

# DANUBE RURALS CAPES

● Landscapes ● Identity ● Policies ● Toolkits ● Network

March 31, 2026

## A NETWORK OF PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT FOR SELF-ORGANIZED VILLAGE CLUSTERS



Duration: April 1, 2025 - September 30, 2027

### What we are building?

A Transnational Network of Knowledge, 7 Action Plans, Architectural & Rural Landscape Identity Guides, Governance models and replication tools for wider use across the Danube Region.

### By the Numbers

- 15 partners
- 14 associated partners
- 6 Danube countries
- 7 pilot micro-regions
- Multiple workshops & Professional consultations
- 1 shared mission



### A Year of Turning Expertise into Local Power

Across the Danube, rural communities are not waiting to be “saved”. They are building the knowledge, confidence and partnerships to shape change on their own terms.

### Why Danube Ruralscapes?

Because rural places do not need generic solutions. They need tools that begin with identity. Danube Ruralscapes helps self-organized village clusters across the Danube co-create climate-conscious, heritage-based and inclusive rural landscapes - through community-led processes, practical planning tools and cross-border learning. Building on the legacy of DANUrB and DANUrB+, the project brings together 15 partners and 14 associated partners from 6 Danube countries to turn rural heritage into local power.

Danube Ruralscapes is supported by the Interreg Danube Region Programme co-funded by the European Union.

# Year At a Glance

## Spring 2025 – Spring 2026

One year, one clear direction: Danube Ruralscapes moved from project launch into field learning, local dialogue and the first building blocks of a shared rural planning model for the Danube Region.

### April 2025 - The beginning

Danube Ruralscapes started, setting the framework for a new transnational network focused on sustainable, heritage-based rural architecture, governance and local self-organisation.  
[Read More!](#)

### May 2025 - Kick-off in Budapest

Partners from 6 Danube countries met in Budapest (28-30 May), aligning their cross-border vision and opening the first phase of collaboration.

### May 2025 - First study tour: Ipoly Valley

The first study tour followed immediately in the Ipoly Valley (30 May), putting good practices, rural landscapes and community-led development into focus from day one.  
[Read more!](#)

### Summer 2025 - From legacy to momentum

Danube Ruralscapes publicly positioned itself as a continuation of the DANURB and DANURB+ legacy, with a stronger focus on village clusters, bottom-up planning and new heritage-based tools for rural communities.  
[Read More!](#)

### September 2025 - Pilot work moves closer to the ground

Local workshops started turning the model into reality. In the Danube Delta, Romania (1-3 September), partners and stakeholders worked on shared local perspectives for heritage and landscape.  
[Read More!](#)

In Nikopol, Bulgaria (25 September), a strategic workshop launched the local rural planning process.  
[Read More!](#)

### What's next?

Study Tour in the Danube Delta (RO)  
Professional consultations  
Capacity-building activities

### October 2025 - Second study tour: Living Heritage in practice

The second study tour, On the Trail of Living Heritage (16-18 October), deepened the exchange across Austria and the Czech Republic, showing how heritage, innovation and local commitment can reinforce one another.  
[Read More - part I](#)  
[Read More - part II](#)

### December 2025 - Spring 2026 - Learning turns into structure

Project communication continued to grow, including the Rural echoes and the Villages of Wonder storytelling campaigns ([Read More!](#)), while work advanced on the project's core outputs: a Transnational Network of Knowledge, Action Plans for 7 pilot micro-regions, Architectural & Rural Landscape Identity Guides, governance models, and policy and replication tools for wider use across the Danube Region.

## Learning turns into structure Exchange, local dialogue and pilot work continue to shape the first shared tools and methods.

In its first year, Danube Ruralscapes moved from shared ambition to grounded action. What began as a transnational vision quickly took shape through meetings, study tours, policies analyses, workshops and professional consultations, and the first practical steps toward a common rural planning model for the Danube Region. Across seven pilot micro-regions, the project started turning expertise into something local communities can actually use: clearer methods, stronger dialogue, and tools rooted in heritage, landscape and identity.

### What changed?

**We moved from concept to contact: from shared vision to real places, real conversations and the first tools shaped with communities, not just for them.**

# Partner Spotlight

## Meet our Network of Knowledge

### Budapest University of Technology and Economics (HU)

- The lead partner setting the direction: connecting strategy, architecture and transnational cooperation into one working model for rural change.

### Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre – KÉK (HU)

- Bringing participation to the centre, KÉK helps make planning more open, legible and rooted in community voices.

### Pest County Municipality (HU)

- A public-sector bridge between policy and place, helping regional thinking land in real rural contexts.

### Politehnica University of Timișoara (RO)

- Design knowledge meets field reality here, with a strong contribution to Romanian pilot work and place-based learning.

### Regional Development Agency “Braničevo-Podunavlje” (RS)

- A regional connector turning cooperation into action, linking institutions, communities and development practice on the Serbian side.

### University of Belgrade - Faculty of Architecture (RS)

- Bringing architectural depth and long-view thinking to the network, with strong expertise in heritage-based rural transformation.

### “Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urbanism (RO)

- A key knowledge partner helping shape methodology, dialogue and landscape-sensitive planning across the Romanian pilot areas.

### Romanian Order of Architects (RO)

- Translating professional know-how into usable guidance, with proven experience in architectural guides for rural areas.

**Different institutions.**

**Complementary strengths.**

**One shared rural future built in partnership.**

### National Tourism Cluster “Bulgarian Guide” (BG)

- Driving the project communication, active stakeholders engagement and sustainable thinking, with a sharp focus on local identity and practical outreach.

### Association of Danube River Municipalities “Danube” (BG)

- Connecting municipalities and local stakeholders, and helping project ideas to be realised across the pilot region.

### Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23 Association (RO)

- Rooted in the Delta, the association brings community trust, local energy and a powerful sense of place.

### Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek (HR)

- The Croatian academic voice, contributing technical insight and grounded support for the Baranja pilot area.

### Municipality of Kneževi Vinogradi (HR)

- Keeping the work practical, local and real - where strategies meet municipal reality and community needs.

### Mehedinți County Council (RO)

- Bringing regional governance power and territorial perspective to the project’s Romanian implementation and long-term uptake.

### Izmail State University of Humanities (UA)

- The Ukrainian academic partner extending the network eastward, with a vital role in cross-border knowledge exchange.

### **Why this matters?**

**No single institution can rebuild a rurscape alone. Our network works because it connects research, planning, governance, participation and local development - linking expert knowledge with real places and real communities.**

# From the Field

## Danube Ruralscapes Pilot Regions (1)

### Lower Ipoly Valley (HU)

Challenge: ecological imbalance and village decline.

Heritage asset: river landscapes, wetlands, forests, mills, rail traces and borderland settlements shaped by water and terrain.

Sustainability opportunity: reconnect habitat restoration, traditional land use, slow mobility and small-scale rural innovation into one shared landscape future.

### Baranja / Kneževi Vinogradi (HR)

Challenge: keeping rural identity alive without reducing heritage to a tourist backdrop.

Heritage asset: vineyard slopes, old wine cellars, crafts, gastronomy and strong village character in places like Suza, Karanac and Zmajevac.

Sustainability opportunity: link wine culture, landscape care and village renewal into a more resilient local economy.

### Iron Gates (RO)

Challenge: helping small Danube villages remain visible and viable within a powerful natural setting.

Heritage asset: gorge landscapes, layered border history, Roman traces and settlements shaped by movement along the river.

Sustainability opportunity: connect heritage interpretation, low-impact tourism and local livelihoods so villages benefit from the landscape around them.

### Danube Delta (RO)

Challenge: sustaining village life in a fragile water-based environment with limited access and constant ecological pressure.

Heritage asset: reed landscapes, fishing culture, water settlements and a rare mix of communities and traditions.

Sustainability opportunity: support planning that protects biodiversity while strengthening everyday life, local identity and community resilience.



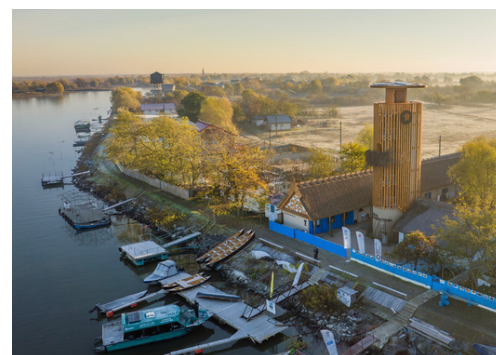
Credits:  
Aron Dorka,  
Pest County  
Municipality



Credits:  
Ines Palko  
Tataj,  
Kneževi  
Vinogradi  
Municipality



Credits:  
Luca Pop,  
Politechnical  
University of  
Timisoara



Credits:  
Mani Gutău,  
Ivan  
Pataichin –  
Mila 23  
Association

Our pilot regions show how different rural future can look when they begin from place: some shaped by wetlands, some by vineyards, some by gorge landscapes, some by layered settlement history. What connects them is the shared search for guidance rooted in identity.

# From the Field

## Danube Ruralscapes Pilot Regions (2)



Credits:  
Emil  
Shumov,  
Nikopol  
Municipality

### Nikopol Municipality (BG)

Challenge: depopulation, economic decline and limited access to planning support.

Heritage asset: 13 villages with distinct rural character, a historic Danube setting, fortress heritage and the nearby wetland-island landscape of Persina. Sustainability opportunity: turn this layered identity into practical guidance for better planning, stronger confidence and place-sensitive village development.



Credits:  
Jelena  
Petrovic,  
RDA  
"Braničevo-  
Podunavlje"  
Ltd.

### Braničevo Region, Golubac micro-region (RS)

Challenge: ensuring that the benefits of a major destination reach surrounding villages as well.

Heritage asset: Golubac Fortress, the Danube gateway to the gorge, protected nature and a dramatic cultural landscape.

Sustainability opportunity: build a wider rural offer that connects villages, interpretation, nature-based tourism and community benefit.



Credits:  
Ivan  
Tatarynov,  
Izmail State  
University of  
Humanities

### Odesa District (UA)

Challenge: maintaining village identity and landscape stewardship in a water-defined territory under pressure. Heritage asset: canal-based settlements, delta biodiversity and long-lived local traditions shaped by the river environment.

Sustainability opportunity: combine local knowledge with cross-border expertise to support sustainability, biodiversity care and stronger community continuity.

## What we are learning from the pilots

- Local identity is not a branding exercise.
- Landscape is infrastructure, not scenery.
- Planning works better when communities recognise themselves in it.
- Small villages need practical guidance.

# Where ideas met the ground

*From the kickoff meeting in Budapest to field visits in the Ipoly Valley, collaborative workshops in the Danube Delta and Nikopol, and the second study tour across Austria and the Czech Republic, this first year proved one thing: Danube Ruralscapes works best when people meet in place. Each gathering moved the project beyond discussion - toward shared methods, local dialogue and practical next steps for the pilot regions.*

## Danube Ruralscapes First Year Top Outcomes

### 1. A shared rural planning language began to take shape

Across meetings and workshops, partners aligned around a common direction: heritage-based, climate-conscious rural planning rooted in local identity and shaped with communities, not for them.

### 2. Pilot regions moved from introduction to co-creation

The workshops in the Danube Delta and Nikopol opened the first real working phase in the pilot areas - local consultation, mapping, exchange of good and bad practices, and the first steps toward locally adapted Architecture and Rural Landscape Identity Guides.

### 3. The network became more than a partnership - it became a learning system

The study tours in Hungary, Austria and the Czech Republic turned good practice into something concrete and transferable, strengthening cross-border exchange and building a living network of partners, places and methods.



Danube Ruralscapes Network in Krems, Austria



Danube Ruralscapes Network in Ipoly Valley, Hungary



Danube Ruralscapes Network in Wachau, Austria

# Our Voices

*Behind every analysis, identity guide, study tour, workshop and pilot action is a shared conviction: rural futures work best when local identity, practical knowledge and cooperation move together.*

***“Danube Ruralscapes shows why we all feel truly at home in these wonderful rural landscapes in the Danube region, and gives hope that these places will be able to thrive making people living there proud to have such a home!”***

Dr. Bálint Kádár  
(Budapest University of  
Technology and  
Economics)

***“Above all, the Lower Ipoly Valley represents connection: a landscape where the river links communities across borders, creating new values and opening up fresh opportunities for cooperation, innovation and sustainable development.***

Péter Wolf  
(Pest County  
Municipality)

***“Danube Ruralscapes turns rural heritage into a competitive advantage - by giving communities practical tools to protect what’s authentic and grow what’s sustainable.”***

Desislava  
Mincheva-Yordanova  
(National Tourism  
Cluster  
“Bulgarian Guide”)

***“Through Danube Ruralscapes, we take an active role in rethinking the relationship between architecture, landscape, and rural communities. The project enables us to turn professional expertise and research into concrete tools for a sustainable, high-quality built environment.”***

arch. Raluca Munteanu  
(Romanian Order of  
Architects)

***“With Danube Ruralscapes, we help communities see the beauty and potential of their rural landscapes, while contributing to a more sustainable tomorrow”***

Jelena Petrovic  
(RDA Braničevo-  
Podunavlje)

**Different starting points.**

**One shared belief:**

**Rural villages deserve tools that recognise who they are.**



Danube Ruralscapes Network in  
Heidenreichstein, Austria

***“We see Danube Ruralscapes as an opportunity to harmonize top-down and bottom-up approaches, thus contributing to the preservation of the cultural landscapes of our rural areas.”***

Stefana Badescu  
(Politechnical University of Timisoara)

***“We see Danube Ruralscapes as a unique opportunity to connect culturally diverse villages, to recognize and classify rural building traditions, and to breathe new life into the villages of the Golubac micro-region. Through this project, we can support rural communities in raising awareness of building practices, deepening understanding, and shaping public spaces.”***

Nikola Mitrovic  
(University of Belgrade)

***“Our villages preserve stories, customs, traditions and landscapes that shape the identity of Baranja. We see Danube Ruralscapes as an important tool that helps us safeguard these values and pass them on to future generations through sustainable development.”***

Ines Palko-Tatai  
(Municipality of Kneževi Vinogradi)

# DANUBE RURALSCAPES

**SHAPING THE FUTURE OF RURAL SETTLEMENTS - SUSTAINABLY,  
TOGETHER!**

## Field Notes from the Danube

A year of turning expertise into local power.

Danube Ruralscapes supports rural communities across the Danube Region with practical knowledge, shared methods and heritage-based planning tools for more sustainable villages.



Credits: Dina Stober, Vukovar, Croatia, aerial view



**Architecture and Rural Landscape Identity Guides for Village Clusters**



**Network of Knowledge for Rural and Architecture Planning**



**Toolkits and Policy Models for heritage-based, climate-smart development**



**Pilot Actions in 7 micro-regions**

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