

# Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement for RBOs

29 January 2026, Online

# Tools for Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement: Lessons from the Danube

Good Practices, Challenges, and Innovative Solutions

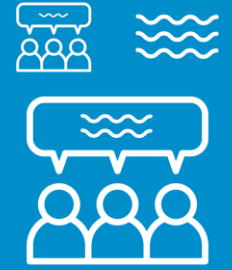


**ICPDR** **IKSD**

International Commission  
for the Protection  
of the Danube River

Internationale Kommission  
zum Schutz der Donau

# Grounding Public Participation in Policy: the WHY

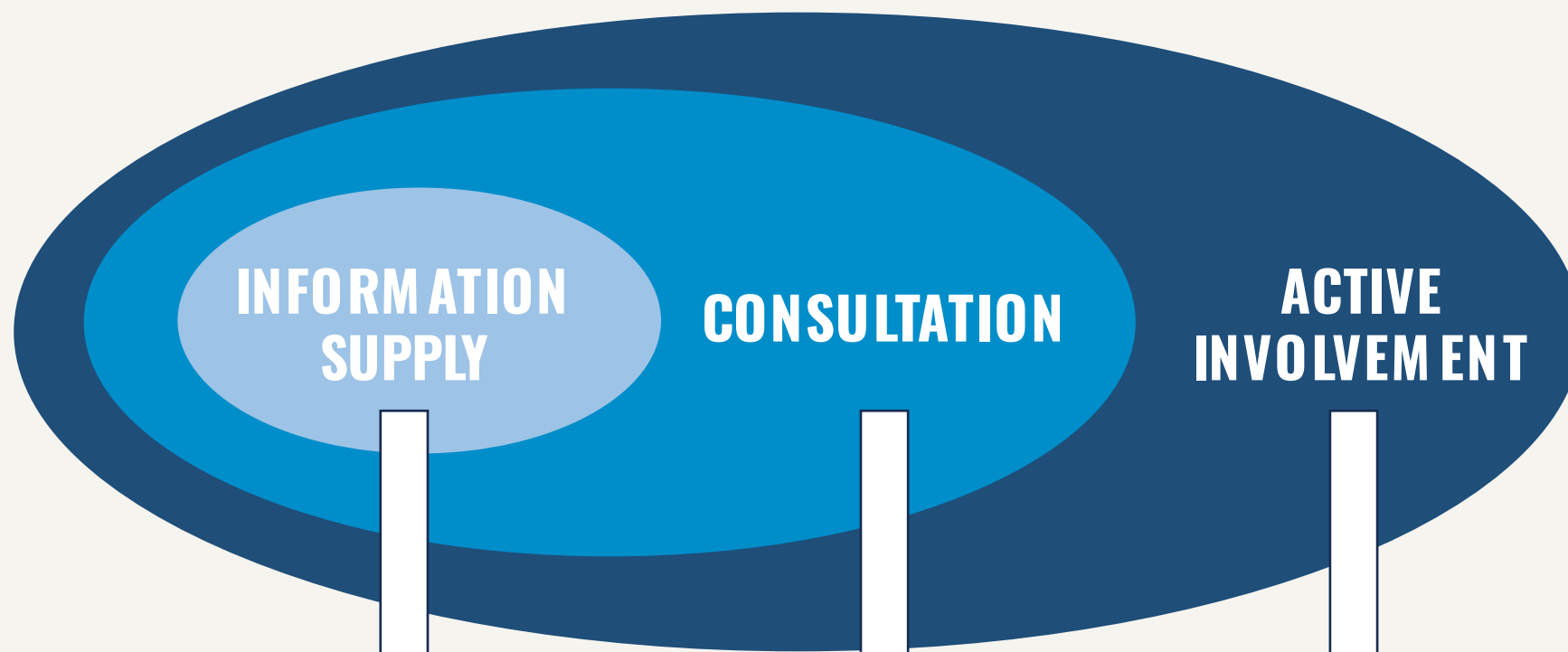


## EU Directives Supporting Participation\*\*

- 💧 Water Framework Directive (Art. 14)
- 💧 Floods Directive (Art. 9 & 10)

*\*\*Member states are required “to encourage the active involvement of interested parties” in the implementation of both directives.\*\**

# Grounding Public Participation in Policy: the WHY

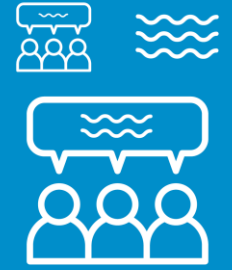


**shall be ENSURED**

**shall be  
ENCOURAGED**

Source: European Commission 2003

# Grounding Public Participation in Policy: the WHAT



## Public Participation (A Broad Definition):

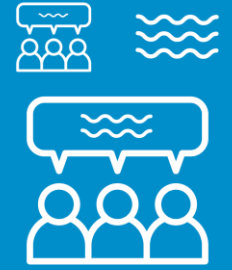
- Enabling people to influence **decisions, plans, and processes**

## Public Participation In the context of the ICPDR (Our Interpretation) :

- Raising **awareness** of **environmental** issues
- Building **trust, ownership, and commitment**
- Improving **decision-making outcomes**



# Grounding Public Participation in Policy: the HOW



## Public Participation in the context of the ICPDR:

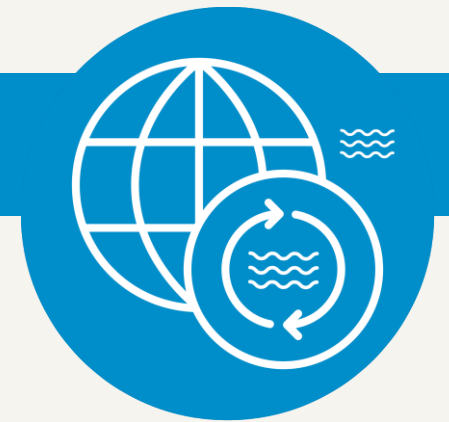
- Public awareness campaigns
- stakeholder workshops
- school outreach
- Academic Study visits
- digital communication tools
- Utilizing digital tools like social media, websites, newsletters, and other digital channels to connect with more people

## Key takeaway

We make participation **more accessible and build real involvement**. Member states are required to actively encourage participation, not just passively allow it. The phrasing, or wording of the two directives about the requirement **“to encourage the active involvement of interested parties”** emphasizes the **need for real and meaningful engagement**.

**Achieving meaningful public input isn't without challenges. Limited awareness, technical barriers, or even public apathy can hinder participation.**

# Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement: the WHO



## Who Should Be Involved?

- ◆ AT LEAST stakeholders (interested parties) for active involvement
- ◆ The **general public** in consultation processes
- ◆ No one-size-fits-all approach for public participation: the process needs to adapt to **local, national, and regional** concepts

## Who Is a Stakeholder?

- ◆ Anyone affected by or with influence over an issue
- ◆ **Clear roles = realistic expectations!**
- ◆ Participation must be **inclusive** and **clearly structured**

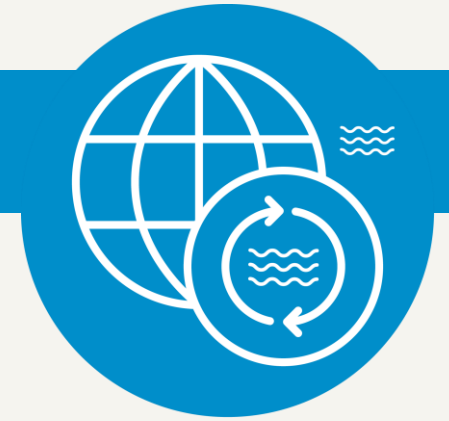
### Key takeaway

A stakeholder is **anyone who is affected by, or has influence over**, the issue at hand. That could include NGOs, government agencies, farmers, industry, youth groups, you name it.

**There's no one-size-fits-all model.** The way participation is structured needs to reflect **local, national, and regional contexts**. What works in one setting might not work in another, flexibility is key.

# Stakeholder Engagement in Practice

# Showcasing Successful Practices



## Key Initiatives in Public Participation

### Outreach, creative engagement

- ◆ Danube Day
- ◆ Danube Art Master

### Science communication

- ◆ JDS5: “Let’s Go Sampling Together”

### Management Plans Updates

- ◆ “Have your say!”
- ◆ “Let us explain”



# Showcasing Successful Practices



## Outreach, creative engagement



- ◆ **Danube Day:** Annual celebration that fosters public connection to the Danube River. Flagship event celebrating the Danube with community events, cultural activities, and educational programs.
- ◆ **Danube Art Master:** Inspiring creativity and environmental awareness among youth. Engaging youth to express their connection to the Danube through creative art.

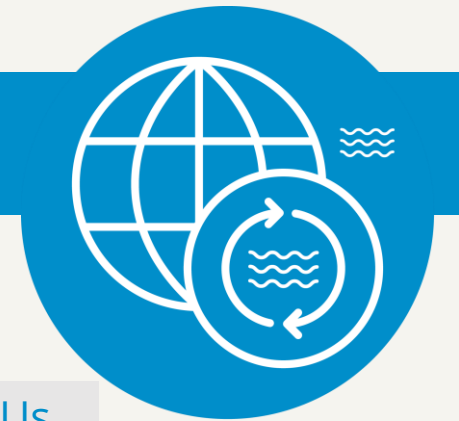


## Science Communication

- ◆ **JDS5:** Conducted every six years, this scientific survey, and the largest river monitoring effort globally, emphasizes the power of science communication to the broadest public. Assess water quality, biodiversity, and pollution levels across the Danube River Basin.
- ◆ **With the** citizen science activity, under the motto 'Let's Go Sampling Together', we engaged communities, bridging science and the public for actionable outcomes.



# Showcasing Successful Practices



## Management Plans Updates: Mechanisms for stakeholder and civil society engagement



- Public Consultation process: Collection of comments for the Updates of the Danube River Basin Management Plan (DRBMP) and Flood Risk Management Plan (DFRMP).
- Tools: Social media campaigns, educational programs, stakeholder consultation workshops.

ICPDR IKSD

*Let us explain!*

**Why Public Consultation?**

The DRBMP lies at the core of the ICPDR's central work programs – so it should be developed with strong involvement of civil society and stakeholders at all possible levels from the beginning and throughout the entire cycle of all activities.

The public is therefore invited to get involved in a variety of activities, ranging from developing policies, to implementing measures and evaluating impacts.

Additionally, public consultation is a legal requirement of the WFD.

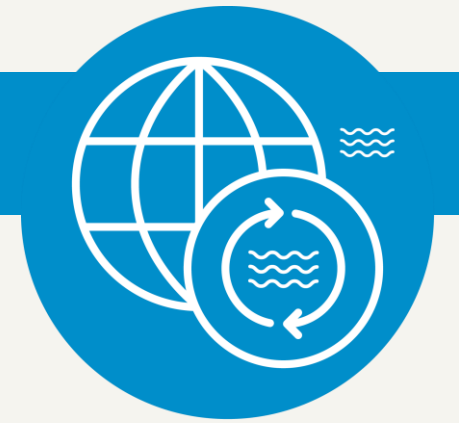
The ICPDR aspires to work ever closely with the public to reach our goals together. Only with adequate public participation, will we be able to make the Danube **CLEANER, HEALTHIER and SAFER**.

### Key Aspects of the "Let Us Explain" Approach:

- Simplifying Complex Information:** using visuals and storytelling to explain technical, transboundary water management issues to the public.
- "Fun-Fact" Integration:** the "Let Us Explain" text is used following questions to provide context and engage with less-informed audiences.

# Monitoring Results

# Monitoring Mechanisms



## The PP EG & the 25 ICPDR Observers



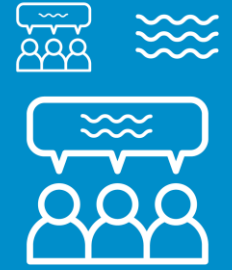
Public Participation ACTIVITIES are all planned, monitored, and evaluated under the umbrella of the ICPDR Public Participation Expert Group or PP EG. The ICPDR is one of the only RBOs to have an appointed staff member helping coordinate.



Activities are coordinated through the basin's 14 countries + the EU. The PP EG is engine of change and renewal — always bringing a fresh wind to the Danube. Thanks to this group, public participation isn't just effective — it's also fun and meaningful, truly making a difference in people's lives.

The role of our 25 observer organizations is crucial; they act as the connective tissue linking the ICPDR to the 79 million women and men who call the Danube River Basin home.

# Challenges & Solutions



## Challenges

**#1** complex policy documents may be difficult for non-experts to engage with.

**#2** Engaging the public, especially youth, can present some unique challenges. One key issue is avoiding tokenism

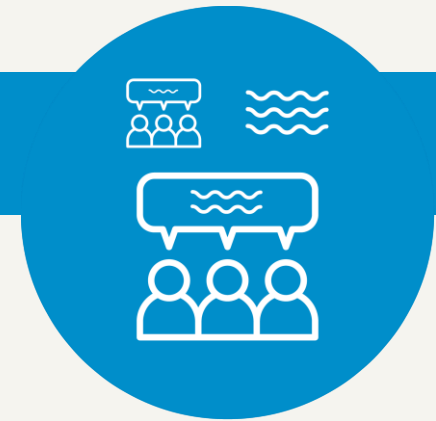
**#3** ensuring that key players in policy don't just make an appearance but stay actively involved. Often, the perception is that decisions have already been made, leading people to wonder, "What's the point of my contribution?"

**#4** accessibility is a big hurdle. Decision-making processes can be intimidating or hard to understand. Complex jargon and technical discussions often exclude non-experts.



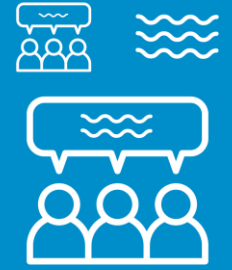
## Solutions

- #1** we simplify communication. Using visuals, storytelling, and local languages makes our work more relatable and accessible.
- #2** At the ICPDR, youth engagement isn't about checking a box, it's rooted in our mission. We're working toward a cleaner, healthier, and safer Danube River Basin for future generations, and young people must be part of shaping that future.
- #3** We change that narrative by showing that all voices matter and can influence outcomes.
- #4** Simplifying language and providing clear, relatable explanations are essential for meaningful participation.

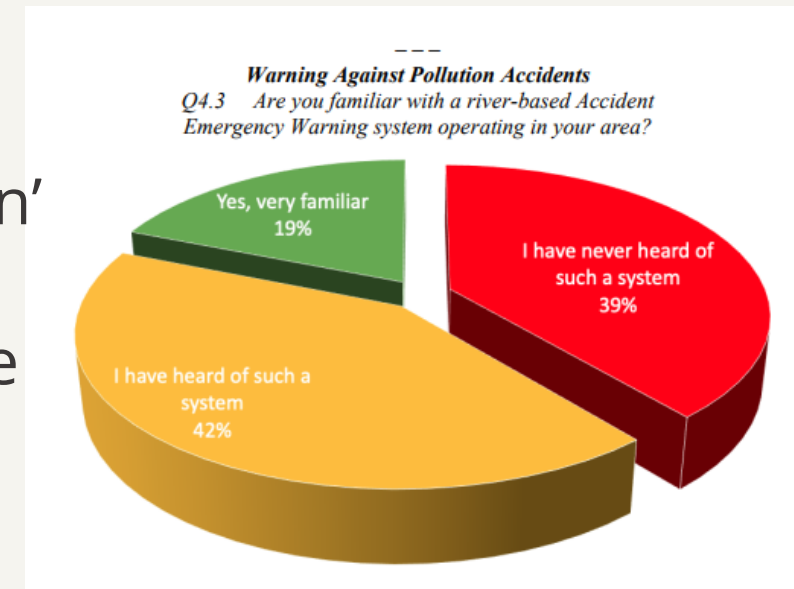


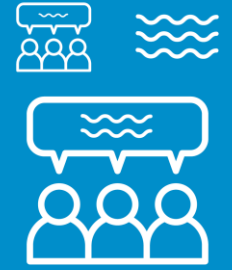
## Practical Examples and Lessons Learned

# Case study: Online questionnaires for the DRBMP & DFRMP Updates 2021



- ◆ Target **less-informed** audiences with **accessible** questions
- ◆ Brought in a **'fun-fact'** feeling with the 'Let Us Explain' text following each question
- ◆ Translation into **11 Danubian languages** besides the English original
- ◆ Fostered **awareness** and collected valuable **public feedback**





# Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement in figures...

- ◆ Broaden the reach using social media platforms: **we reached almost 2 Mio people** with a cooperation campaign with the EU's DG ENV "See Water Differently"
- ◆ Encourage multi-level participation to empower communities and stakeholders: **we reach over 30 K people** during Danube Day festivities
- ◆ Think out of the box, constantly improve and diversify your communication practices: **we reached 400 individuals** with our last online questionnaire for the two management plans, we had only 18 respondents in the previous cycle.