAMP and transnational CO-TAMP

Also, targeting the decision-makers and public authorities in domain of economic, environmental and social affairs, as well as civil society, public agencies, academia and private sector, project partners would prepare a handbook for using the national TAMP, and understanding and interpretation of TA indicator values, their mutual relations and TA trends. Additionally, in order to support utilization of both national and transnational TAMPs results, the 3 national seminars for the empowering territorial development decision-makers and policy planners would be organized. These seminars are expected to provide direct and specific support to the individual institution on the TAMP employment and selective integration of created TA knowledge into the relevant territorial development policies.

Finally, concerning the sustainability of national TAMPs, the National memorandums with action plans for integrating TAMP on national level would be signed on behalf of the each project partner countries, thus keeping project stakeholders committed to the cooperation also after the Attractive Danube project ends.

5.2 Policy priorities management

Finally, combined with the project activities for the national policy planners empowerment to integrate created TA tools, results and knowledge into the national territorial development planning network and policy, transnational TA policy coordination and integration activities would take place. (Fig.6)

Relying on the already established transnational policy stakeholders network for the Attract-SEE project, 3 transnational policy coordination and integration workshops (TWSs) would be organized with the relevant organisations. The goals of TWSs are to promote and discuss the Attractive Danube project results and their sustainability; to establish knowledge sharing forum with the other European macroregions; and to debate integration approach for CO-TAMP results into the national and transnational territorial development policies.

Directed to reach the project Objective 2, the Policy recommendations for integration of TAMP into policies on national and transnational level along the Capitalisation action plan with the potential future capitalization activities of the Attractive Danube project results would be prepared. Also, future cooperation possibilities among the project partners would be identified.

On the end, long-term commitment of the project partners to CO-TAMP sustainability, and thus TAMP monitoring system longevity, would be confirmed by signing of the planned Transnational memorandum of understanding among the all project partners.

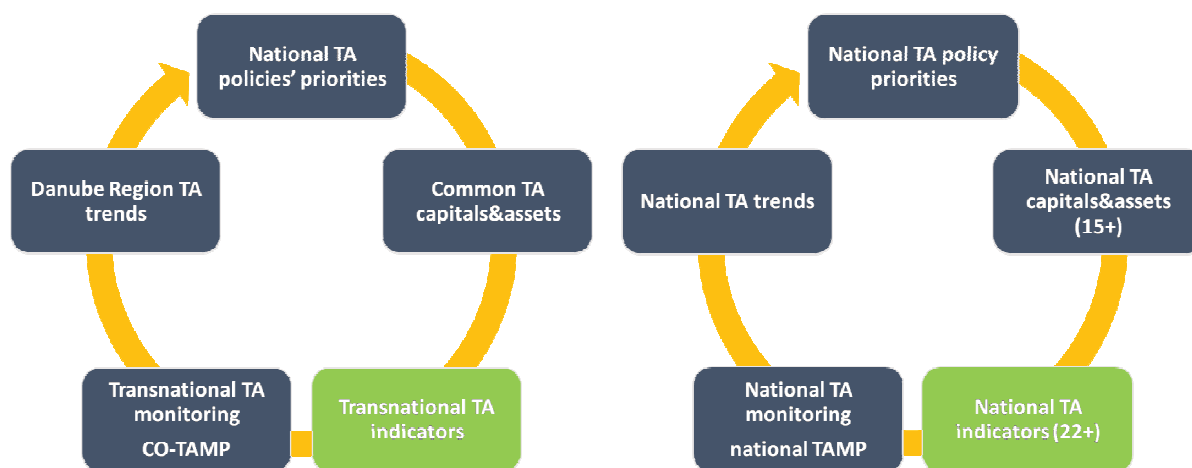


Fig. 6: Transnational TA policy coordination (left) and national TA policies management life-cycle (right)

6 PROJECT STATUS

After the first 6 months of the Attractive Danube project implementation (January-June, 2017), the planned project activities are running in timely and efficient manner.

The project and quality management teams have been established, and the communication activities have been launched with the Kick-off Conference and 1st Project Partners Meeting in Prague (14th-17th February, 2017). Also, the relevant promo materials are produced and project's pages are created on the leading social networking services, like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

During the Kick-off Conference and 1st Project Partner Meeting, the knowledge transfer seminar on the Attract-SEE project results and the training for TAMP establishment (Output 1.1) are held for the project partners. Following this first project output, all project partners following the prepared Participatory planning process guidance (Output 1.3) have implemented the same approach to the national TAMP building (Output 1.2). During the 1st NWSs project stakeholders have been introduced to the Attractive Danube project aim, objectives, methodology and expected results, while the country-specific TA indicators are identified and data have been collected for both national and transnational TA indicators, i.e. national and transnational TAMP monitoring systems (Output 2.1).

Until the end of 2017, 2nd Project Partner Meeting would take place in Belgrade in June and 3rd one in Germany in December, while the building activities on the national TAMPs and CO-TAMP should be finalised. Year 2018 and the first half of 2019 are dedicated to the capacity building and policy integration project activities.

7 CONCLUSIONS

In order for the territorial development in the Danube region to be continually and integrally supported and directed towards achievement of the sustainable and cohesive development policy goals, 11 Danube countries has launched the DTP-funded project Attractive Danube. The aim of this project is to strengthen institutional capacities and enhance multilevel governance approach of the partnering-countries' policy planners and other relevant stakeholders to recognise and retain TA on both national and transnational –the Danube Region- level.

The project would be implemented in period 2017-2019 and it would result in:

- Understanding, retaining and improving common and specific TA assets within the Danube Region;
- Establishment of tool, namely, TAMP monitoring systems for informed decision-making and efficient and effective steering of policies life-cycle on both national and transnational level;
- Capacities building of territorial development policy planners and other stakeholders, reaching the more efficient public administration in general;
- Preparation of national action plans and TA policy recommendations, as well as other instruments and measures, for better evidence and knowledge utilization and integration; and

- Contribution to the EU and national sustainable and cohesive development policy goals achievement.

The main advantage of the project concept and approach is adoption and implementation of the European best practices and standards in domain of the monitoring systems for territorial development policy management and integration. This advantage should allow in future national and transnational TAMP monitoring systems to be capable to connect and compare the indicator values and territorial development trends: between them as well as with the other relevant monitoring systems in the Danube Region; with ESPON programme's and projects' monitoring systems; and with the other European monitoring systems in general. Also, assumed interactivity, accessibility and longevity of the TAMP monitoring systems would create conditions for the today needed integrated and participatory territorial development planning approach and process management.

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