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A Study of Socioeconomic Effects of the LIFE WILDisland Habitat Corridor Project

Research Report

Osijek, June 2024

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1. Introduction

This research study was conducted within the project Danube Wild Island Habitat Corridor - LIFE WILDisland LIFE program of the European Union for environment and climate activities that started on September 1, 2021, with an expected duration of 72 months.

The main goal of the project is to contribute to the strategic goal of biodiversity within the EU Biodiversity Strategy until 2030 in preventing the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services along the Danube. The project's specific goal is to maintain or improve the favourable conservation status of the target species and habitats of the Danube islands. The target habitat type, according to the Ecological Network NATURA 2000, is 91E0* floodplain forest with black alder and white ash (Alno-Pandion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae).

The project is aimed at preserving endangered natural habitats of floodplain forests on the Danube islands. The previous project, DANUBEparksCONECTED, identified over 900 islands on the Danube from its source to its mouth covering an area of 138,000 hectares. The Danube islands represent original and autochthonous river and wetland ecosystems with specific flora and fauna. The islands are the result of the hydrological processes of the Danube and are an indicator of the naturalness of the river. Islands as such constitute the extremely valuable habitats that need to be preserved in their natural state. The Danube, with its flood plains and wild islands, represents the heart of the wilderness of the European continent.

One of the assigned project activities is monitoring the project's socio-economic effects. In this project, for the first time, a socio-economic survey was carried out at the level of the entire course of the Danube River to learn more about public awareness and support for natural rivers, the role of wildlife in riverine and coastal forest habitats, and the role of the Ecological Network Natura 2000 and LIFE in the preservation and restoration of those last remnants of wilderness in Central and South-Eastern Europe. The main focus is also a comparison of the level of support for river wildlife in various European countries and regions, as well as a comparison of public opinion in Danube cities with remote natural areas. This study provides valuable data for all stakeholders working in EM Natura 2000, conserving wildlife and implementing nature protection along the Danube as well as other river basins. It also provides unique data for the nature conservation process at the European level.

This research report covers the first round of research carried out in seven countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia). The research consisted of the following elements:

- Online survey of the general population,
- Survey field research in the local communities,
- Survey field research on a sample of visitors to the protected areas,
- Survey field research or a focus group on a sample of stakeholders,
- Research in primary schools – 5th grades (one school class) – only in Croatia.

The same questionnaire (attached to this report) was used for the first three parts of the research, and the same questionnaire was used in those countries that opted for a stakeholder survey. In those countries that decided to conduct a focus group with stakeholders, it was conducted using a special focus group guide. In the research in which local elementary school students participated (Croatia only), a special questionnaire was used that was adapted to the age of the participants (also attached to this report).

The specific objectives of the survey included the determination of:

- Free associations related to the natural environment of the region where a person lives,
- Free associations related to the Danube River,
- Frequency of visiting the Danube area,
- Assessments of the importance of individual functions of the Danube River,
- Assessments of the aesthetic appeal of certain forms of the river environment,
- Perceptions of the concept of naturalness of the environment,
- Assessments of the importance and function of the naturalness of the river environment,
- Estimates of the number of Danube islands and the state of their naturalness,
- Assessments of threats and pressures about the naturalness of the river environment on the Danube,
- Assessments of the importance of the various conservation and restoration measures on the Danube,
- The level of support for the strict protection of the Danube islands,
- Perception of the various organizations about their duties toward the Danube protection,
- The level of awareness about various programs, institutions, and funding instruments related to the Danube protection,
- The level of awareness about the Danube protected areas,

- The level and type of support for the Danube natural islands.

The data were analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software package.

2. General population

2.1. Research sample

The following table shows the number of research participants by country. It can be seen that the sample size ranges from the lowest 111 (Germany) to the highest 310 (Serbia).

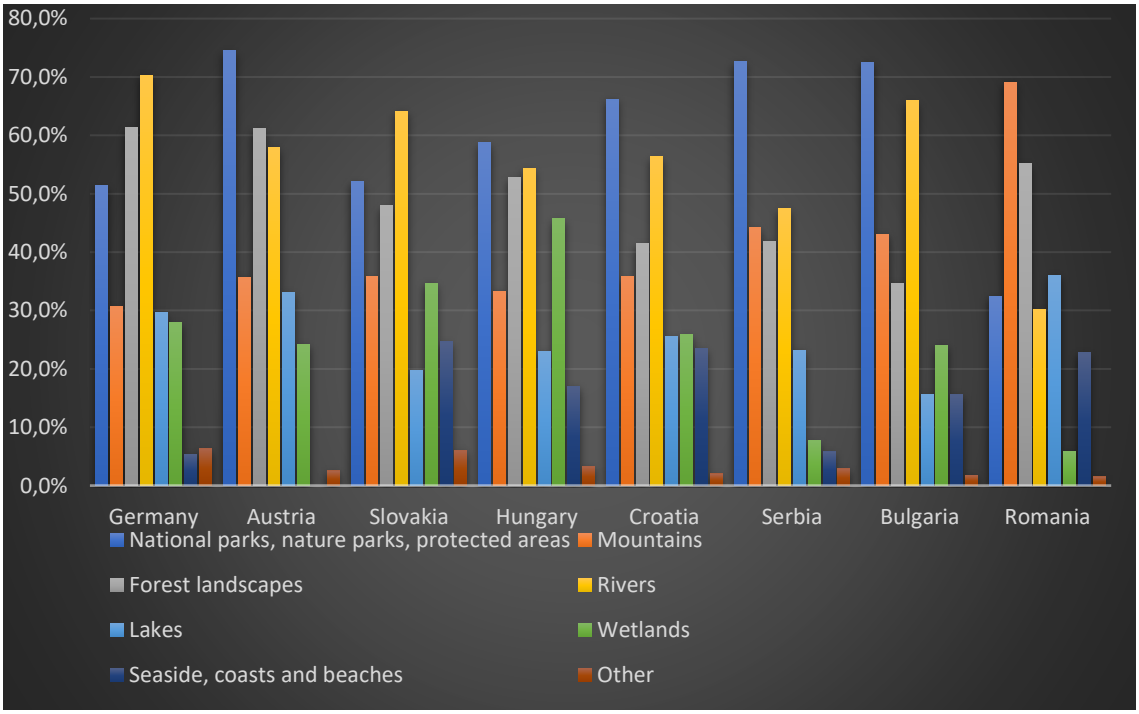
Table 1. Sample size – by countries (general population)

Country	Austria	Bulgaria	Croatia	Germany	Hungary	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia	Total
N	157	167	302	111	300	136	310	167	1650

2.2. Associations related to the natural environment of the region where a person lives

In the first question in the survey, the participants were asked to think about natural landscapes in their region and to name a maximum of three ones that they are particularly proud of. It can be seen that in the case of five countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, and Serbia) people are proudest of national parks, nature parks, and other protected areas. In Germany and Slovakia respondents are most proud of their rivers, and in Romania, of mountains.

Figure 1. If you think of natural landscapes in your region, which ones are you proud of (choose up to 3 options)? (general population)



As a continuation, in the second question, the participants were asked to list spontaneous associations that come to mind when they think about natural landscapes in their region. As can be seen in Table 2, in five countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, and Serbia) the Danube is the most common association, whereas in Croatia the first associations are rivers in general. In Romania, the respondents most often mentioned mountains/hills, and in Slovakia, the most often cited associations were related to the (alluvial) forests.

Table 2. Spontaneous associations related to the natural landscapes in the region (general population)

Country	Top three answers by frequencies
Germany	Danube (28) Altmulhtal (14) Danube floodplains (12)
Austria	Danube floodplains (24) Danube (21) Lobau (20)
Slovakia	(Aluvial) forests (59) Rivers (26) Danube (23)
Hungary	Danube (55) Mecsek (52) Gemenc (25)
Croatia	Rivers (63) Danube (33) Kopački rit (25)
Serbia	Danube (60) Fruška gora (57) Mountains (22)
Bulgaria	Danube (37) Mountains/hills/peaks (16) Vitosha (8)
Romania	Mountains/hills (36) Forests (14) Danube delta (6)

2.3. Free associations related to the Danube River

Similarly as in the second question, in the next question, the participants were asked to state the spontaneous associations that come to their minds when they think of the Danube River. As can be noted, the answers were very diverse, with floodplains most commonly cited in Austria and Germany, size and length in Croatia and Slovakia, the Danube delta in Romania, boating/sailing in Hungary, and pollution in Serbia. In Bulgaria, the most common association was the river itself. The top three answers in each country can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Spontaneous associations related to the Danube River (general population)

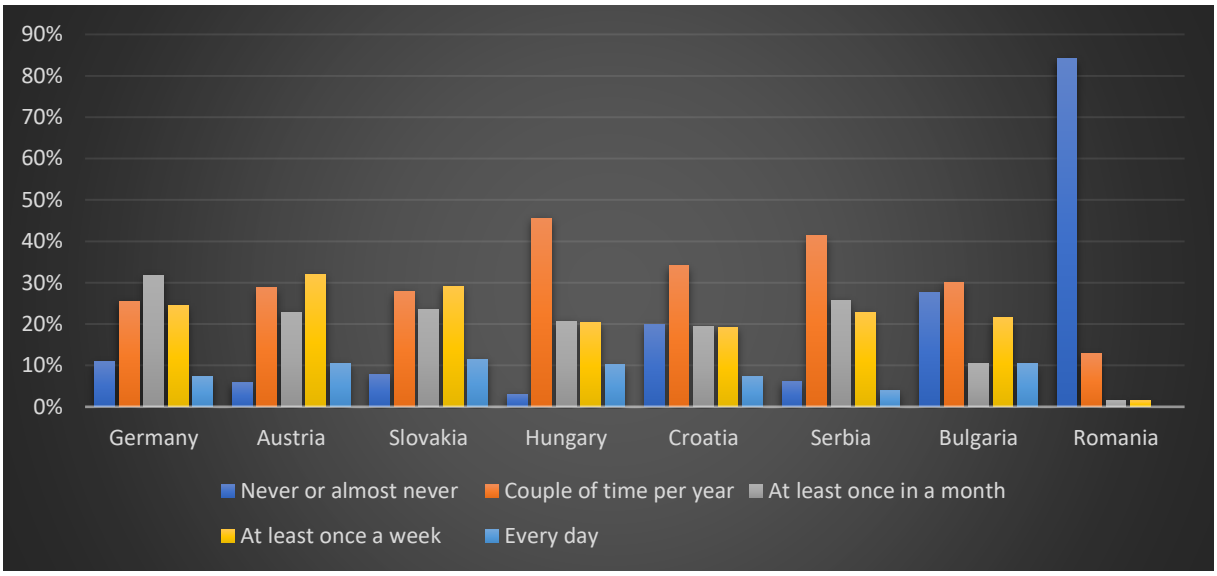
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Serbia	Danube (60) Fruška gora (57) Mountains (22)
Bulgaria	Danube (37) Mountains/hills/peaks (16) Vitosha (8)
Romania	Mountains/hills (36) Forests (14) Danube delta (6)

2.4. Frequency of visiting the Danube area

The frequency of visits to the Danube varies greatly by country, which is to be expected considering the differences in the geographical area occupied by the Danube and the importance of this river in each country. Namely, in Austria, about 42% of research participants visit the Danube at least once a week, and this share is also high in Slovakia (about 40%). The Danube

is visited the least by research participants from Romania, that is, only about 2% of them visit it at least once a week (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Frequency of visiting the Danube area (general population)



2.5. Assessments of the importance of individual functions of the Danube River

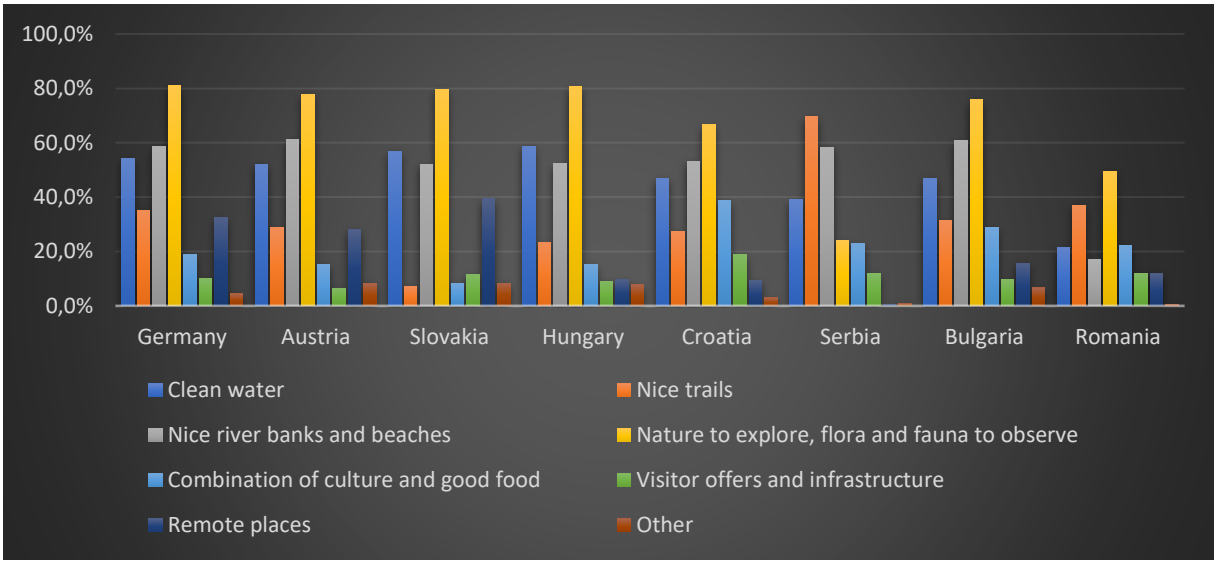
From Table 4, it can be concluded that ecosystems for rich biodiversity and habitats for protected species are, according to the research participants, the most important functions of the Danube River. The function of forestry (timber production) and hunting is the least important, and it can be added that the participants of all countries share a fairly similar opinion when it comes to the importance of the listed functions of the Danube.

Table 4. Assessments of the importance of individual functions of the Danube River (means) (general population)

	Germany	Austria	Slovakia	Hungary	Croatia	Serbia	Bulgaria	Romania	**Total**
Area for recreation and sports activities	3,65	3,83	3,98	3,81	3,81	4,05	4,16	4,13	**3,93**
Ecosystem for rich biodiversity	4,72	4,79	4,91	4,81	4,67	4,38	4,85	4,46	**4,68**
Habitat for protected species	4,67	4,77	4,84	4,76	4,61	4,41	4,89	4,51	**4,66**
Source for (drinking) water	3,75	3,49	4,71	4,70	4,21	3,95	4,26	3,98	**4,18**
Source for (renewable) energy production	3,08	3,44	3,29	3,60	3,70	4,08	3,75	4,35	**3,71**
Forestry (timber production) and hunting	2,45	2,52	2,32	2,84	3,31	3,61	3,23	3,61	**3,07**
Fishing	2,78	2,67	3,12	3,54	3,71	3,89	3,98	4,27	**3,57**
Tourism destination	3,68	3,47	3,77	3,92	3,95	4,26	4,29	4,42	**4,00**
Transport route	2,83	3,52	3,70	4,16	3,93	4,09	4,42	4,37	**3,95**
Integrative and inspiring lifeline for many different countries and cultures	4,08	3,98	4,12	4,04	4,07	4,11	4,20	4,17	**4,09**

In the next question, research participants were required to list a maximum of three things that are important to them when visiting the Danube. In all countries except Serbia, nature to explore, flora, and fauna to observe are the most important things for respondents when visiting the Danube. In Serbia, on the other hand, nice trails are the most important to the research participants.

Figure 3. Important things when visiting the Danube (general population)



2.6. Assessments of the aesthetic appeal of certain forms of the river environment

In the first question, the respondents were given a task to rank four photos with varying levels of embankment/natural value. The first photo represented an intact riverbank („wild island“), with a very high level of natural value.

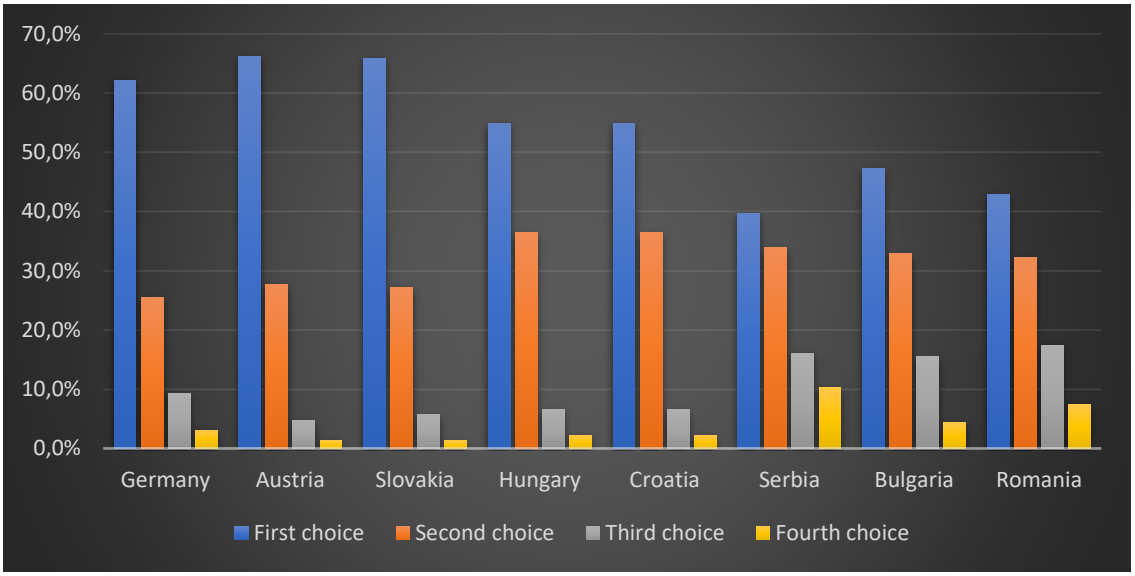
Figure 4. First photograph – an intact riverbank



The second photo showed a restored riverbank with a high level of natural value. The third photo represented an embanked riverbank with a low level of natural value, while the fourth photo represented a strongly embanked riverbank with a very low level of natural value.

It can be seen that the photograph of the first environment (an intact riverbank) was chosen as first choice by more than 50% of all respondents in four countries (Austria, Germany, Hungary, and Slovakia), while in Bulgaria and Croatia this photo was also the first choice, but for slightly less than a half of all respondents.

Figure 5. First photograph – distribution of choices (general population)



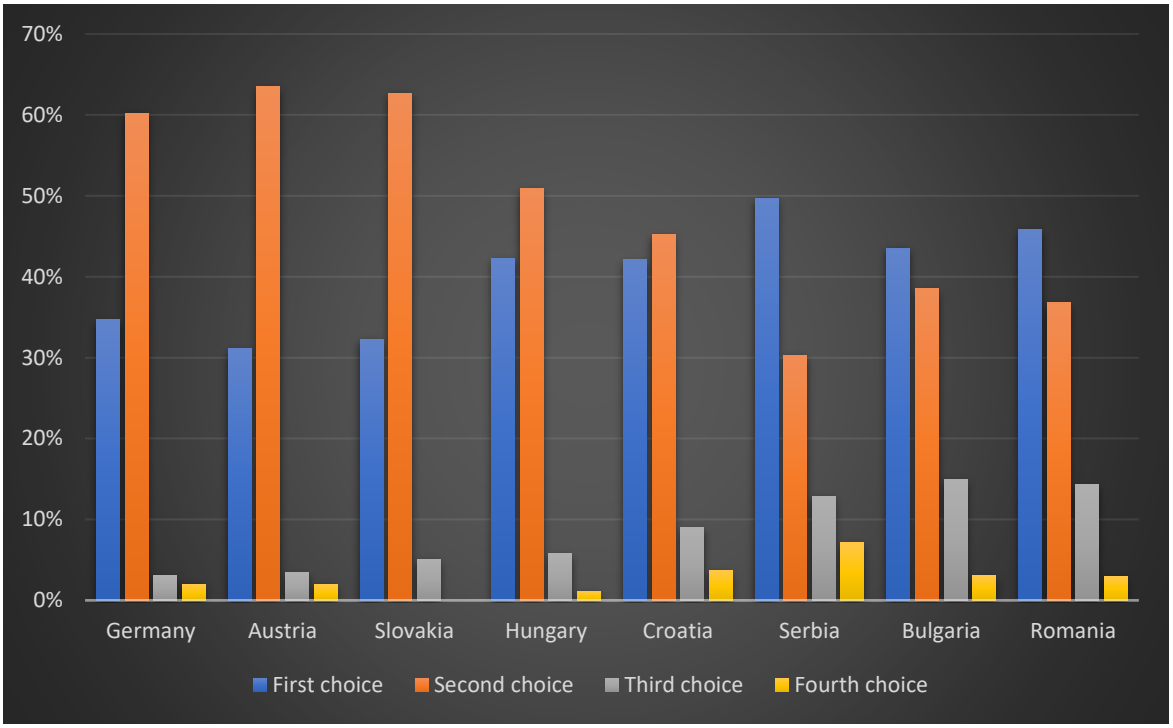
As already mentioned, the second photograph represented a restored riverbank with a high level of natural value.

Figure 6 - Second photograph - a restored riverbank



It can be noted that this photograph in most countries was chosen as the second choice, while in Romania and Serbia, it was most often listed as the first choice. Namely, in Romania, 45.9% of all respondents chose it as their first choice, while in Serbia this share amounted to 49.7%. These are the only two countries where this photo was more often chosen as more aesthetically appealing when compared to the first photograph.

Figure 7. Second photograph – distribution of choices (general population)



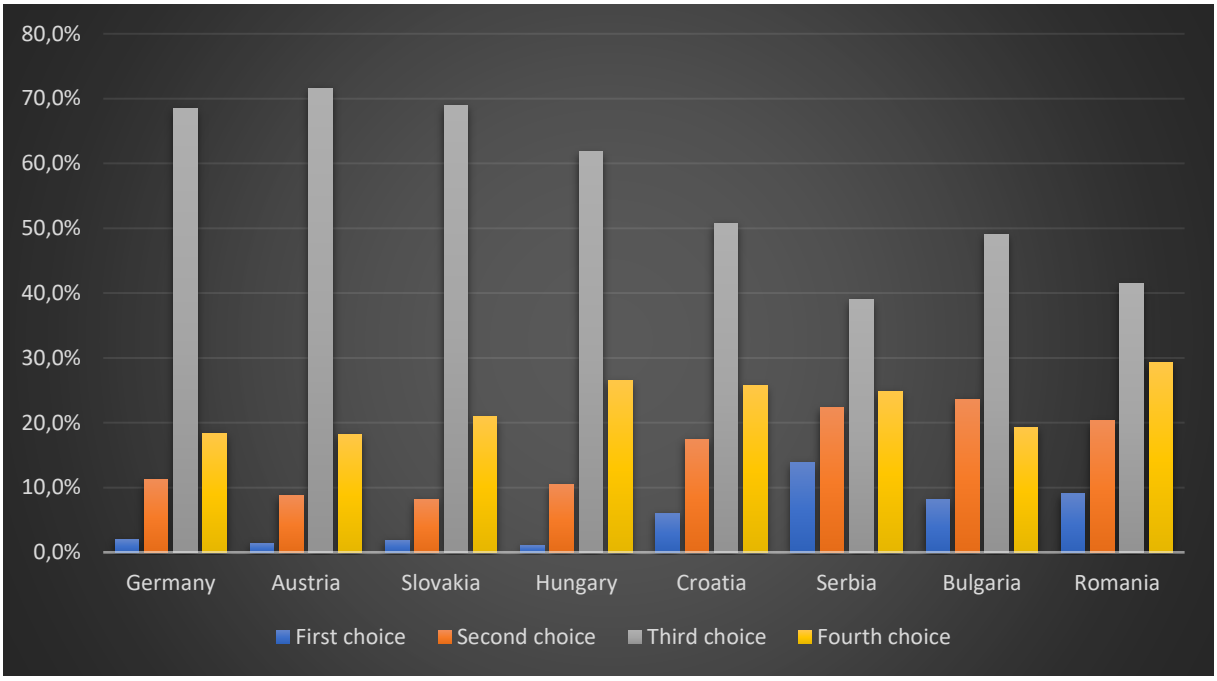
The third photograph, shown in Figure 8, represents an embanked riverbank with a low level of natural value.

Figure 8. Third photograph – an embanked riverbank



This photo was chosen as the third choice in all countries that participated in this study.

Figure 9. Third photograph – distribution of choices (general population)



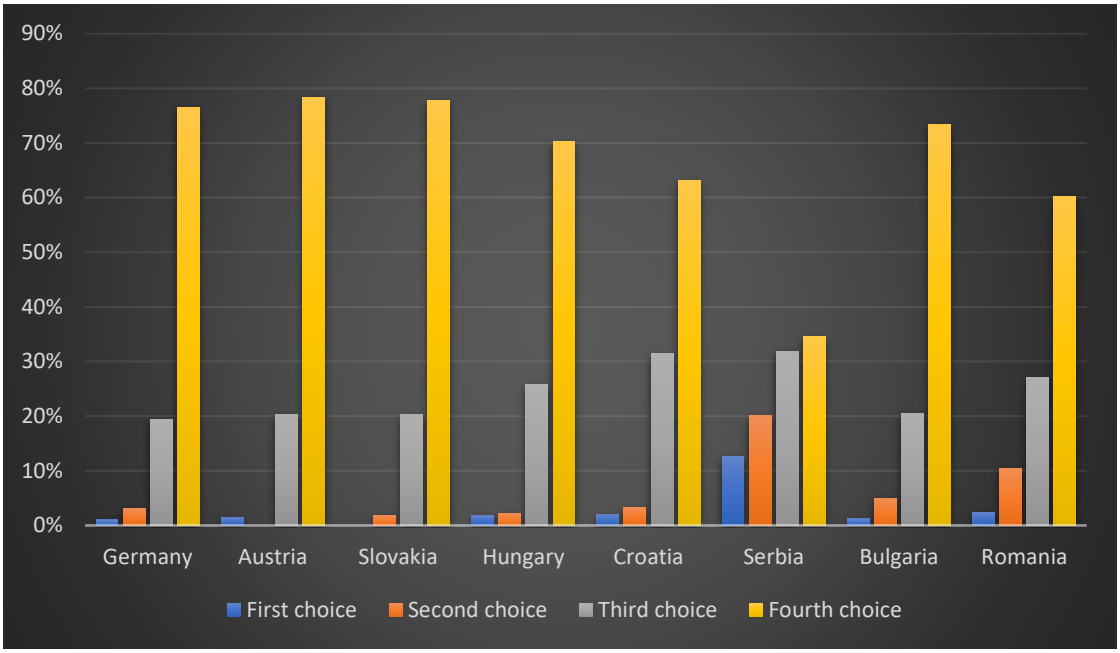
The fourth photograph (Figure 10) represents a strongly embanked riverbank with a very low level of natural value, and the negative perception of this kind of environment was confirmed in the respondents' rankings.

Figure 10. Fourth photograph - a strongly embanked riverbank



Namely, this photograph was chosen as the last (fourth) choice in all countries participating in this study (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Fourth photograph – distribution of choices (general population)



Overall, it can be concluded that the negative perception of the strongly embanked riverbank is more widespread in the countries on the upper course of the Danube (Germany, Austria, and Slovakia). In a similar vein, the positive perception of the riverbanks with a high level of natural value was also more common in those countries.

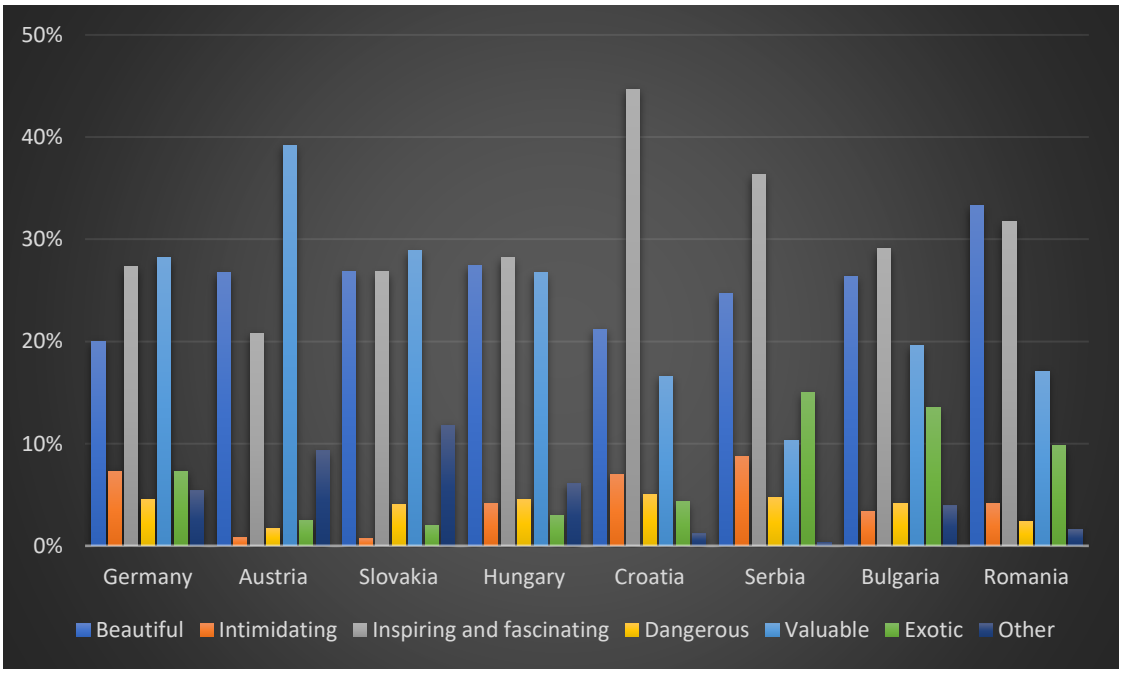
In the next survey question, respondents were shown a photograph of a river with good lateral connectivity (Figure 12), with a set of adjectives (beautiful, intimidating, inspiring and fascinating, dangerous, valuable, and exotic, with a task to choose the one among them that first comes to their mind when they see the photograph.

Figure 12. River with a good lateral conductivity



The results show that in four countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, and Serbia) the most commonly chosen option was „inspiring and fascinating“. „Valuable“ is most often chosen in Austria, Germany, and Slovakia, while in Romania beautiful was the most frequent answer. Overall, the positive associations were much more frequent than the negative ones.

Figure 13. River with a good lateral conductivity – associations (general population)



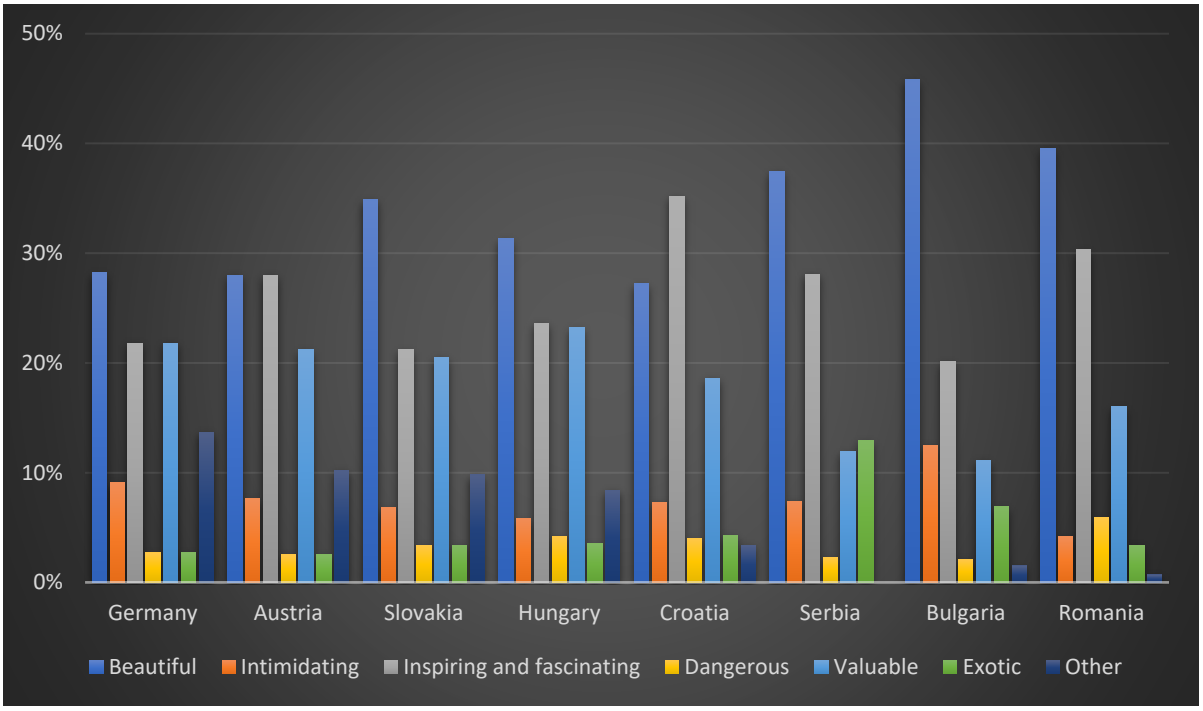
In the next survey question, respondents were shown a photograph of wild islands on the Danube (Figure 14), with the same list of adjectives as in the previous question.

Figure 14. Wild islands



In six countries (Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia) the most common answer was „beautiful “, and the second option was „inspiring and fascinating“, while only in Croatia this order was reversed. In Austria, both options received the same number of choices (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Wild islands – associations (general population)



2.7. Perceptions of the concept of naturalness of the environment

From Table 5, it can be seen that for the participants, a place with rich biodiversity and fascinating animals and plants represents the most important feature to determine whether a river is natural. Namely, the average score on the scale of importance that ranged from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important) is 4.58. This feature is the most important for respondents in all countries. The least important feature was „A place with none or few restrictions on my behaviour; for unrestrained or unconfined recreation".

Table 5. How relevant are the following characteristics to determine a river as natural? (general population)

	Germany	Austria	Slovakia	Hungary	Croatia	Serbia	Bulgaria	Romania	**Total**
A place with only natural sounds	4,09	4,10	4,21	4,40	4,08	3,97	4,22	4,31	**4,17**
A place with pure and clean water	4,30	4,40	4,48	4,67	4,21	4,23	4,51	4,52	**4,40**
A place where rivers and streams flow unimpeded, without river regulation	4,40	4,48	4,55	4,12	4,19	4,02	4,29	4,21	**4,23**

A place with little evidence of human occupation and modifications (buildings, dams…)	3,93	4,02	3,92	4,25	4,10	4,09	4,46	4,21	**4,13**
A place where natural conditions and processes exist and form the landscape	4,39	4,42	4,67	4,34	4,39	4,22	4,49	4,47	**4,40**
A place with none or few restrictions on my behaviour; for unrestrained or unconfined recreation	2,30	2,36	3,00	3,12	3,24	3,56	3,63	4,11	**3,22**
A place with rich biodiversity and fascinating animals and plants	4,55	4,65	4,80	4,64	4,57	4,35	4,72	4,48	**4,58**
A place without non-native animals and plants	3,48	3,46	3,69	4,06	3,52	3,42	3,83	3,37	**3,62**

2.8. Assessments of the importance and function of the naturalness of the river environment

When the factors that are important for the river to be assessed as natural are taken into account, it is evident that the statements that „natural rivers host rich biodiversity of characteristic animal and plant species“ (arithmetic mean is 4.53) and the statements that natural rivers promote local recreation by providing beautiful sites and landscapes (4.31) are assessed as the most important for the naturalness of the river environment. The statement that natural rivers create “green” jobs had the lowest degree of agreement (3.88).

Table 6. Importance of the naturalness of the river environment (from 1 – not important at all to 5 – very important) (general population)

	Germany	Austria	Slovakia	Hungary	Croatia	Serbia	Bulgaria	Romania	**Total**
Natural rivers host rich biodiversity of characteristic animal and plant species	4,58	4,76	4,78	4,73	4,37	4,23	4,75	4,44	**4,53**
Natural rivers help to prevent environmental pollution	3,86	3,83	4,17	3,71	4,07	4,01	4,27	4,24	**4,01**
Natural river flows contribute to prevent floodings	4,32	4,19	4,08	3,74	3,86	3,61	4,18	3,97	**3,91**
Natural rivers are important to reduce	4,23	4,24	4,56	4,20	4,13	3,99	4,49	4,15	**4,21**

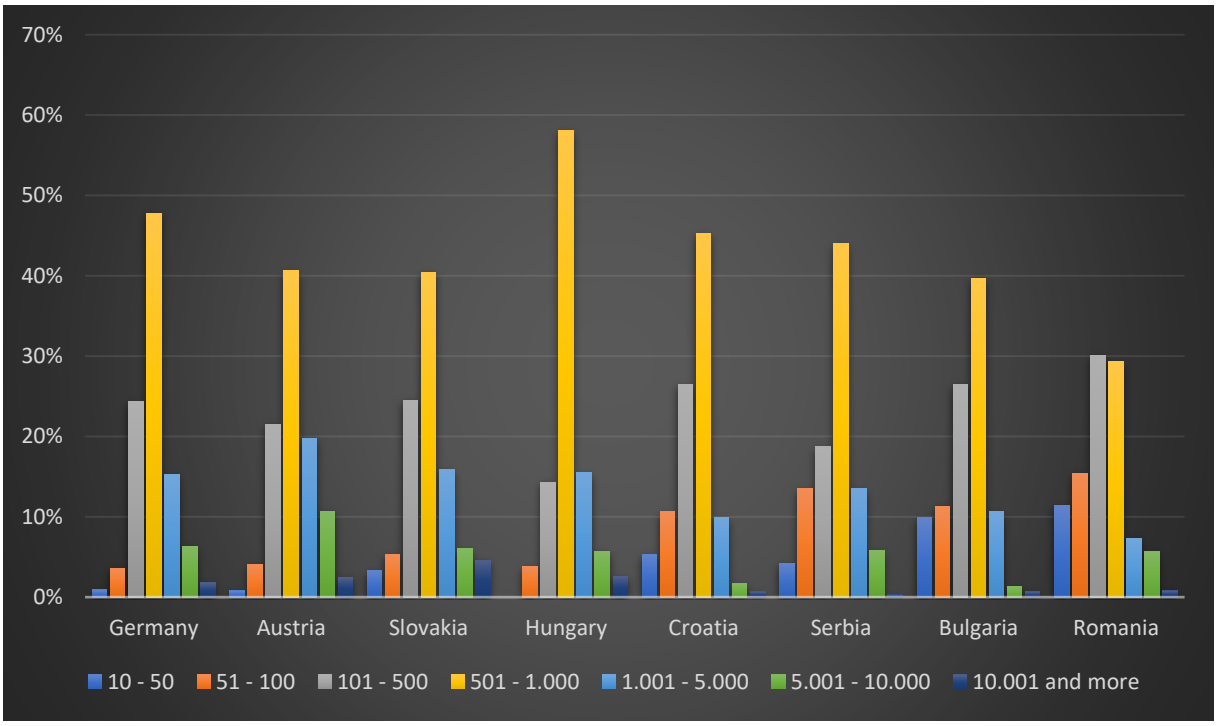
the negative impact of climate change									
Natural rivers support and promote local tourism	3,96	3,76	3,97	4,10	4,00	4,17	4,45	4,37	**4,10**
Natural rivers promote local recreation by providing beautiful sites and landscapes	4,29	4,33	4,28	4,43	4,14	4,22	4,59	4,30	**4,31**
Natural river create „green“ jobs	3,56	3,68	3,90	3,73	3,75	4,11	4,11	4,07	**3,88**

Here it also can be noted that the perception of a river as a method for the prevention of flooding is more common on the upper course of the Danube (Germany, Austria, and Slovakia) and in Bulgaria. On the other hand, the support for the statement that natural rivers support and promote local tourism is lower in the countries on the upper course of the Danube.

2.9. Estimates of the number of Danube islands and the state of their naturalness

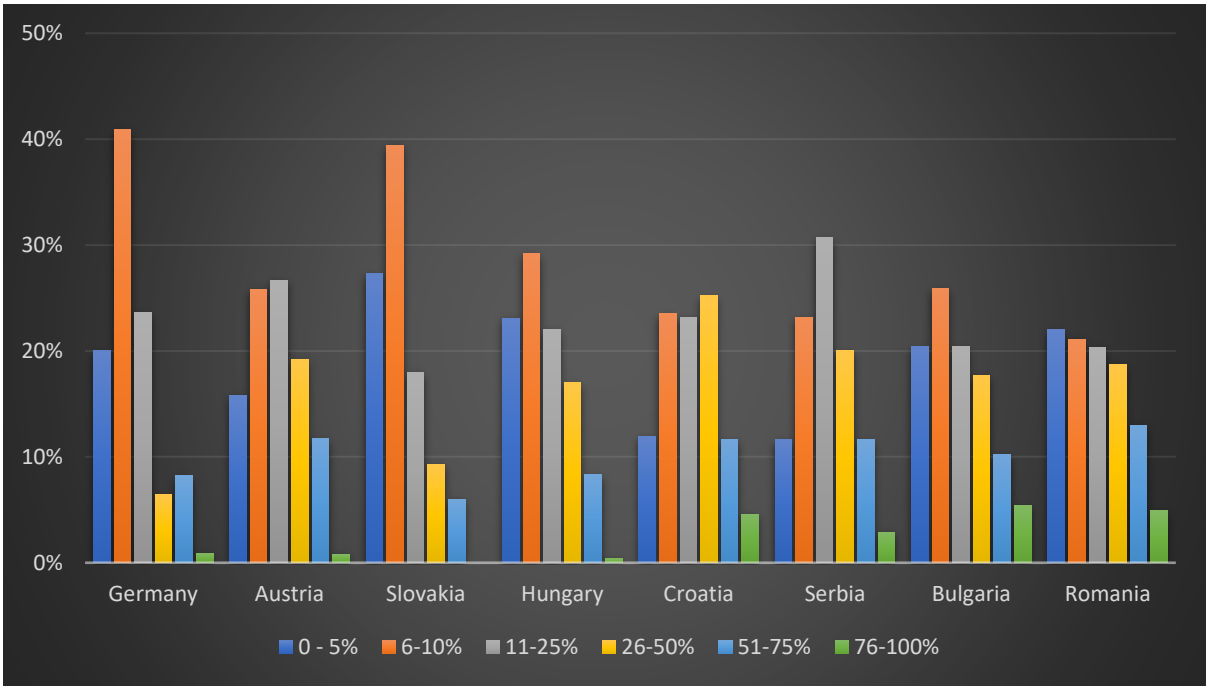
In the next question, the research participants were asked to estimate how many islands there are on the Danube River. As can be seen from Figure 16, in all countries except Romania, the largest share was obtained by the estimate according to which there are between 500 and 1000 such islands. Then follows the estimate according to which there are between 101 and 500 Danube islands, and only in Romania this order is reversed.

Figure 16. Estimate of the number of Danube islands (general population)



When it comes to the estimates of the number of natural and "wild" Danube islands, the largest share of responses in four countries (Hungary, Bulgaria, Germany, and Slovakia) estimated that there are between 6 and 10% of such islands. In two countries (Austria and Serbia) this estimate was from 11 to 25%, in Romania, the estimate was that there are less than 5% of such islands, while in Croatia the largest share of participants stated that between 26 and 50% of Danube islands are natural and "wild".

Figure 17. Estimate of the number of natural and „wild" Danube islands (general population)

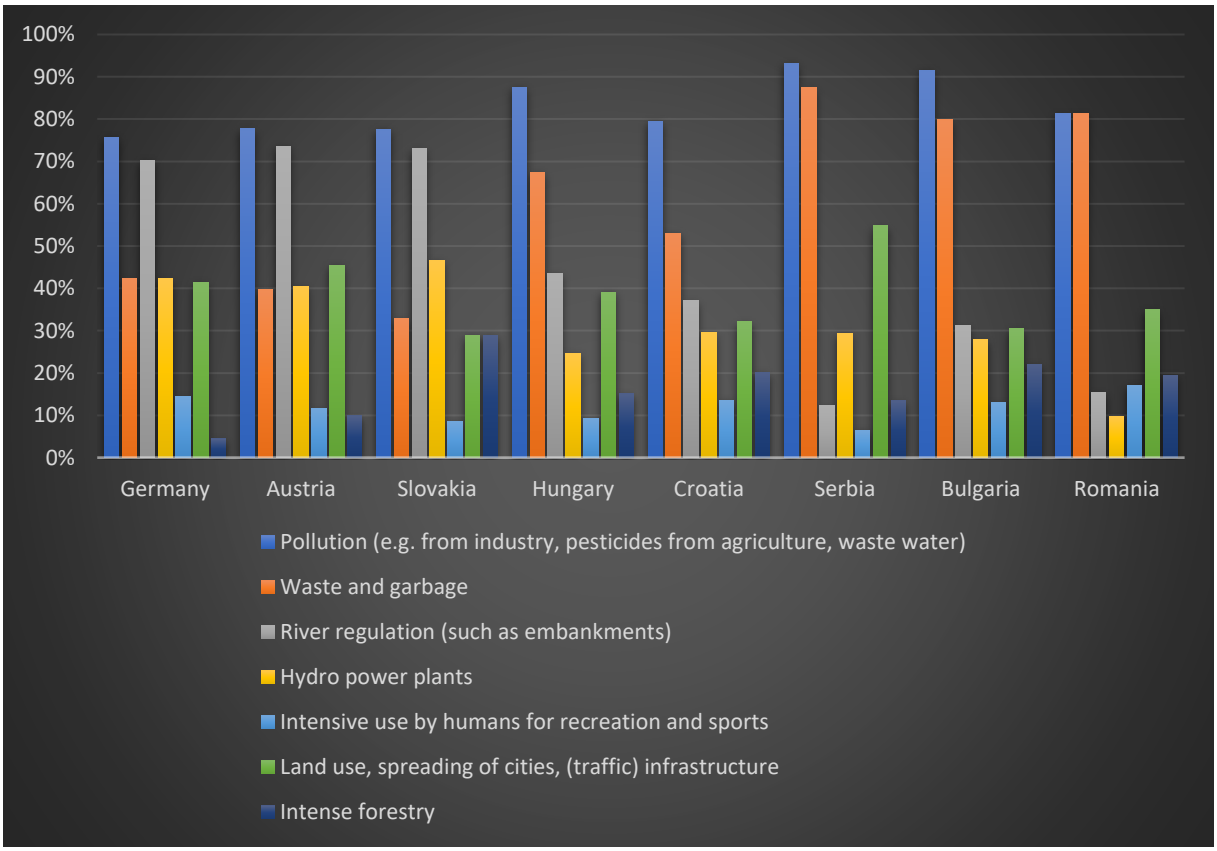


2.10. Assessments of threats and pressures regarding the naturalness of the river environment on the Danube

As can be seen from the following figure, pollution (e.g. from industry, pesticides from agriculture, wastewater) was assessed in all countries as the most important threat to the natural environment of the Danube River. Waste and garbage were assessed as the second most important threat in Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, and Serbia, while in Austria, Germany, and Slovakia the second most important threat was river regulation (such as embankments).

Here we also can note the differences between the countries on the upper course of the Danube and the other countries.

Figure 18. Threats and pressures regarding the naturalness of the river environment on the Danube (general population)



2.11. Assessments of the importance of the various conservation and restoration measures on the Danube

In the next part of the survey, research participants were offered a list of various conservation and restoration measures regarding the Danube River. All listed measures received a high degree of support, with wastewater treatment receiving the most support in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovakia, removal of trash in Croatia, Romania, and Serbia, while ecological river engineering: restoration of natural river banks, reconnection of side branch was the most supported measure in Austria and Germany (Table 7). Here as well we can see that the countries on the upper course of the Danube are more supportive when it comes to the measures for the restoration of the natural river banks.

Table 7. Importance of the conservation and restoration measures on the Danube (general population)

	Germany	Austria	Slovakia	Hungary	Croatia	Serbia	Bulgaria	Romania	**Total**
Ecological river engineering: Restoration of natural river banks, reconnection of side branche	4,58	4,69	4,76	4,55	4,33	4,14	4,39	4,20	**4,41**
Protection of species	4,51	4,66	4,66	4,69	4,57	4,49	4,83	4,63	**4,62**
New protected areas and strictly protected zone	4,16	4,32	4,24	4,30	4,30	4,33	4,61	4,48	**4,34**
Waste water treatment	4,52	4,61	4,75	4,80	4,57	4,59	4,84	4,55	**4,66**
Fish bypasses	4,17	4,28	4,34	4,16	4,28	4,32	4,56	4,10	**4,28**
Sustainable forestry	3,96	4,12	4,27	4,34	4,23	4,17	4,42	4,34	**4,24**
Sustainable tourism and nature education	3,98	4,04	4,34	4,31	4,18	4,27	4,53	4,48	**4,27**
Removal of trash	4,53	4,48	4,60	4,73	4,61	4,63	4,79	4,71	**4,64**

2.12. The level of support for the strict protection of the Danube islands

As can be noted from Table 8, the level of support for the strict protection of the Danube islands is very high in all participating countries. It can be seen that the proportion of the respondents who stated that they do not have an opinion about this issue is somewhat higher in Romania in comparison to other countries.

Table 8. The level of support for the strict protection of the Danube islands (general population)

	Germany	Austria	Slovakia	Hungary	Croatia	Serbia	Bulgaria	Romania	Total
Yes	86,5	92,6	86,2	91,7	89,4	83,5	90,1	74,8	87,3
No	4,5	1,6	5,2	3,8	3,0	3,0	1,3	0,0	2,9
Don't know, don't have an opinion	9,0	5,8	8,6	4,5	7,6	13,5	8,6	25,2	9,8

Similarly, the participants agree that access to strictly protected islands is prohibited to better preserve their sensitive nature (Table 9).

Table 9. The level of support for the prohibition of access to strictly protected islands (general population)

	Germany	Austria	Slovakia	Hungary	Croatia	Serbia	Bulgaria	Romania	Total
Yes	84,7	82,6	68,4	78,2	80,5	75,5	82,6	81,3	78,6
No	9,0	12,4	20,4	16,9	13,2	8,4	8,7	7,3	12,3
Don't know, don't have an opinion	6,3	5,0	11,2	4,9	6,3	16,1	8,7	11,4	9,1

2.13. Perception of the various organizations about their duties toward the Danube protection

In the next question, the participants were asked to name a maximum of three organizations that should be in charge of the wise use and management of the Danube.

Table 10. Which organizations should be in charge of the wise-use and management of the Danube?(general population)

	Germany	Austria	Slovakia	Hungary	Croatia	Romania	Serbia	Bulgaria	Romania	Total
Waterway administrations	28,8	38,8	28,9	21,9	34,8	32,0	46,8	27,3	32,0	33,3
Protected area administrations (national parks, etc.)	83,8	90,9	87,5	87,4	69,5	76,2	67,7	81,2	76,2	78,5
Cities, local municipalities and communities	35,1	19,0	34,9	43,0	44,0	29,5	50,6	42,2	29,5	40,3
Ministries and water authorities	37,8	33,9	59,9	74,8	46,7	57,4	59,4	48,7	57,4	54,9
International organizations	25,2	33,1	23,0	31,5	26,5	13,9	32,9	37,0	13,9	28,8
Fishermen´s organizations	11,7	9,9	13,8	11,5	9,9	12,3	18,4	14,3	12,3	13,0
Non-governmental organizations	27,0	24,8	25,0	9,3	15,2	20,5	14,8	18,2	20,5	17,4

From Table 10, it can be concluded that in all countries, research participants believe that protected area administrations (national parks, etc.) should be the most important type of organization that should be entrusted with this task. In all countries, ministries and water authorities were listed as the second most important organization, while fishermen's organizations received the least number of votes in all countries.

2.14. The level of awareness about various programs, institutions, and funding instruments related to the Danube protection

When it comes to the level of awareness about various programs, institutions, and funding instruments related to the Danube protection, the largest number of citizens are familiar with UNESCO as an organization, as well as with protected areas on the Danube in their own country.

Table 11. Have you ever heard of these institutions, programmes and funding instruments? (general population)

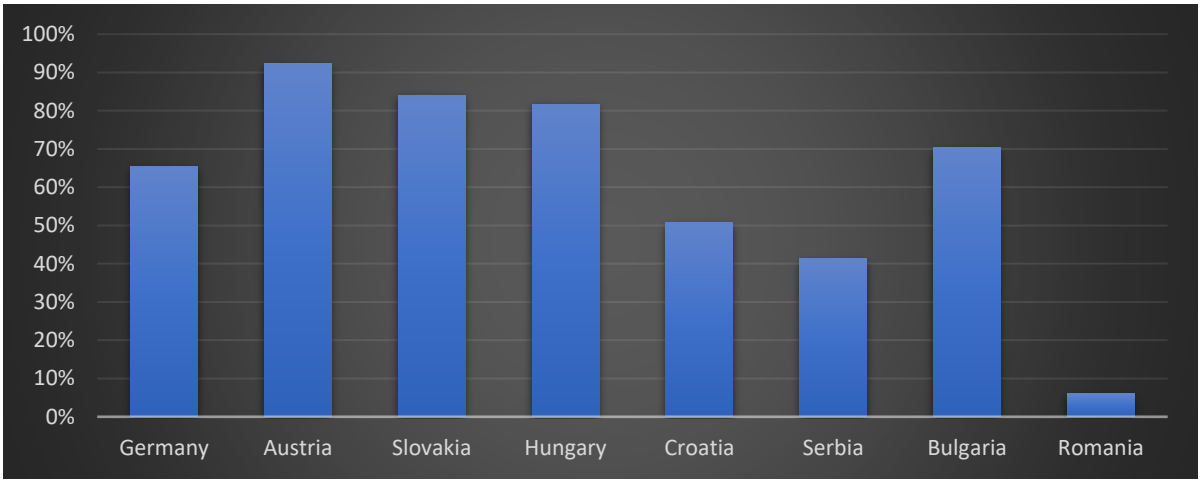
	Germany	Austria	Slovakia	Hungary	Croatia	Serbia	Bulgaria	Romania	All
ICPDR International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River									
Yes	18,1	25,0	25,5	34,3	39,7	19,3	33,1	15,4	28,0
No	75,5	64,4	52,5	49,2	48,0	61,0	54,2	65,8	56,6
Do not know/ Not sure	6,4	10,6	22,0	16,5	12,3	19,7	12,7	18,8	15,4
EU Strategy for the Danube River									
Yes	29,4	32,4	37,1	40,6	49,7	26,1	58,7	19,8	37,8
No	62,4	53,3	51,0	43,9	44,7	55,8	30,8	60,3	49,3
Do not know/ Not sure	8,3	14,3	11,9	15,6	5,6	18,1	10,5	19,8	12,9
UNESCO									
Yes	97,3	97,1	95,1	97,6	96,0	94,2	95,8	86,3	95,2
No	1,8	1,0	1,4	1,2	2,6	2,3	1,4	7,7	2,3
Do not know/ Not sure	0,9	1,9	3,5	1,2	1,3	3,5	2,8	6,0	2,5
RAMSAR Convention									
Yes	31,4	40,0	57,3	62,0	42,7	21,9	40,1	10,3	39,2
No	61,9	51,4	34,3	29,0	49,4	66,8	47,2	69,0	50,5
Do not know/ Not sure	6,7	8,6	8,4	9,0	7,9	11,3	12,7	20,7	10,3
DANUBEPARKS The Danube River Network of Protected Areas									
Yes	47,3	42,3	35,9	33,7	50,7	21,9	52,8	15,3	36,9
No	40,9	46,2	43,7	53,7	40,1	61,0	34,7	65,0	49,1
Do not know/ Not sure	11,8	11,5	20,4	12,6	9,2	17,1	12,5	19,7	14,0
Natura 2000 Network									
Yes	55,5	78,1	84,0	94,4	64,2	23,9	89,0	21,4	62,1
No	40,0	18,1	10,4	2,8	31,5	61,6	8,3	59,8	30,6
Do not know/ Not sure	4,5	3,8	5,6	2,8	4,3	14,5	2,7	18,8	7,3
LIFE programme – the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action									
Yes	35,5	51,5	69,5	73,0	53,3	13,9	52,4	16,4	45,5
No	57,3	37,1	20,1	23,0	37,8	69,0	37,1	61,2	43,3
Do not know/ Not sure	7,2	11,4	10,4	4,0	8,9	17,1	10,5	22,4	11,2
Park prirode Kopački rit/Donau-Auen National Park, Gornje Podunavlje, Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve…									
Yes	47,7	88,6	94,4	98,0	87,4	65,2	69,4	61,0	78,5
No	37,8	5,7	4,2	0,8	9,9	24,5	22,9	22,9	15,0
Do not know/ Not sure	14,4	5,7	1,4	1,2	2,6	10,3	7,6	16,1	6,5
River Conservation Fund									
Yes	15,5	15,2	16,2	20,4	41,1	45,2	52,8	74,1	36,1
No	75,5	76,2	54,2	63,3	41,7	39,4	33,1	14,7	48,0
Do not know/ Not sure	9,1	8,6	29,6	16,3	17,2	15,5	14,1	11,2	15,9

A significant number of citizens have heard of the Natura 2000 Network, bearing in mind that only in Romania and Serbia, less than half of the participants have heard of this program. The least known is the ICPDR International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, which in none of the countries has been familiar to more than half of the research participants.

2.15. The level of awareness about the Danube protected areas

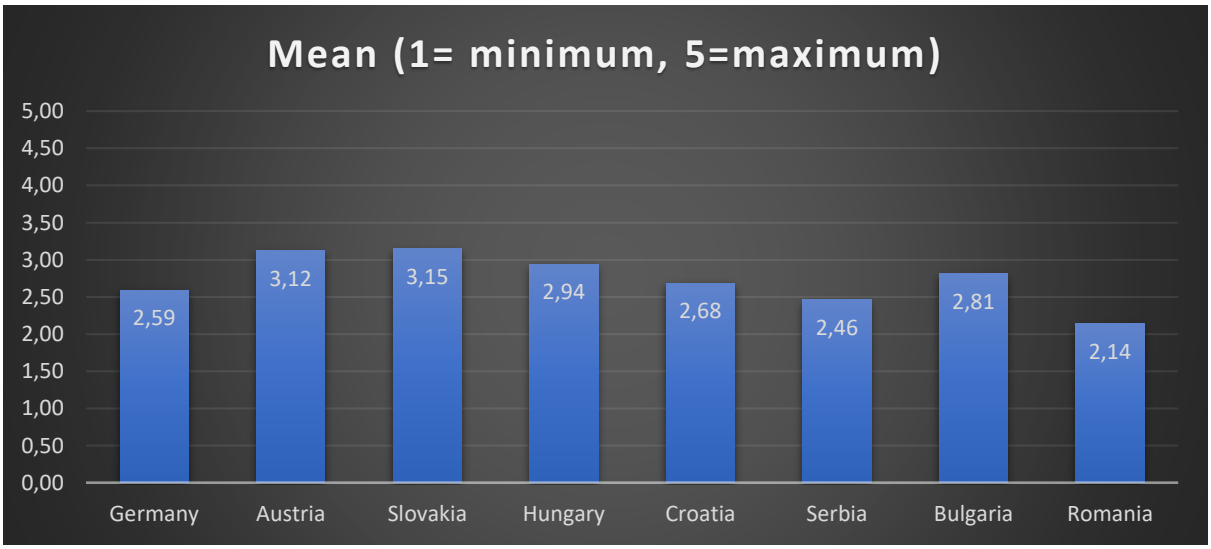
In the next question, the respondents were asked to state whether they knew any of the Danube-protected areas (Figure 19). The level of awareness was the highest in Austria (92.3%), followed by Slovakia (84.0%), and Hungary (81.7%).

Figure 19. Do you know any protected area(s) at the Danube? (general population)



In the next question, the participants were asked to express how well they feel informed about the Danube protected areas in their country, on a one-to-five-point scale running from „not informed at all“ to „very well informed“. From Figure 20, we can conclude in all but two (Austria and Slovakia) countries the respondents feel that they are not well informed. Namely, in all other countries, the average result falls below the centre point of the scale (3).

Figure 20. How well do you feel informed about the Danube-protected areas in your country? (general population)



2.16. The level and type of support for the Danube natural islands

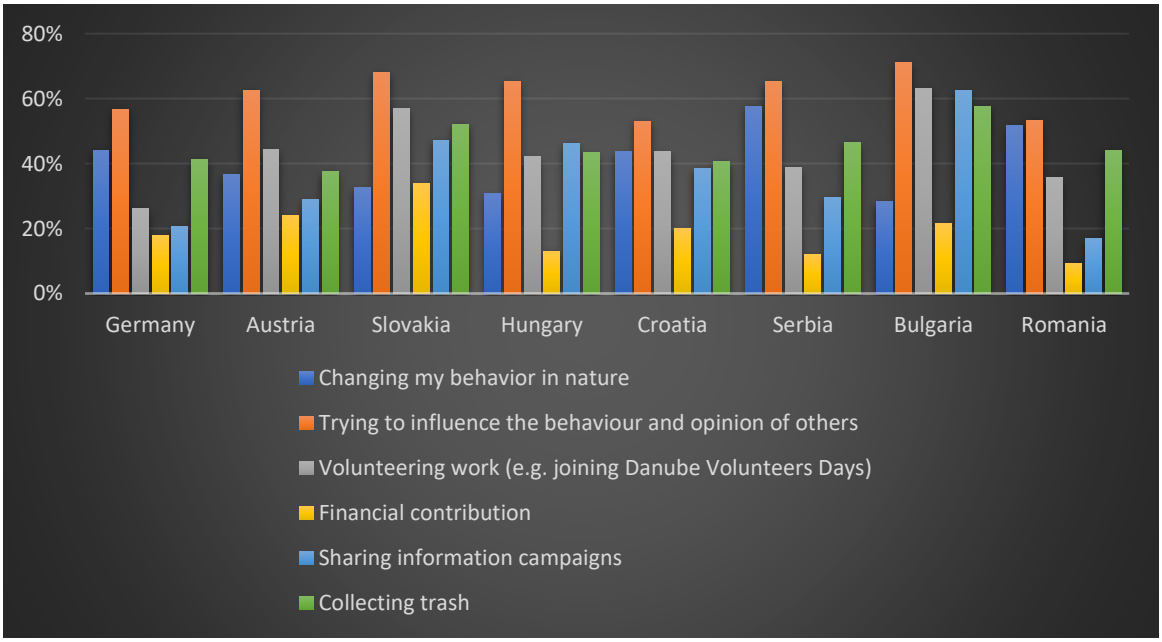
From Table 12, we can note that a large majority of the respondents support or absolutely support conservation actions for the Danube and its nature, such as natural islands.

Table 12. Are you in favour of conservation actions for the Danube and its nature such as the natural islands? (general population)

	Germany	Austria	Slovakia	Hungary	Croatia	Serbia	Bulgaria	Romania	Total
Absolutely	29,1	31,7	46,8	47,0	46,7	36,5	39,3	37,3	40,8
Yes	48,2	62,5	48,9	48,6	46,7	47,7	59,3	50,8	50,2
Not that much	20,9	5,8	3,5	4,4	6,6	14,2	1,4	11,0	8,4
Absolutely not	1,8	0,0	0,7	0,0	0,0	1,6	0,0	0,0	0,6

In the next question, the participants were given a list of activities with which they could contribute to the conservation of the Danube and its islands: changing their behavior in nature, trying to influence the behaviours and opinions of others, volunteering work (e.g. joining Danube Volunteers Days), etc. In all countries, „trying to influence the behaviors and opinions of others“ was the activity chosen by more than 50% of the participants. „Changing my behaviour in nature“ was chosen by more than half of the participants in Romania and Serbia, „volunteering work (e.g. joining Danube Volunteers Days)“ by more than half of the participants in Bulgaria and Slovakia, while „sharing information campaigns“ and „collecting trash“ was chosen by more than half of the participants only in Bulgaria. The financial contribution was endorsed by 34.0% of the participants in Slovakia.

Figure 21. How can you imagine contributing to the conservation of the Danube and its islands and nature? (general population)



3. Local community

3.1. Research sample

The following table shows the number of research participants by country. The total of four countries (Croatia, Germany, Romania, and Serbia) participated in this part of the research (208 respondents in total).

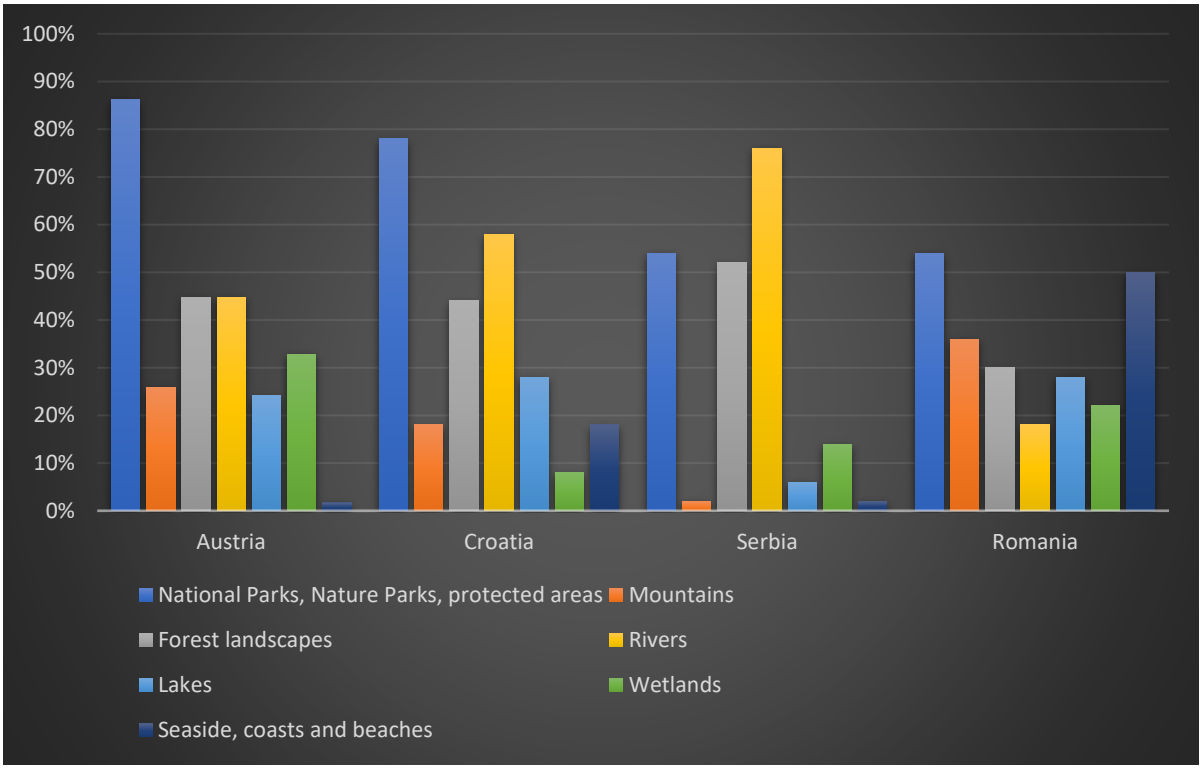
Table 13. Sample size – by countries (local community)

Country	Austria	Croatia	Romania	Serbia	Total
N	58	50	50	50	208

3.2. Associations related to the natural environment of the region where a person lives

In the first question in the survey, the participants were asked to think about natural landscapes in their region and to name a maximum of three ones that they are particularly proud of. It can be seen that in the case of three countries (Austria, Croatia, and Romania) people are proudest of national parks, nature parks, and other protected areas. In Serbia, the most common choice was "rivers".

Figure 22. If you think of natural landscapes in your region, which ones are you proud of (choose up to 3 options)? (local community)



As a continuation, in the second question, the participants were asked to list spontaneous associations that come to mind when they think about natural landscapes in their region. It can be noted that the associations related to the Danube were most commonly cited in all four countries (Table 14).

Table 14. Spontaneous associations related to the natural landscapes in the region (local community)

Country	Top three answers by frequencies
Austria	Donau-Auen National Park (16) Danube floodplains (15) Lobau (15)
Croatia	Kopački rit (28) National parks (3) Swamps (3)
Serbia	Gornje Podunavlje (15) Danube (10) Rivers (8)
Romania	Danube delta (9) Black Sea (9) Mountains/hills (8)

3.3. Free associations related to the Danube River

Similarly, as in the second question, the participants were asked to state the spontaneous associations that come to their minds when they think of the Danube River. We can note that associations in Austria were mainly related to the Danube floodplains, and in Croatia to fishing.

Table 15. Spontaneous associations related to the Danube River (local community)

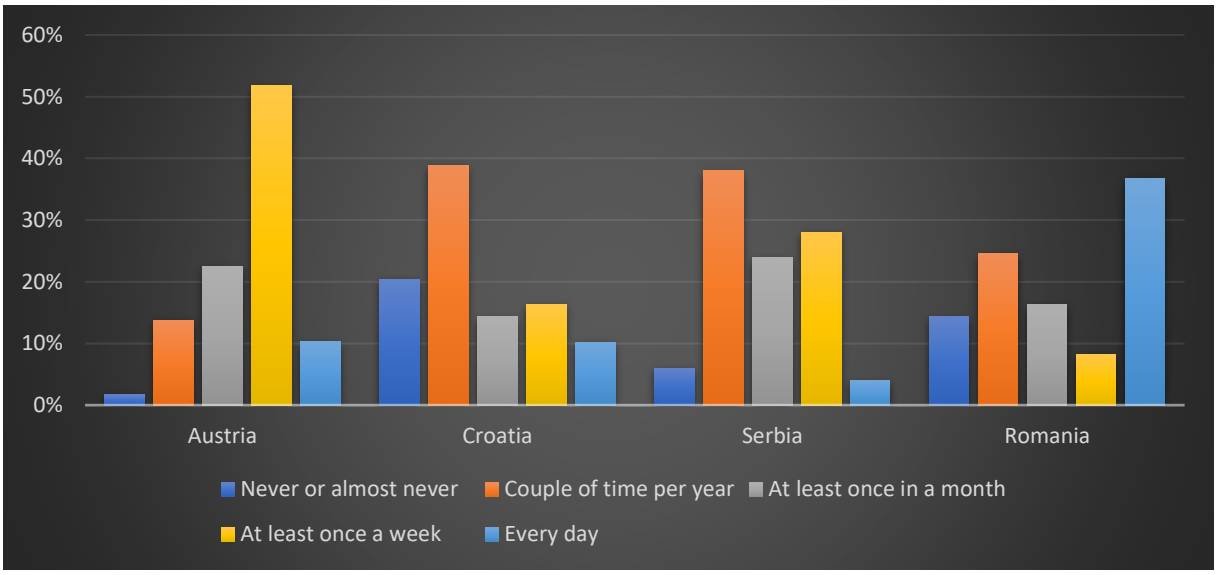
Country	Top three answers by frequencies
Austria	Danube floodplains (8) Danube island (4) Vienna (3)
Croatia	Fishing (16) Boats/sailing (5) Swimming (4)
Serbia	Peace and relaxation (10) Fishing (9) Clean/fresh air and water (5)
Romania	Danube delta (7) Fishes (7) Flora and fauna (4) Pollution/garbage (4)

In Romania, the most commonly cited associations were connected to the Danube delta and fishing, while in Serbia the most commonly cited associations are related to peace and relaxation (Table 15).

3.4. Frequency of visiting the Danube area

The frequency of visits to the Danube varies greatly by country, which is to be expected considering the differences in the geographical area occupied by the Danube and the importance of this river in each country. Namely, in Romania, about 37% of the respondents visit the Danube every day, while in Serbia this goes only for 4% of the participants.

Figure 23. Frequency of visiting the Danube area (local community)



3.5. Assessments of the importance of individual functions of the Danube River

From Table 16, it can be concluded that ecosystems for rich biodiversity and habitats for protected species are, according to the research participants, the most important functions of the Danube River.

Table 16. Assessments of the importance of individual functions of the Danube River (means) (local community)

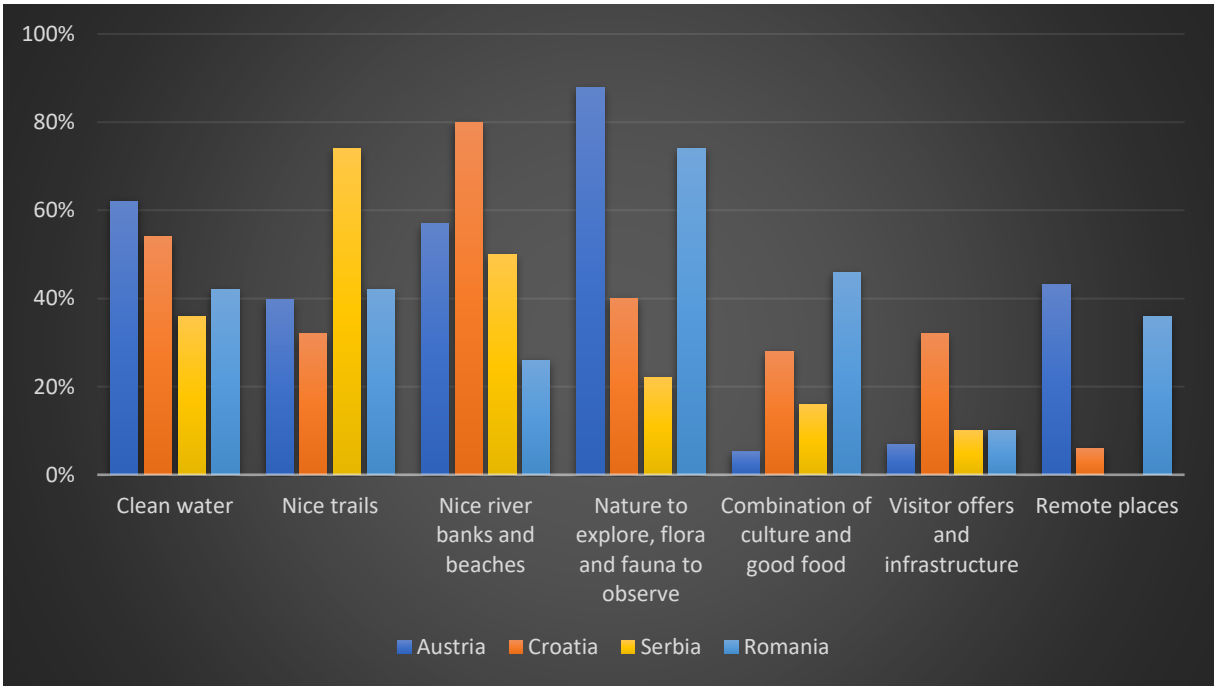
	Austria	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	**Total**
Area for recreation and sports activities	3.84	3,80	4,42	4,23	**4,06**
Ecosystem for rich biodiversity	4,83	4,35	4,82	4,59	**4,66**
Habitat for protected species	4,79	4,48	4,80	4,53	**4,66**
Source for (drinking) water	3,54	4,22	4,11	4,31	**4,02**
Source for (renewable) energy production	3,05	4,08	4,27	4,29	**3,89**
Forestry (timber production) and hunting	2,14	4,20	4,35	3,47	**3,49**
Fishing and angling	2,27	4,29	4,61	4,39	**3,83**
Tourism destination	3,15	4,36	4,62	4,50	**4,12**
Transport route	3,09	3,59	4,41	4,61	**3,90**

Integrative and inspiring lifeline for many different countries and cultures	3,50	3,94	4,57	4,14	**4,01**

The function of forestry (timber production) and hunting is the least important, and it can be added that the participants of all countries share a fairly similar opinion when it comes to the importance of the listed functions of the Danube.

In the next question, research participants were asked to list a maximum of three things that are important to them when visiting the Danube. In Austria and Romania, nature to explore, flora and fauna to observe are the most important things for respondents when visiting the Danube. In Serbia, on the other hand, nice trails are the most important to the research participants, while in Croatia this goes for nice river banks and beaches.

Figure 24. Important things when visiting the Danube (local community)



3.6. Assessments of the aesthetic appeal of certain forms of the river environment

In the first question, the respondents were given a task to rank four photos with varying levels of embankment/natural value. The first photo represented an intact riverbank („wild island“), with a very high level of natural value. The second photo showed a restored riverbank with a high level of natural value. The third photo represented an embanked riverbank with a low level

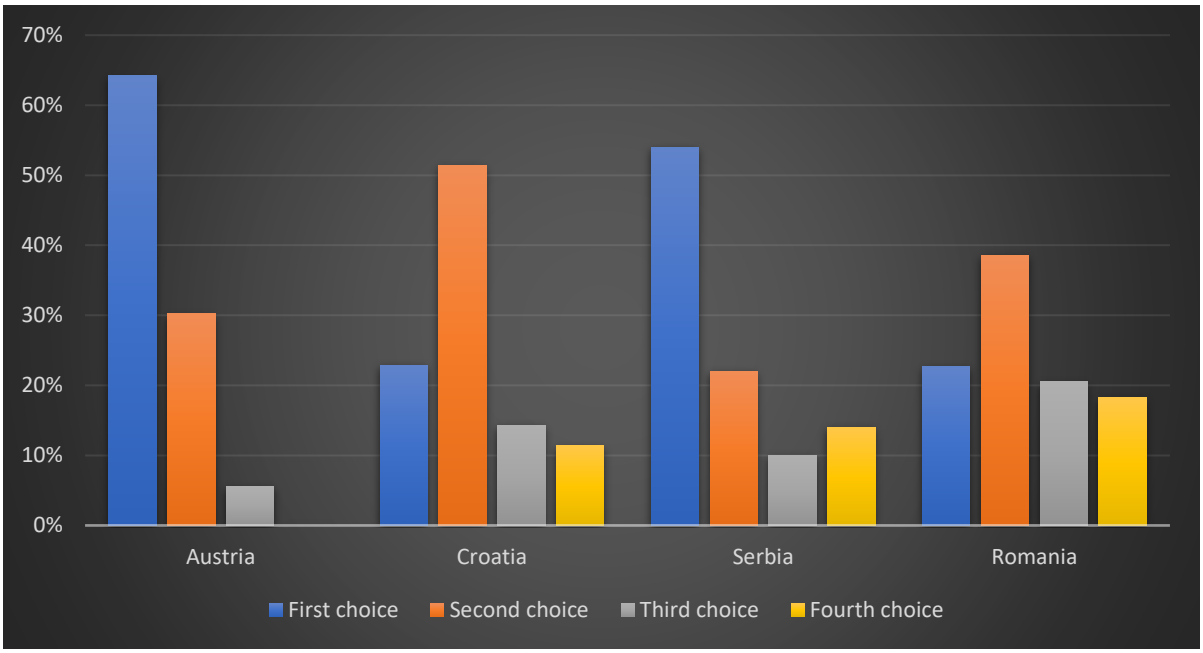
of natural value, while the fourth photo represented a strongly embanked riverbank with a very low level of natural value.

Figure 25. First photograph – an intact riverbank



It can be seen that the photograph of the first environment (an intact riverbank) was chosen as the first choice by more than 50% of all respondents in Austria and Serbia, while in Croatia and Romania, this environment was the second choice of the respondents (Figure 26).

Figure 26. First photograph – distribution of choices (local community)



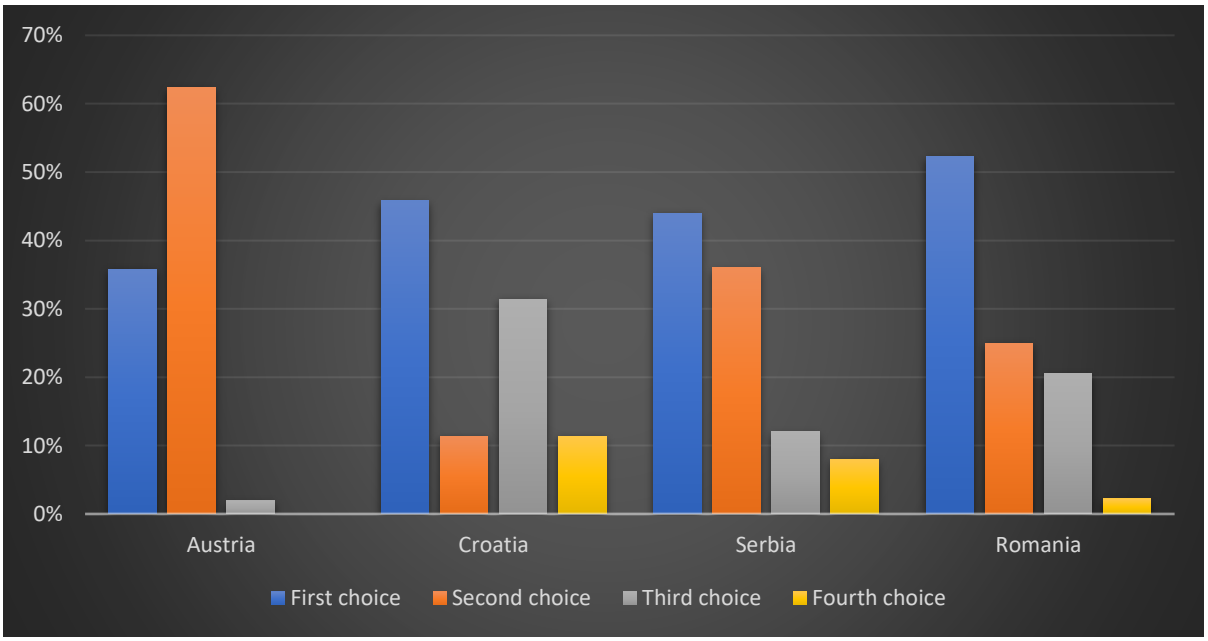
As already mentioned, the second photograph represented a restored riverbank with a high level of natural value.

Figure 27 - Second photograph - a restored riverbank



It can be noted that this photograph in Austria was chosen as the second choice, while in the remaining three countries, it was most often listed as the first choice (Figure 28).

Figure 28. Second photograph – distribution of choices (local community)



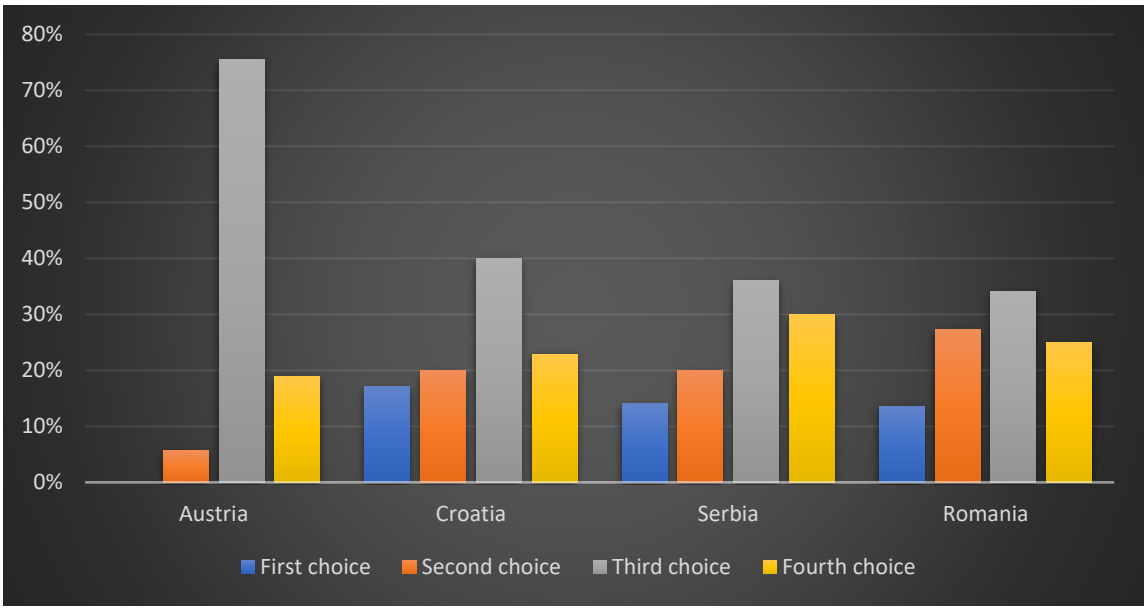
The third photograph, shown in Figure 29, represents an embanked riverbank with a low level of natural value.

Figure 29. Third photograph – an embanked riverbank



This photograph was chosen as the third choice in all countries that participated in this study (Figure 30).

Figure 30. Third photograph – distribution of choices (local community)



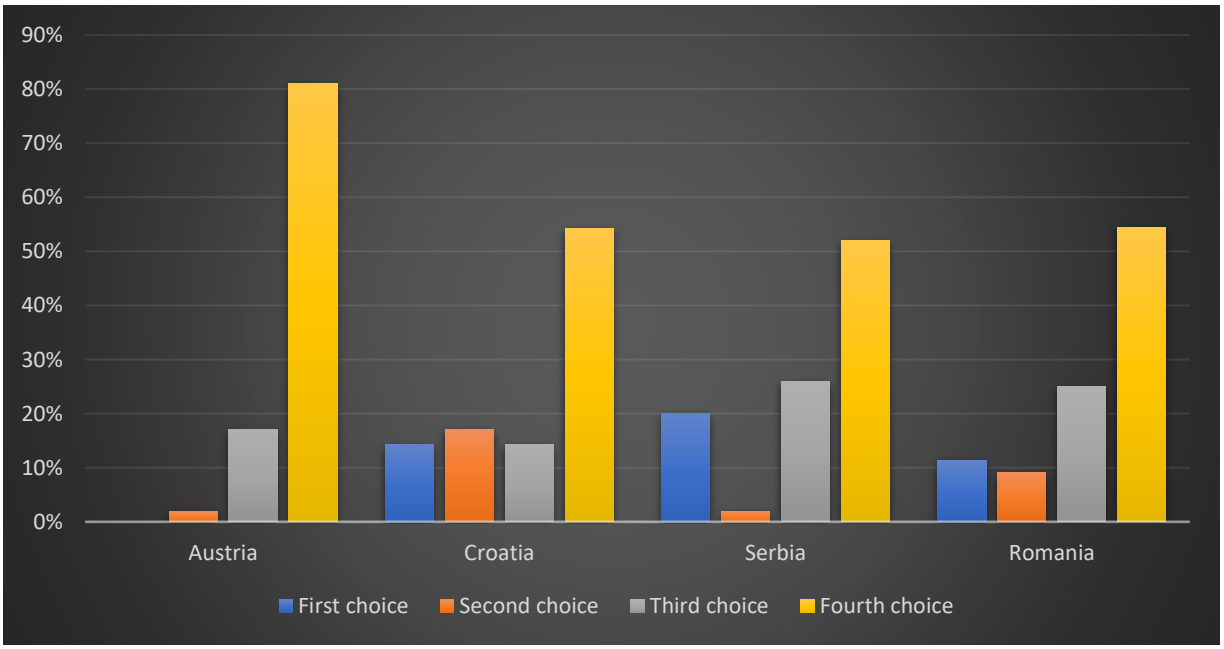
The fourth photograph (Figure 31) represents a strongly embanked riverbank with a very low level of natural value, and the negative perception of this kind of environment was confirmed in the respondents' rankings.

Figure 31. Fourth photograph - a strongly embanked riverbank



Namely, this photograph was chosen as the last (fourth) choice in all countries participating in this study (Figure 32). However, here it can be emphasized that the negative perception was the most widespread in Austria.

Figure 32. Fourth photograph – distribution of choices (local community)



In the next survey question, respondents were shown a photograph of a river with good lateral connectivity (Figure 33), with a set of adjectives (beautiful, intimidating, inspiring and

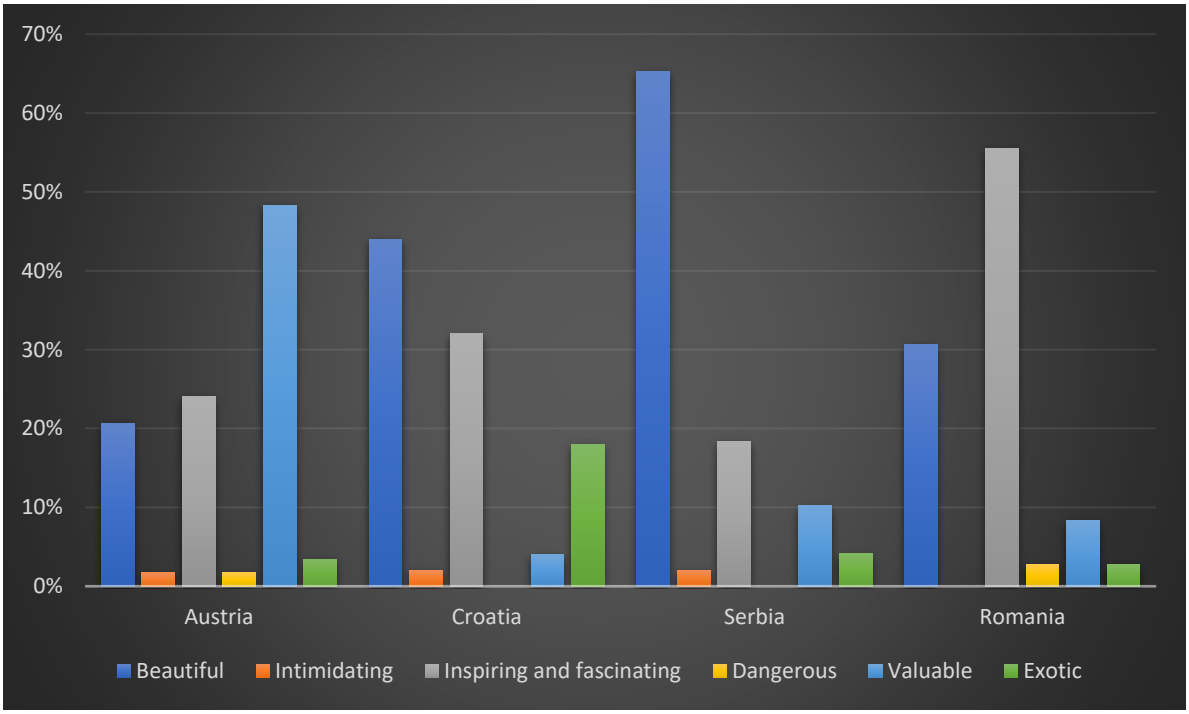
fascinating, dangerous, valuable, and exotic, with a task to choose the one among them that first comes to their mind when they see the photograph.

Figure 33. River with a good lateral connectivity



The results show that in Croatia and Serbia the most commonly chosen option was „beautiful". „Valuable" is most often chosen in Austria, Germany, and Slovakia, while in Romania „inspiring and fascinating" was the most frequent answer. Overall, the positive associations were much more frequent than the negative ones.

Figure 34. River with a good lateral conductivity – associations (local community)



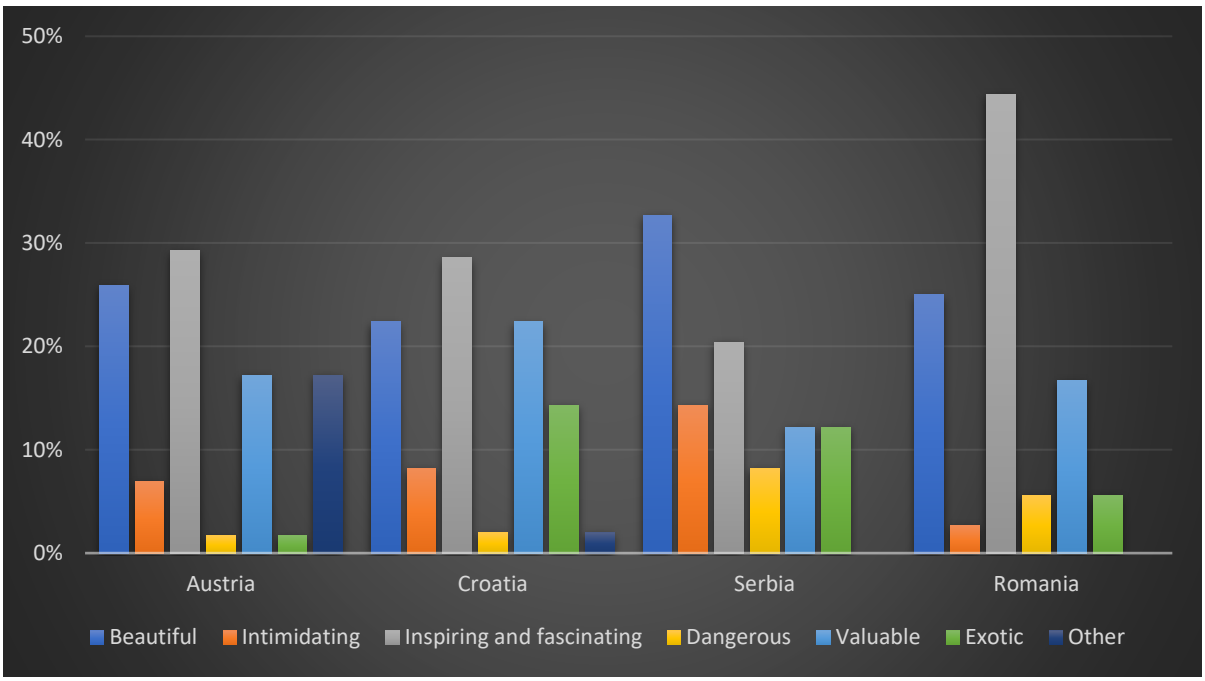
In the next survey question, respondents were shown a photograph of wild islands on the Danube (Figure 35), with the same list of adjectives as in the previous question.

Figure 35. Wild islands



In three countries (Austria, Croatia, and Romania) the most common answer was „inspiring and fascinating ", and the second option was „beautiful", while only in Serbia the order was reversed (Figure 36).

Figure 36. Wild islands – associations (local community)



3.7. Perceptions of the concept of naturalness of the environment

From Table 17, it can be seen that for the participants of the research study, a place with rich biodiversity and fascinating animals and plants represents the most important feature to determine whether a river is natural. Namely, the average score on the scale of importance that ranged from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important) is 4.61. This feature is the most important for respondents in all countries except in Serbia, where „a place with pure and clean water" had a slightly higher average acceptance. The least important feature was „A place with none or few restrictions on my behaviours; for unrestrained or unconfined recreation".

Table 17. How relevant are the following characteristics to determine a river as natural? (local community)

	Austria	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	**Total**
A place with only natural sounds	4,28	3,84	4,34	4,37	**4,21**
A place with pure and clean water	4,48	3,58	4,45	4,56	**4,28**
A place where rivers and streams flow unimpeded, without river regulation	4,69	3,90	3,98	4,15	**4,20**
A place with little evidence of human occupation and modifications (buildings, dams…)	4,17	3,90	4,29	4,17	**4,13**
A place where natural conditions and processes exist and form the landscape	4,54	4,25	4,45	4,44	**4,42**
A place with none or few restrictions on my behaviour; for unrestrained or unconfined recreation	2,02	3,59	3,89	3,81	**3,26**
A place with rich biodiversity and fascinating animals and plants	4,76	4,40	4,70	4,54	**4,61**
A place without non-native animals and plants	3,62	3,58	3,84	3,31	**3,60**

3.8. Assessments of the importance and function of the naturalness of the river environment

When the factors that are important in order for the river to be assessed as natural are taken into account, it is evident that the statements that „natural rivers host rich biodiversity of characteristic animal and plant species" (arithmetic mean is 4.53) and the statements that natural rivers promote local recreation by providing beautiful sites and landscapes (4.34) were assessed as the most important for the naturalness of the river environment. The statement that natural rivers create "green" jobs had the lowest degree of agreement (3.88).

Table 18. Importance of the naturalness of the river environment (from 1 – not important at all to 5 – very important) (local community)

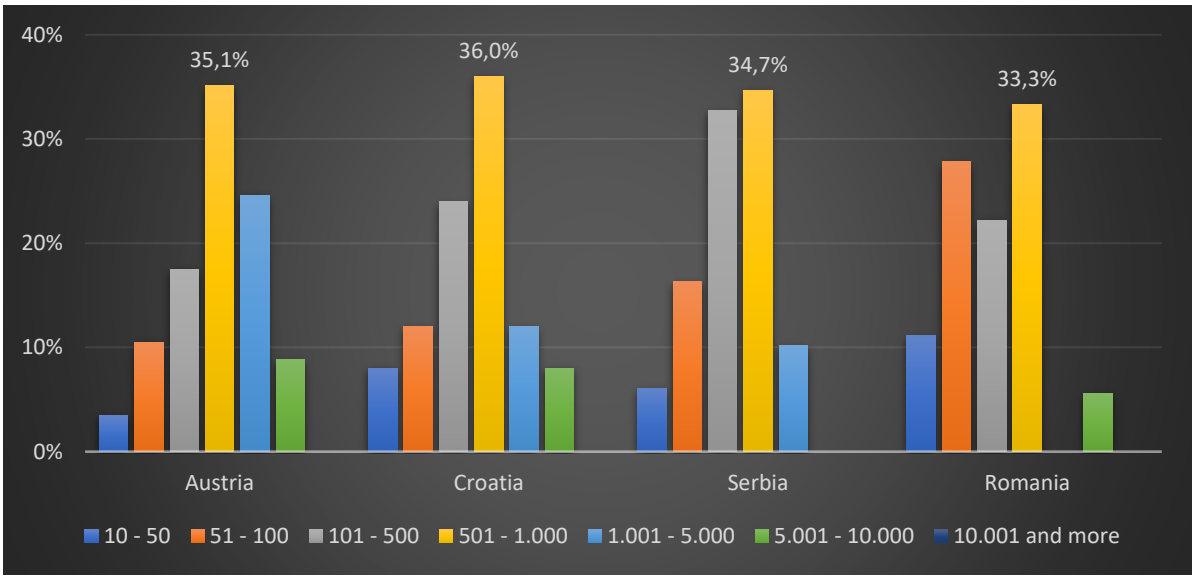
	Austria	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	**Total**
Natural rivers host rich biodiversity of characteristic animal and plant species	4,64	4,31	4,66	4,46	**4,53**
Natural rivers help to prevent environmental pollution	3,88	4,16	4,36	4,22	**4,12**
Natural river flows contribute to prevent floodings	4,12	3,76	4,02	4,00	**3,98**
Natural rivers are important to reduce the negative impact of climate change	4,14	3,90	4,14	4,19	**4,09**
Natural rivers support and promote local tourism	3,48	4,14	4,48	4,24	**4,05**

Natural rivers promote local recreation by providing beautiful sites and landscapes	4,24	4,26	4,58	4,27	**4,34**
Natural river create „green“ jobs	3,50	3,70	4,36	3,92	**3,85**

3.9. Estimates of the number of Danube islands and the state of their naturalness

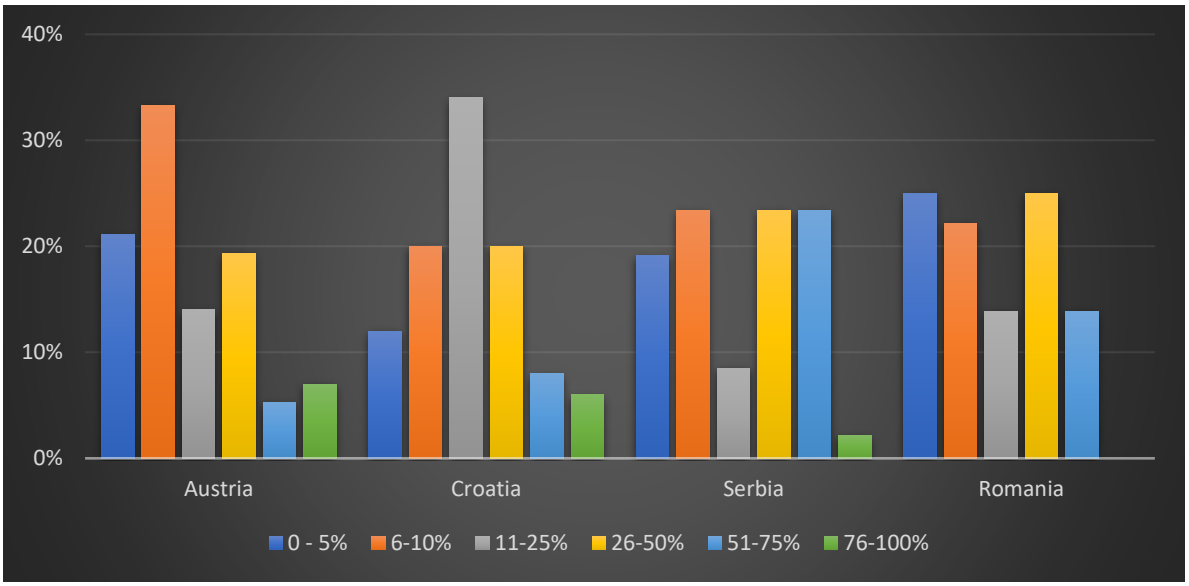
In the next question, the research participants were asked to estimate how many islands there are on the Danube River. As can be seen from the following Figure 37, in all countries the largest share was obtained by the estimate according to which there are between 500 and 1000 such islands.

Figure 37. Estimate of the number of Danube islands (local community)



When it comes to the estimate of the number of natural and “wild” Danube islands, the estimates varied by country. In Austria, the largest number of the respondents estimated the share of such islands to be between 6 and 10%. In Croatia, the most chosen share was between 11 and 25%, while in Romania and Serbia it was equally divided between 0 to 5% and 26 to 50% (Romania), and as much as three options (Serbia).

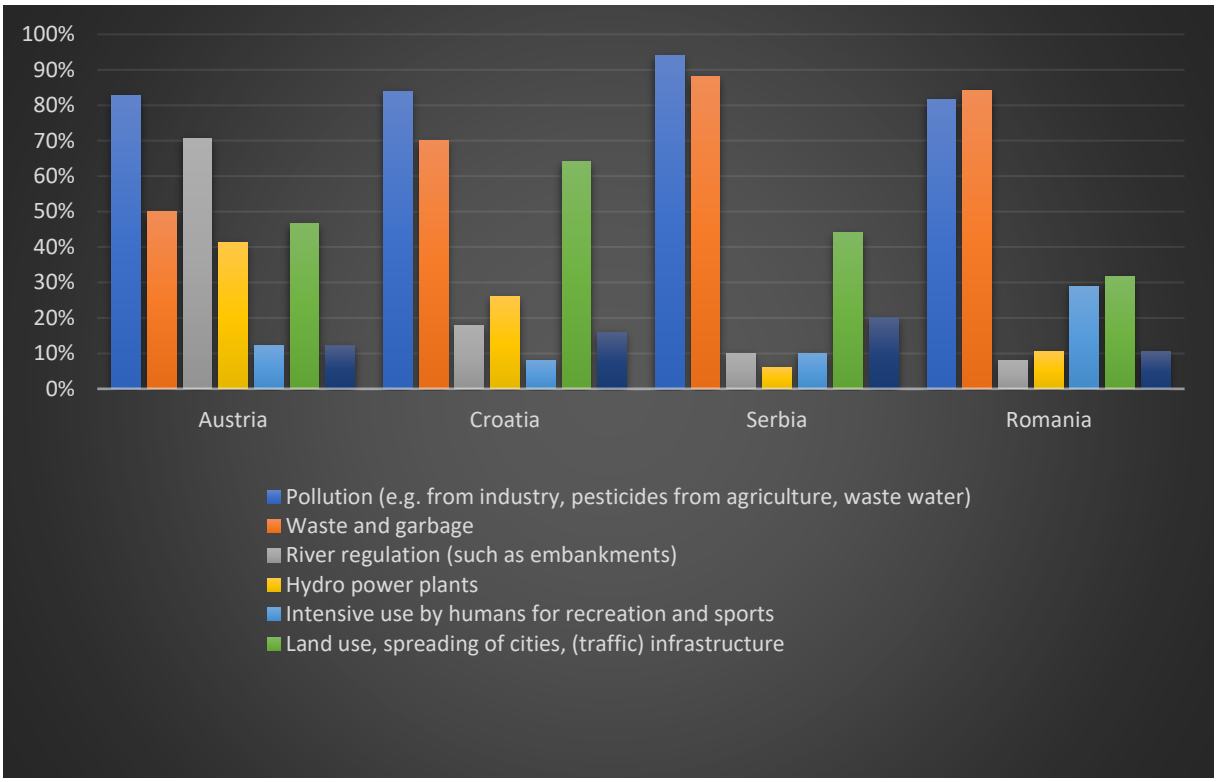
Figure 38. Estimate of the number of natural and „wild“ Danube islands (local community)



3.10. Assessments of threats and pressures regarding the naturalness of the river environment on the Danube

As can be seen from the following figure, pollution (e.g. from industry, pesticides from agriculture, wastewater) was assessed in three countries (Austria, Croatia, and Serbia) as the most important threat to the natural environment of the Danube River, while in Romania waste and garbage was assessed as the most important threat. Waste and garbage were assessed as the second most important threat in Croatia and Serbia, while in Austria this goes for river regulation. In comparison to other countries, river regulation is by far most often considered as a threat in Austria.

Figure 39. Threats and pressures regarding the naturalness of the river environment on the Danube (local community)



3.11. Assessments of the importance of the various conservation and restoration measures on the Danube

In the next part of the survey, research participants were offered a list of various conservation and restoration measures regarding the Danube River. All listed measures received a high degree of support, with the removal of trash receiving the highest support in Croatia, Romania, and Serbia, while the protection of species was the most supported measure in Austria (Table 19).

Table 19. Importance of the conservation and restoration measures on the Danube (local community)

	Austria	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	**Total**
Ecological river engineering such as restoration of natural river banks, reconnection of side branches	4,69	3,82	4,31	4,11	**4,26**
Protection of species	4,83	4,34	4,83	4,47	**4,63**
New protected areas and strictly protected zone	4,41	3,82	4,61	4,22	**4,27**
Waste water treatment	4,67	4,63	4,92	4,53	**4,70**
Fish bypasses	4,48	4,22	4,61	3,81	**4,32**
Sustainable forestry	4,28	4,16	4,55	3,97	**4,26**
Sustainable tourism and nature education	4,23	4,02	4,55	4,32	**4,27**
Removal of trash	4,72	4,66	4,98	4,67	**4,76**

3.12. The level of support for the strict protection of the Danube islands

As can be noted from Table 20, the level of support for the strict protection of the Danube islands is very high in all participating countries. It can be seen that the proportion of the respondents who stated that they do not have an opinion about this issue is somewhat higher in Romania in comparison to other countries.

Table 20. The level of support for the strict protection of the Danube islands (local community)

	Austria	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	Overall
Yes	89,7	72,0	91,9	62,2	80,5
No	1,7	6,0	2,0	5,4	3,5
Don't know, do not have an opinion	8,6	22,0	6,1	32,4	16,0

Similarly, the participants agree that access to strictly protected islands is prohibited to better preserve their sensitive nature. The share of those agreeing to such a measure was somewhat lower in Croatia (Table 21).

Table 21. The level of support for the prohibition of access to strictly protected islands (local community)

	Austria	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	Overall
Yes	81,1	58,0	81,6	70,3	73,2
No	17,2	20,0	10,2	10,8	14,9
Don't know, do not have an opinion	1,7	22,0	8,2	18,9	11,9

3.13. Perception of the various organizations about their duties toward the Danube protection

In the next question, the participants were asked to name a maximum of three organizations that should be in charge of the wise use and management of the Danube. From Table 22, it can be concluded that in all countries, except Serbia, research participants believe that protected area administrations (national parks, etc.) should be the most important type of organization that should be entrusted with this task. In Serbia, ministries and water authorities were listed as the first choice.

Table 22. Which organizations should be in charge of the wise-use and management of the Danube?(local community)

	Austria	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	Overall
Waterway administrations	32,8	46,0	44,0	39,5	40,3
Protected area administrations (national parks, etc.)	94,8	72,0	54,0	63,2	72,4
Cities, local municipalities and communities	27,6	48,0	54,0	26,3	39,3
Ministries and water authorities	29,3	28,0	68,0	42,1	41,3
International organizations	25,9	36,0	22,0	10,5	24,5
Fishermen´s organizations	8,6	32,0	18,0	13,2	17,9
Non-governmental organizations	25,9	16,0	10,0	21,1	18,4

3.14. The level of awareness about various programs, institutions, and funding instruments related to the Danube protection

When it comes to the level of awareness about various programs, institutions, and funding instruments related to the Danube protection, the largest number of citizens are familiar with UNESCO as an organization, as well as with protected areas on the Danube in their own country. Additionally, a significant number of citizens have heard of the Natura 2000 Network (Table 23).

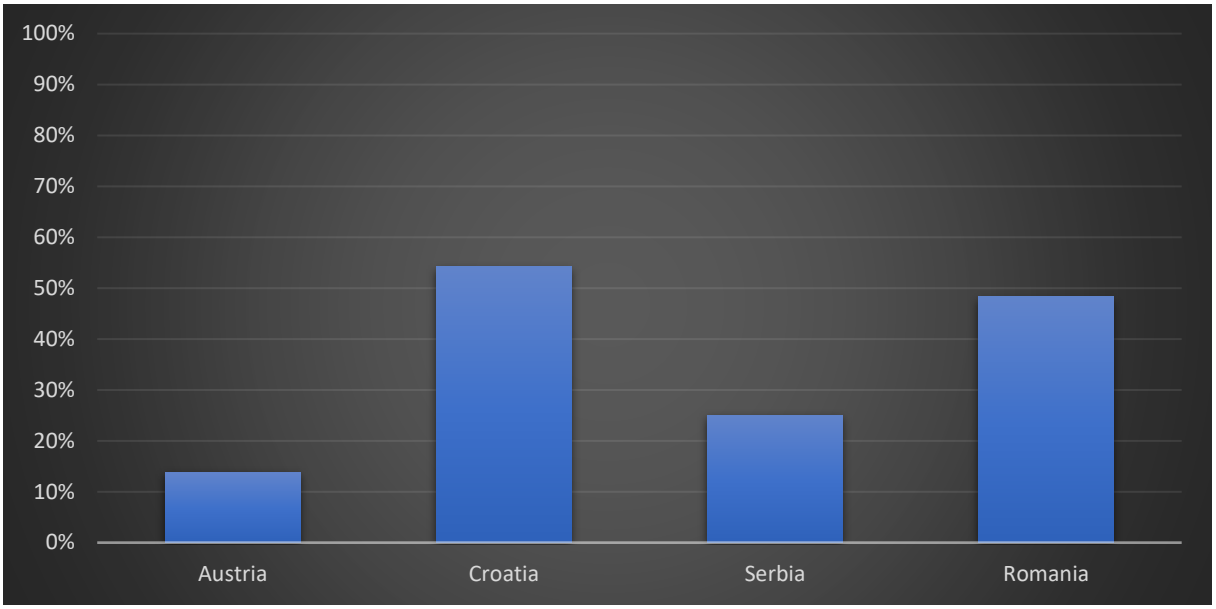
Table 23. Have you ever heard of these institutions, programs and funding instruments? (local community)

	Austria	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	Overall
ICPDR International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River					
Yes	15,5	12,0	28,3	31,0	20,2
No	75,9	80,0	52,2	48,3	66,7
Do not know/ Not sure	8,6	8,0	19,5	20,7	13,1
EU Strategy for the Danube River					
Yes	17,5	24,0	38,6	31,0	26,7
No	68,5	62,0	38,6	48,3	56,1
Do not know/ Not sure	14,0	14,0	22,7	20,7	17,2
UNESCO					
Yes	98,2	96,0	82,8	100,0	95,2
No	1,8	0,0	13,8	0,0	3,0
Do not know/ Not sure	0,0	4,0	3,4	0,0	1,8
RAMSAR Convention					
Yes	31,0	18,0	3,8	31,0	22,7
No	62,1	64,0	65,4	44,9	60,1
Do not know/ Not sure	6,9	18,0	30,8	24,1	17,2
DANUBEPARKS The Danube River Network of Protected Areas					
Yes	40,4	44,0	17,8	41,4	35,9
No	50,9	40,0	66,7	48,3	51,4
Do not know/ Not sure	8,7	16,0	15,5	10,3	12.7
Natura 2000 Network					
Yes	63,8	30,6	14,3	55,2	41,6
No	34,5	47,0	57,1	27,6	42,1
Do not know/ Not sure	1,7	22,4	28,6	17,2	16,3
LIFE programme – the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action					
Yes	39,3	22,0	11,9	24,1	25,4
No	46,4	62,0	64,3	58,7	57,1
Do not know/ Not sure	14,3	16,0	23,8	17,2	17,5
Park prirode Kopački rit/Donau-Auen National Park, Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve…					
Yes	93,0	98,0	93,9	100,0	95,6
No	3,5	0,0	4,1	0,0	2,2
Do not know/ Not sure	3,5	2,0	2,0	0,0	2,2
River Conservation Fund					
Yes	5,3	57,1	52,2	65,5	40,9
No	75,4	32,7	23,9	20,7	42,0
Do not know/ Not sure	19,3	10,2	23,9	13,8	17,1

3.15. The level of awareness about the Danube protected areas

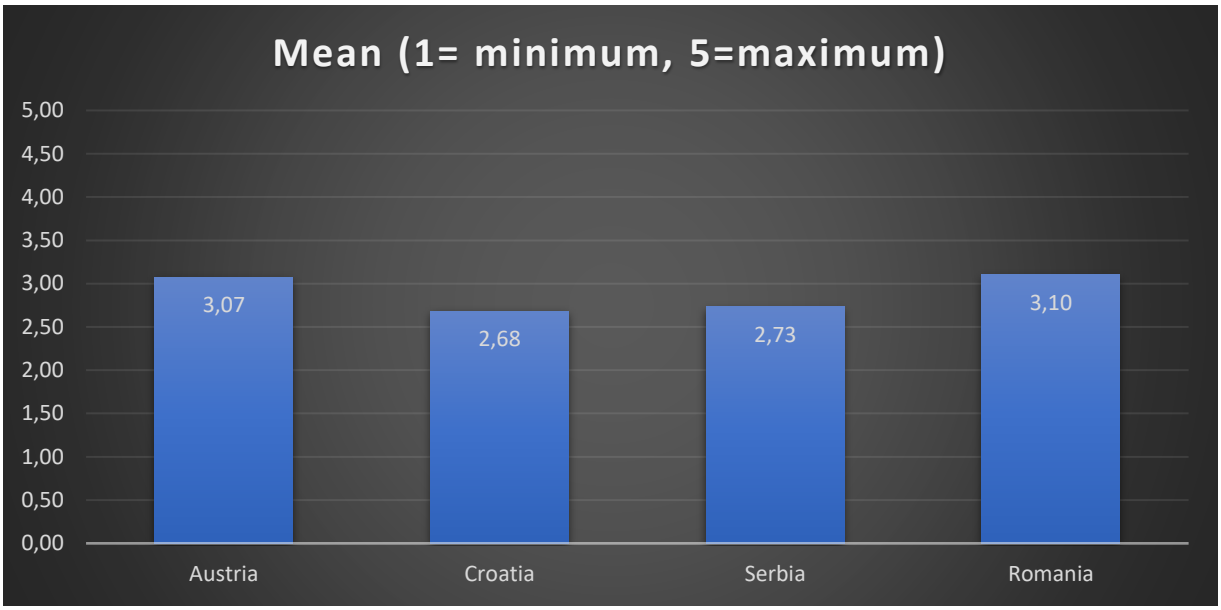
In the next question, the respondents were asked to state whether they knew any of the Danube-protected areas (Figure 40). The level of awareness was the lowest in Austria (13.8%), followed by Serbia (25.0%), Romania (48.3%), and Croatia (54.2%).

Figure 40. Do you know any protected area(s) at the Danube? (local community)



In the next question, the participants were asked to express how well they feel informed about the Danube protected areas in their country, on a one-to-five-point scale running from „not informed at all“ to „very well informed“. From Figure 41, we can conclude in two countries (Austria and Romania) countries the respondents feel that they are not well informed. Namely, in those countries, the average result falls below the center point of the scale (3).

Figure 41. How well do you feel informed about the Danube-protected areas in your country? (local community)



3.16. The level and type of support for the Danube natural islands

From Table 24 we can note that the large majority of the respondents support or absolutely support conservation actions for the Danube and its nature, such as natural islands.

Table 24. Are you in favour of conservation actions for the Danube and its nature such as the natural islands? (local community)

	Austria	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	Overall
Absolutely	33,3	18,0	18,0	31,0	24,7
Yes	56,2	74,0	72,0	58,7	65,7
Not that much	10,5	6,0	10,0	10,3	9,1
Absolutely not	0,0	2,0	0,0	0,0	0,5

In the next question, the participants were given a list of activities with which they could contribute to the conservation of the Danube and its islands: changing their behavior in nature, trying to influence the behavior and opinion of others, volunteering work (e.g. joining Danube Volunteers Days), financial contribution, sharing information campaigns, and collecting trash. In three countries (Austria, Romania, and Serbia), „trying to influence the behavior and opinion of others“ was the activity chosen by more than 50% of the participants. „Collecting trash“ received more than 50% of support in three countries, as well (Austria, Croatia, and Romania). „Changing my behavior in nature“ was chosen by more than half of the participants in Croatia.

Figure 42. How can you imagine to contribute to the conservation of Danube and its islands and nature? (local community)


80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
Austria
Croatia
Serbia
Romania
Changing my behavior in nature
Trying to influence the behaviour and opinion of others
Volunteering work (e.g. joining Danube Volunteers Days)
Financial contribution
Sharing information campaigns
Collecting trash

4. Visitors

4.1. Research sample

This part of the research was conducted in five countries (Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, and Serbia). The following table shows the number of research participants by country. It can be seen that the sample size ranges from the lowest 100 (Serbia) to the highest 432 (Romania).

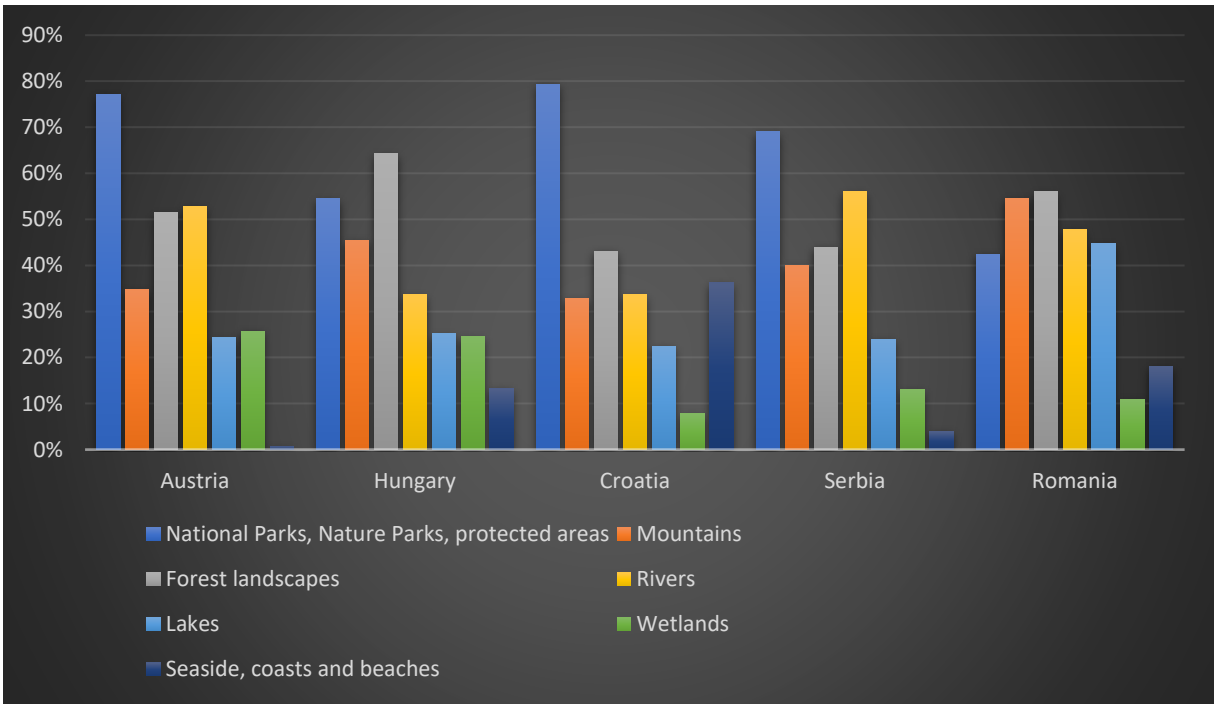
Table 25. Sample size – by countries (visitors)

Country	Austria	Croatia	Hungary	Romania	Serbia	Total
N	144	116	143	432	100	894

4.2. Associations related to the natural environment of the region where a person lives

In the first question in the survey, the participants were asked to think about natural landscapes in their region and to name a maximum of three ones that they are particularly proud of. It can be seen that in the case of three countries (Austria, Croatia, and Serbia) people are proudest of national parks, nature parks, and other protected areas. In Hungary and Romania, respondents are most proud of their forest landscapes (Figure 43).

Figure 43. If you think of natural landscapes in your region, which ones are you proud of (choose up to 3 options)? (visitors)



As a continuation, in the second question, the participants were asked to list spontaneous associations that come to mind when they think about natural landscapes in their region. As can be noted from Table 26, protected Danube areas were most often mentioned in Austria and Croatia. In Hungary, Romania, and Serbia, the most common associations were related to the mountains in the region.

Table 26. Spontaneous associations related to the natural landscapes in the region (visitors)

Country	Top three answers by frequencies
Austria	Donau-Auen National Park (26) Danube floodplains (25) Vienna woods/forests (21)
Hungary	Mecsek (28) Forests (12) Danube (10)
Croatia	Kopački rit (21) Forests/woods (13) Plitvice lakes (10)
Serbia	Fruška gora (39) (Upper) Danube (17) Rivers (7)
Romania	Mountains/hills (224) Plains (56) Forests (31)

4.3. Free associations related to the Danube River

Similarly, as in the second question, in the second question, the research participants were asked to state the spontaneous associations that come to their minds when they think of the Danube River. As can be concluded from Table 27, the answers vary greatly by country, given that ships/boats/rowing were most often mentioned in Austria, fishing in Croatia, Budapest in Hungary, and pollution in Serbia, while the river itself was most often cited in Romania,

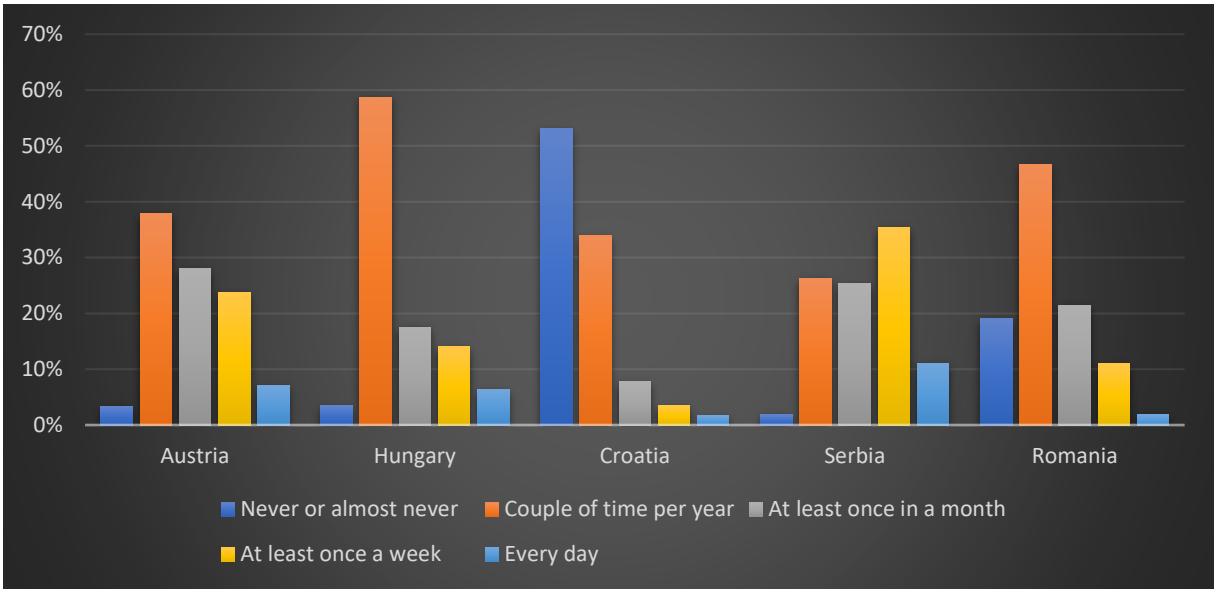
Table 27. Spontaneous associations related to the Danube River (visitors)

Country	Top three answers by frequencies
Austria	Ships/boats/rowing (16) Danube floodplains (15) Large/big (12)
Hungary	Budapest (6) Size/huge/length; Boats/ships/rowing (4)
Croatia	Fishing/fishes (24) Size/huge/length/width (23) Vukovar (16)
Serbia	Pollution (19) Swimming/beaches (9) Beautiful/views (8)
Romania	River (76) Water (71) Mysterious (44)

4.4. Frequency of visiting the Danube area

The frequency of visits to the Danube varies greatly by country, which is to be expected considering the differences in the geographical area occupied by the Danube and the importance of this river in each country. Namely, in Serbia, about 11% of research participants visit the Danube every day, and this share is also higher than average in Austria (about 7%). The Danube is visited less often in the remaining three countries (Figure 44).

Figure 44. Frequency of visiting the Danube area (visitors)



4.5. Assessments of the importance of individual functions of the Danube River

From Table 28, it can be concluded that habitats for protected species and ecosystems for rich biodiversity are, according to the research participants, the most important functions of the Danube River.

Table 28. Assessments of the importance of individual functions of the Danube River (means) (visitors)

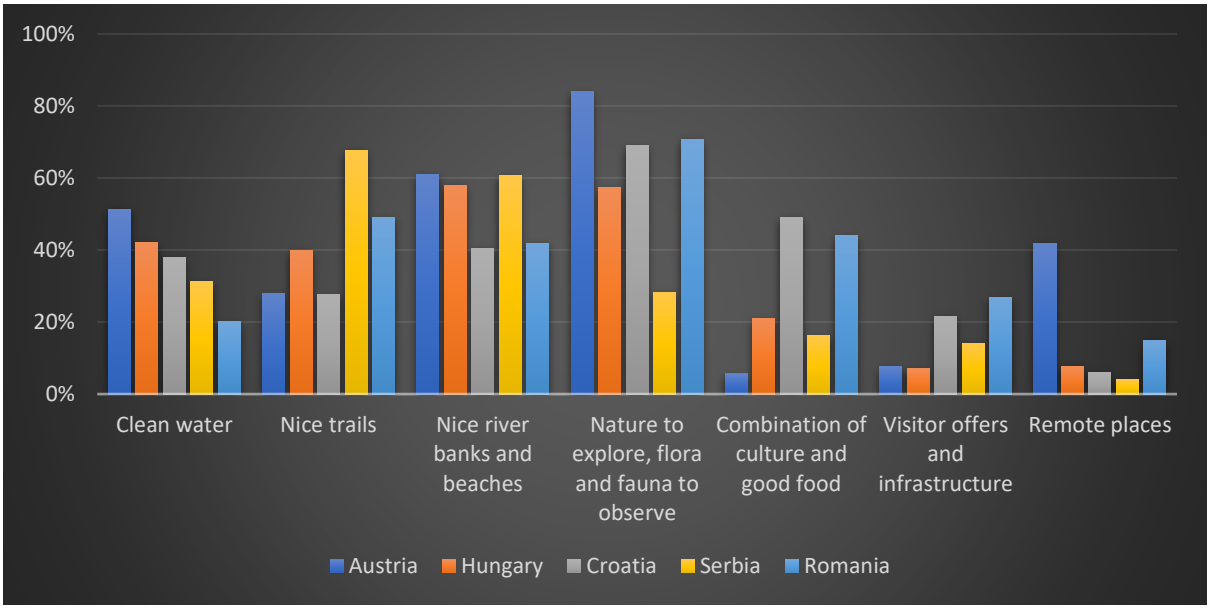
	Austria	Hungary	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	**Total**
Area for recreation and sports activities	3,84	3,57	3,86	4,27	3,82	**3,84**
Ecosystem for rich biodiversity	4,85	4,79	4,60	4,74	4,04	**4,42**
Habitat for protected species	4,82	4,84	4,61	4,63	4,12	**4,45**
Source for (drinking) water	3,46	4,55	4,20	4,11	3,87	**3,98**
Source for (renewable) energy production	3,28	3,69	4,07	4,09	3,99	**3,86**
Forestry (timber production) and hunting	2,33	2,98	3,84	3,58	3,57	**3,32**
Fishing and angling	2,53	3,43	4,00	3,92	3,96	**3,66**
Tourism destination	3,38	3,86	4,18	4,50	4,12	**4,02**
Transport route	3,64	4,24	3,89	4,35	4,11	**4,05**

Integrative and inspiring lifeline for many different countries and cultures	4,04	4,16	4,23	4,41	3,97	**4,09**

The function of forestry (timber production) and hunting is the least important, and it can be added that the participants of all countries share a fairly similar opinion when it comes to the importance of the listed functions of the Danube.

In the next question, research participants were asked to list a maximum of three things that are important to them when visiting the Danube. In all countries except Serbia, nature to explore, flora and fauna to observe are the most important things for respondents when visiting the Danube. In Serbia, on the other hand, nice trails are the most important to the research participants (Figure 45).

Figure 45. Important things when visiting the Danube (visitors)



4.6. Assessments of the aesthetic appeal of certain forms of the river environment

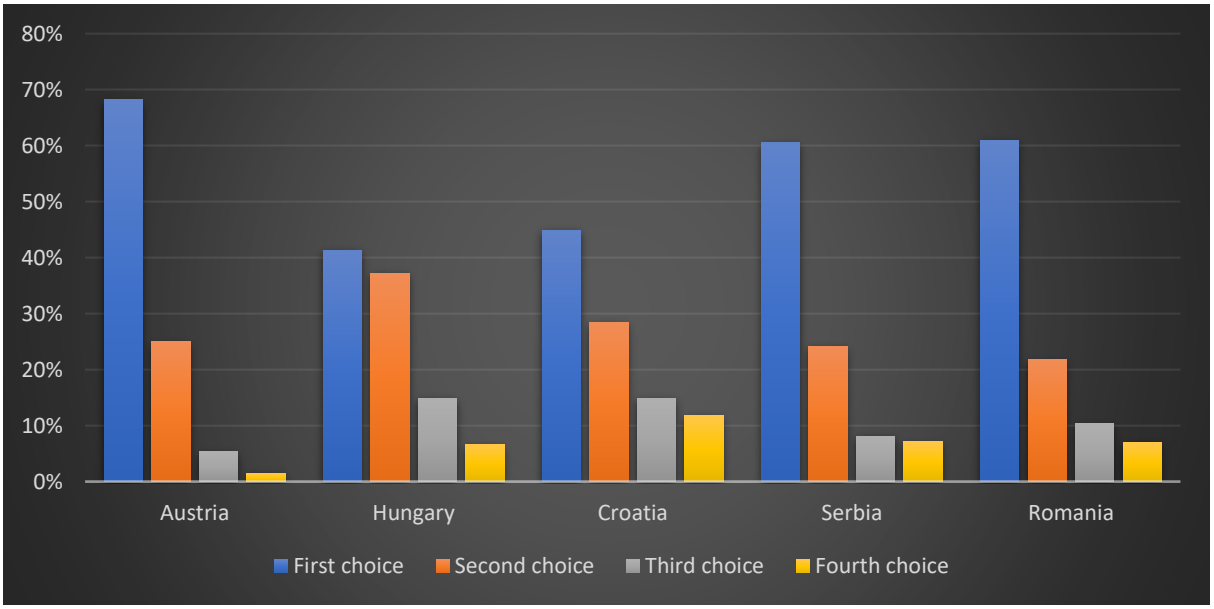
In the first question, the respondents were given a task to rank four photos with varying levels of embankment/natural value. The first photo represented an intact riverbank („wild island“), with a very high level of natural value. The second photo showed a restored riverbank with a high level of natural value. The third photo represented an embanked riverbank with a low level of natural value, while the fourth photo represented a strongly embanked riverbank with a very low level of natural value.

Figure 46. First photograph – an intact riverbank



It can be seen that the photograph of the first environment (an intact riverbank) was chosen as the first choice of more than 50% of all respondents in four countries (Austria, Germany, Hungary, and Slovakia), while in Bulgaria and Croatia this photo was also the first choice, but for slightly less than a half of all respondents.

Figure 47. First photograph – distribution of choices (visitors)



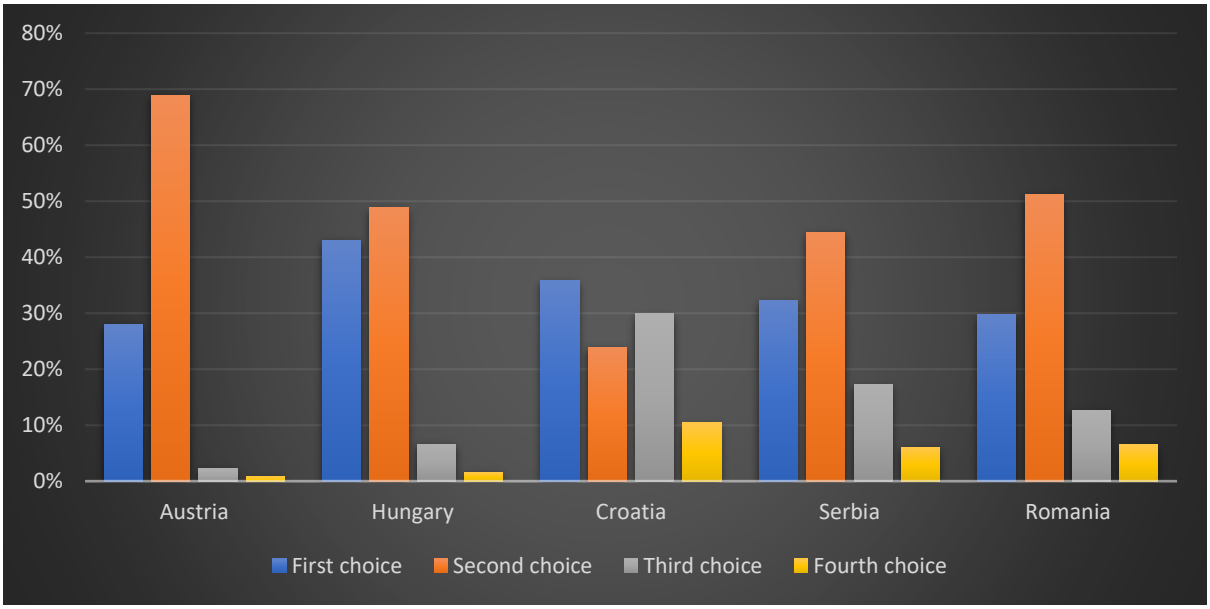
As already mentioned, the second photograph (Figure 48) represented a restored riverbank with a high level of natural value.

Figure 48 - Second photograph - a restored riverbank



It can be noted that this photograph in most countries was chosen as the second choice, while in Romania and Serbia, it was most often listed as the first choice. Namely, in Romania, 45.9% of all respondents chose it as their first choice, while in Serbia this share amounted to 49.7%. These are the only two countries where this photo was more often chosen as more aesthetically appealing when compared to the first photograph (Figure 49).

Figure 49. Second photograph – distribution of choices (visitors)



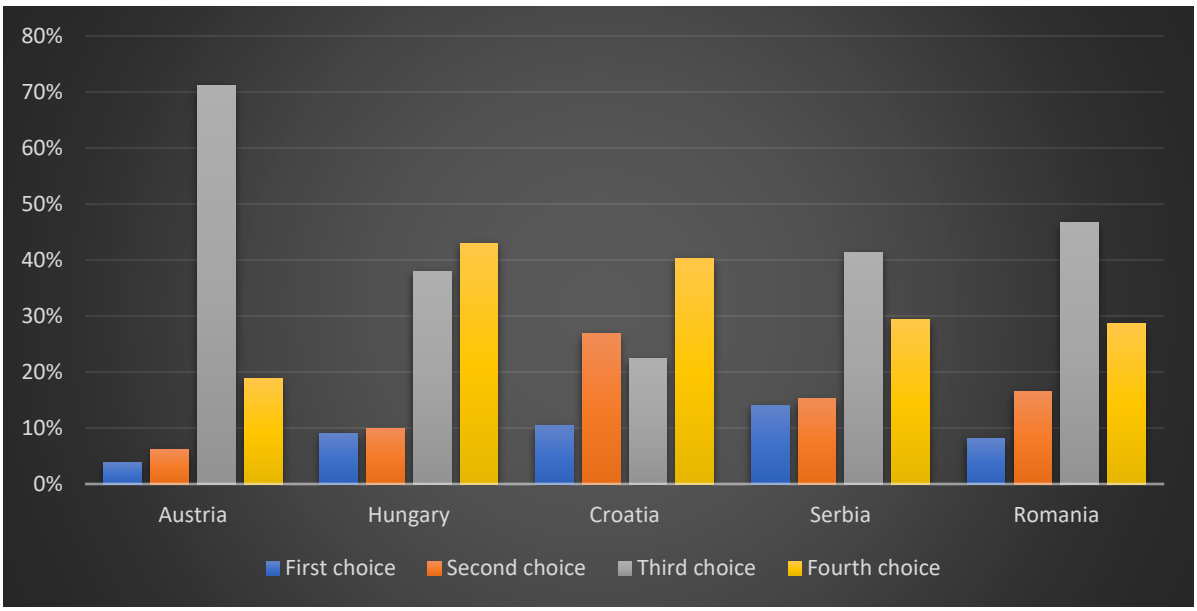
The third photograph, shown in Figure 50, represents an embanked riverbank with a low level of natural value.

Figure 50. Third photograph – an embanked riverbank



This photo was chosen as the third choice in Austria, Serbia and Romania, and as the fourth choice in Hungary and Croatia. (Figure 51).

Figure 51. Third photograph – distribution of choices (visitors)



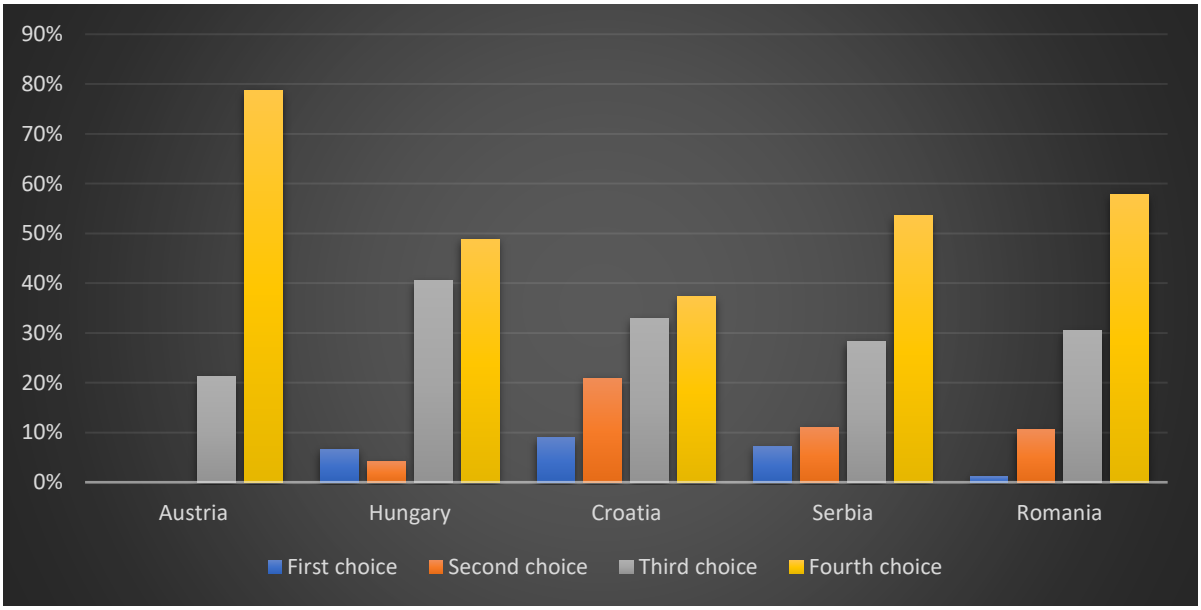
The fourth photograph (Figure 52) represents a strongly embanked riverbank with a very low level of natural value, and the negative perception of this kind of environment was confirmed in the respondents' rankings.

Figure 52. Fourth photograph - a strongly embanked riverbank



Namely, this photograph was chosen as the last (fourth) choice in all countries participating in this study (Figure 53).

Figure 53. Fourth photograph – distribution of choices (visitors)



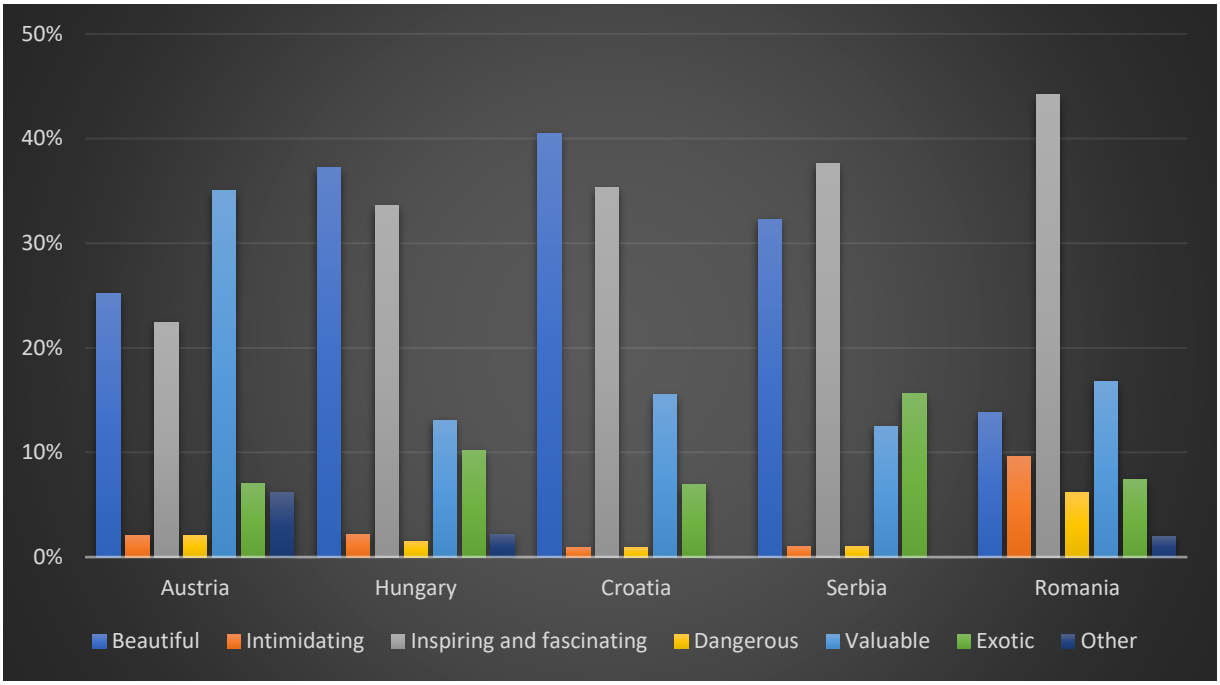
In the next survey question, respondents were shown a photograph of a river with good lateral connectivity (Figure 54), with a set of adjectives (beautiful, intimidating, inspiring and fascinating, dangerous, valuable, and exotic, with a task to choose the one among them that first comes to their mind when they see the photograph.

Figure 54. River with a good lateral conductivity



The results show that in two countries (Romania and Serbia) the most commonly chosen option was „inspiring and fascinating“. „Beautiful“ is most often chosen in Croatia and Hungary, while in Austria „valuable“ was the most frequent answer. Overall, the positive associations were much more frequent than the negative ones.

Figure 55. River with a good lateral conductivity – associations (visitors)



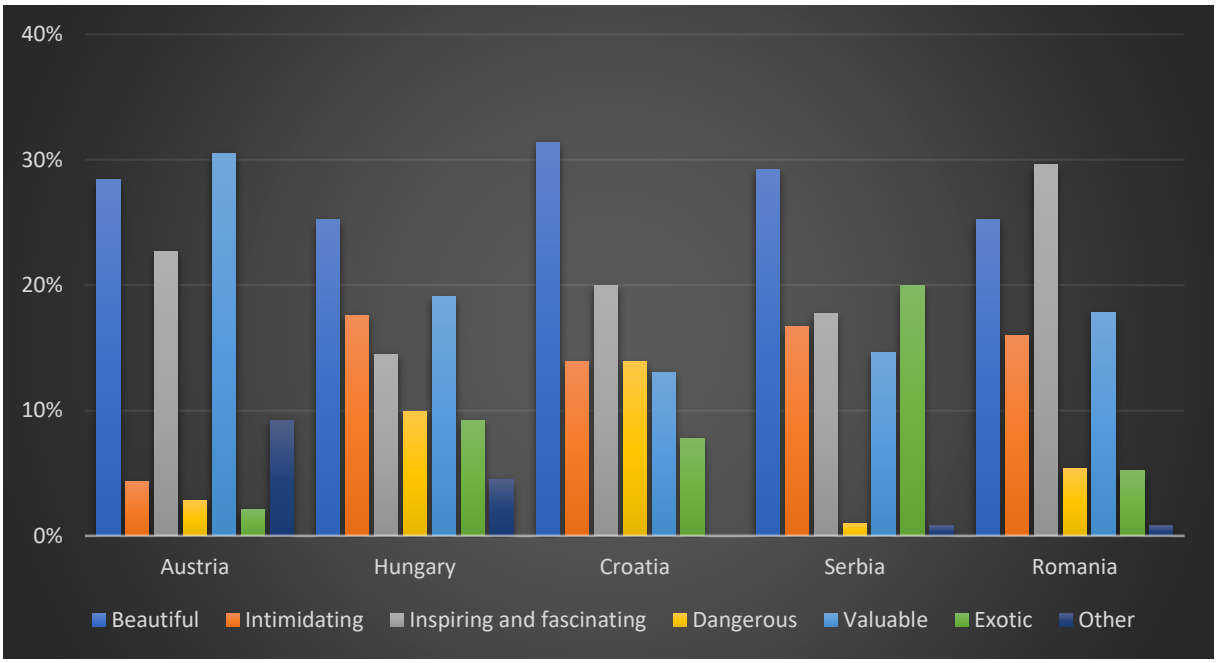
In the next survey question, respondents were shown a photograph of wild islands on the Danube (Figure 56), with the same list of adjectives as in the previous question.

Figure 56. Wild islands



In three countries (Croatia, Hungary, and Serbia) the most common answer was „beautiful “, in Austria the most common answer was „valuable“, while in Romania the largest share of respondents chose „inspiring and fascinating“ option (Figure 57).

Figure 57. Wild islands – associations (visitors)



4.7. Perceptions of the concept of naturalness of the environment

From Table 29 it can be seen that for the participants of the research study, a place with rich biodiversity and fascinating animals and plants represents the most important feature to determine whether a river is natural. Namely, the average score on the scale of importance, which ranged from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important), was 4.42. This feature is the

most important for respondents in all countries. The least important feature was „A place with none or few restrictions on my behavior; for unrestrained or unconfined recreation“.

Table 29. How relevant are the following characteristics to determine a river as natural? (visitors)

	Austria	Hungary	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	**Total**
A place with only natural sounds	4,10	4,31	4,16	4,16	3,91	**4,06**
A place with pure and clean water	4,38	4,59	4,25	4,49	4,04	**4,25**
A place where rivers and streams flow unimpeded, without river regulation	4,59	4,22	4,17	4,05	3,92	**4,11**
A place with little evidence of human occupation and modifications (buildings, dams…)	4,12	4,29	4,23	4,16	3,88	**4,05**
A place where natural conditions and processes exist and form the landscape	4,57	4,50	4,41	4,47	4,07	**4,29**
A place with none or few restrictions on my behaviour; for unrestrained or unconfined recreation	2,15	2,68	3,67	3,58	3,76	**3,31**
A place with rich biodiversity and fascinating animals and plants	4,70	4,60	4,60	4,62	4,17	**4,42**
A place without non-native animals and plants	3,59	4,18	3,76	3,41	3,38	**3,59**

4.8. Assessments of the importance and function of the naturalness of the river environment

When the factors that are important for the river to be assessed as natural are taken into account (Table 30), it is evident that the statements that „natural rivers host rich biodiversity of characteristic animal and plant species“ (arithmetic mean is 4.51) and the statements that natural rivers promote local recreation by providing beautiful sites and landscapes (4.37) are assessed as the most important for the naturalness of the river environment. The statement that natural rivers create “green” jobs had the lowest degree of agreement (4.08).

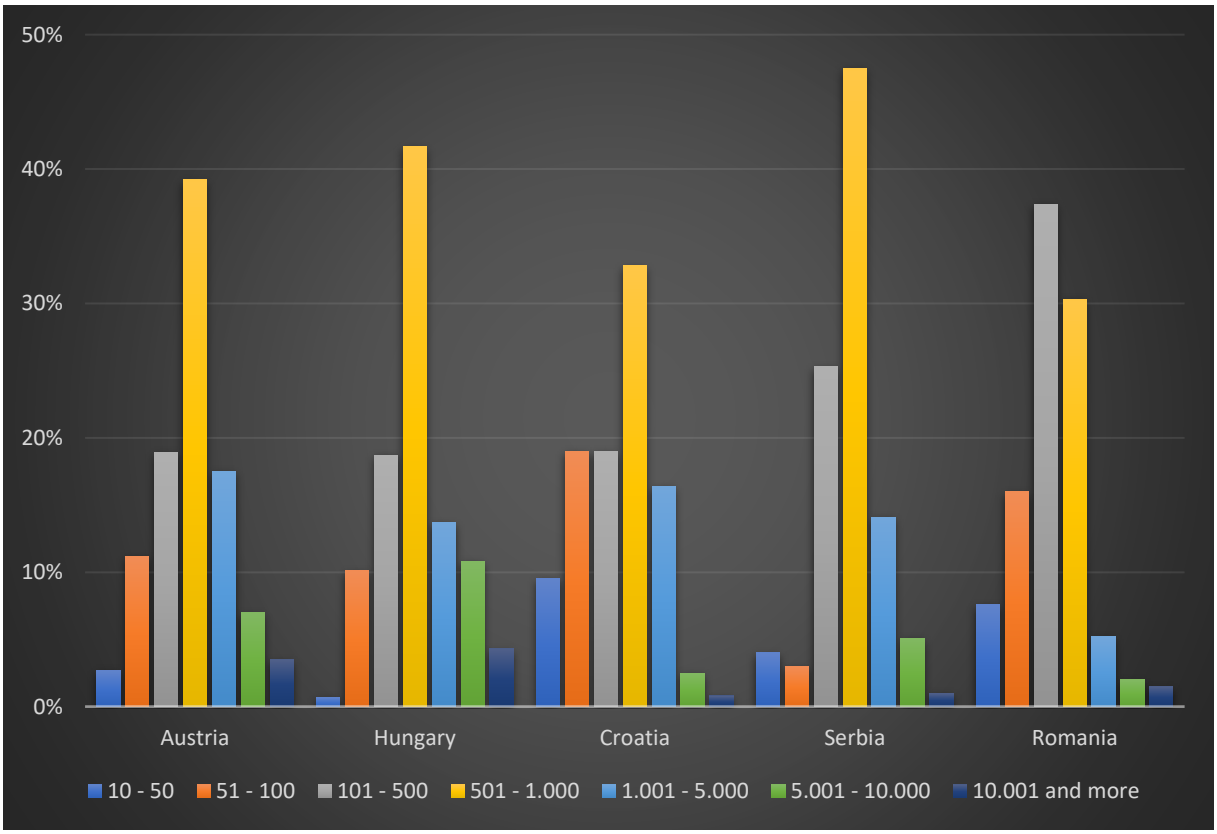
Table 30. Importance of the naturalness of the river environment (from 1 – not important at all to 5 – very important) (visitors)

	Austria	Hungary	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	**Total**
Natural rivers host rich biodiversity of characteristic animal and plant species	4,74	4,77	4,52	4,42	4,34	**4,50**
Natural rivers help to prevent environmental pollution	3,68	4,00	4,40	4,07	4,29	**4,14**
Natural river flows contribute to prevent floodings	4,19	4,01	4,05	3,95	4,17	**4,11**
Natural rivers are important to reduce the negative impact of climate change	4,21	4,20	4,31	4,15	4,30	**4,25**
Natural rivers support and promote local tourism	3,73	3,81	4,30	4,41	4,32	**4,15**
Natural rivers promote local recreation by providing beautiful sites and landscapes	4,33	4,32	4,47	4,35	4,37	**4,37**
Natural river create „green“ jobs	3,66	3,85	4,32	4,20	4,21	**4,08**

4.9. Estimates of the number of Danube islands and the state of their naturalness

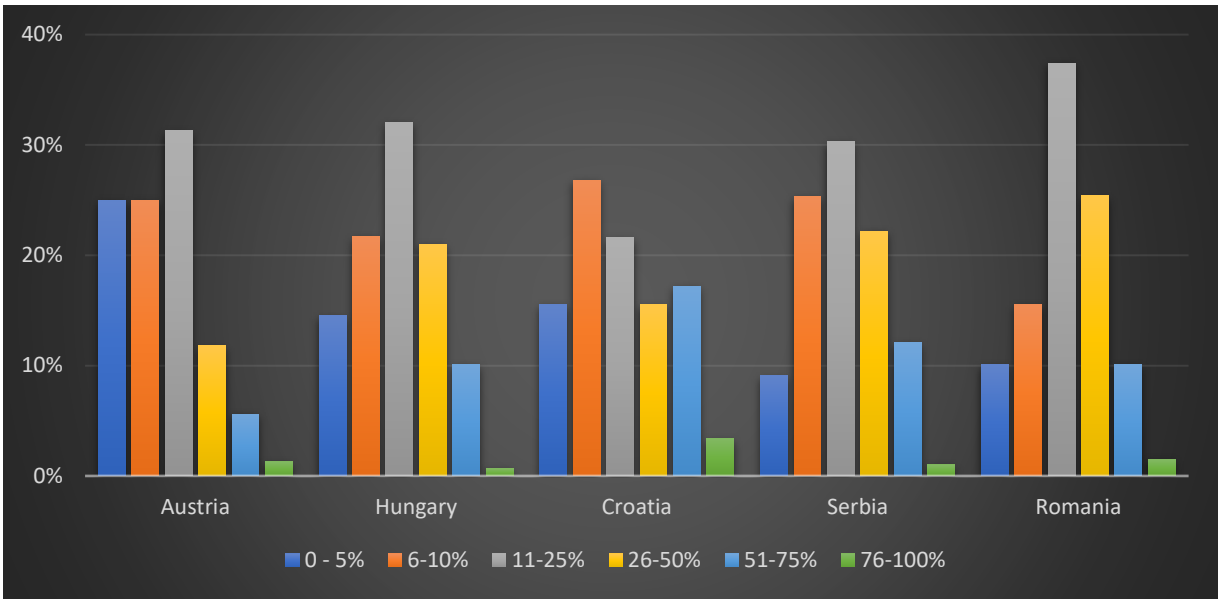
In the next question, the research participants were asked to estimate how many islands there are on the Danube River. As can be seen from the following Figure 58, in all countries except Romania, the largest share was obtained by the estimate according to which there are between 500 and 1000 such islands. Then follows the estimate according to which there are between 101 and 500 Danube islands, and only in Romania this order is reversed.

Figure 58. Estimate of the number of Danube islands (visitors)



When it comes to the estimate of the number of natural and "wild" Danube islands, the largest share of responses in four countries (Austria, Hungary, Romania, and Serbia) estimated that there are between 11 and 25% of such islands. In Croatia, this estimate was somewhat different and amounted to from 6 to 10%.

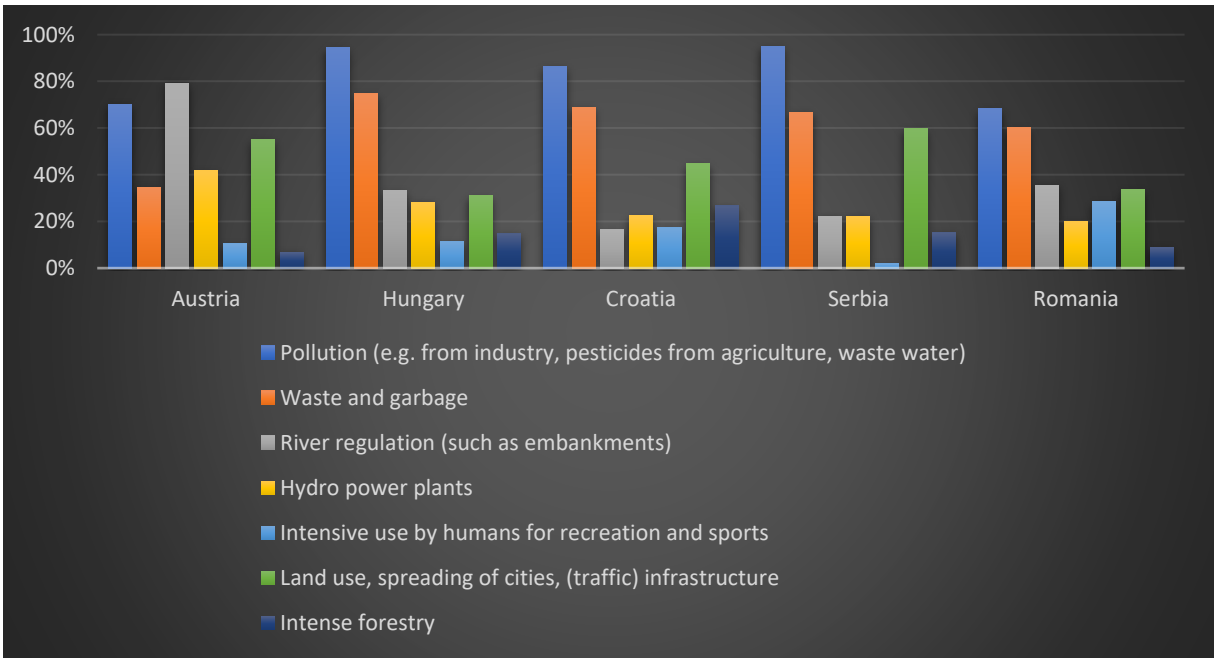
Figure 59. Estimate of the number of natural and „wild“ Danube islands (visitors)



4.10. Assessments of threats and pressures regarding the naturalness of the river environment on the Danube

As can be seen from Figure 60, in all countries except Austria pollution (e.g. from industry, pesticides from agriculture, wastewater) was assessed as the most important threat to the natural environment of the Danube River, while waste and garbage were assessed as the second most important threat.

Figure 60. Threats and pressures regarding the naturalness of the river environment on the Danube (visitors)



In Austria, the most important threat was river regulation (such as embankments).

4.11. Assessments of the importance of the various conservation and restoration measures on the Danube

In the next part of the survey, research participants were offered a list of various conservation and restoration measures regarding the Danube River. All listed measures received a high degree of support, with removal of trash receiving the most support in Croatia, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovakia, removal of trash in Croatia, Hungary, Romania, and Serbia, while in Austria the most support was provided for ecological river engineering: restoration of natural river banks, reconnection of side branches (Table 31).

Table 31. Importance of the conservation and restoration measures on the Danube (visitors)

	Austria	Hungary	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	**Total**
Ecological river engineering such as restoration of natural river banks, reconnection of side branches	4,71	4,45	4,28	4,26	3,82	**4,17**
Protection of species	4,70	4,74	4,55	4,74	4,14	**4,44**
New protected areas and strictly protected zone	4,38	4,37	4,34	4,49	4,07	**4,24**
Waste water treatment	4,63	4,82	4,66	4,85	4,02	**4,41**
Fish bypasses	4,44	4,10	4,41	4,59	3,79	**4,11**
Sustainable forestry	4,35	4,37	4,34	4,42	3,92	**4,17**
Sustainable tourism and nature education	4,29	4,35	4,27	4,46	3,99	**4,18**
Removal of trash	4,61	4,83	4,81	4,85	4,16	**4,49**

4.12. The level of support for the strict protection of the Danube islands

As can be noted from Table 32, the level of support for the strict protection of the Danube islands is very high in all participating countries. It can be seen that the proportion of the respondents who stated that they do not have an opinion about this issue is somewhat higher in Croatia and Serbia in comparison to the other three countries.

Table 32. The level of support for the strict protection of the Danube islands (visitors)

	Austria	Hungary	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	**Total**
Yes	92,3	94,4	87,8	86,6	90,4	**90,6**
No	2,8	0,0	0,9	2,1	2,7	**2,0**
Don't know, do not have an opinion	4,9	5,6	11,3	11,3	6,9	**7,4**

Similarly, the participants agree that access to strictly protected islands is prohibited to better preserve their sensitive nature (Table 33).

Table 33. The level of support for the prohibition of access to strictly protected islands (visitors)

	Austria	Hungary	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	**Total**
Yes	80,6	88,1	75,7	86,6	90,9	**86,5**
No	13,2	5,6	9,5	4,1	4,9	**6,8**
Don't know, do not have an opinion	6,2	6,3	14,8	9,3	4,2	**6,7**

4.13. Perception of the various organizations about their duties toward the Danube protection

In the next question, the participants were asked to name a maximum of three organizations that should be in charge of the wise use and management of the Danube. From Table 34, it can be concluded that in all countries, research participants believe that protected area administrations (national parks, etc.) should be the most important type of organization that should be entrusted with this task. In all countries, ministries and water authorities were listed as the second most important organization, while fishermen's organizations received the least number of votes in all countries.

Table 34. Which organizations should be in charge of the wise-use and management of the Danube? (visitors)

	Austria	Hungary	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	**Overall**
Waterway administrations	41,7	21,3	31,3	36,4	39,7	**35,7**
Protected area administrations (national parks, etc.)	91,0	85,1	72,2	69,7	76,7	**78,9**
Cities, local municipalities and communities	21,5	44,0	36,5	45,5	33,6	**35,0**
Ministries and water authorities	43,8	73,8	43,5	61,6	40,9	**49,1**
International organizations	24,3	37,6	33,9	36,4	16,9	**25,6**
Fishermen´s organizations	6,9	11,3	11,3	14,1	7,4	**9,2**
Non-governmental organizations	25,0	9,2	17,4	11,1	15,7	**15,9**

4.14. The level of awareness about various programs, institutions, and funding instruments related to the Danube protection

When it comes to the level of awareness about various programs, institutions, and funding instruments related to the Danube protection, the largest number of citizens are familiar with UNESCO as an organization, as well as with protected areas on the Danube in their own country (Table 35).

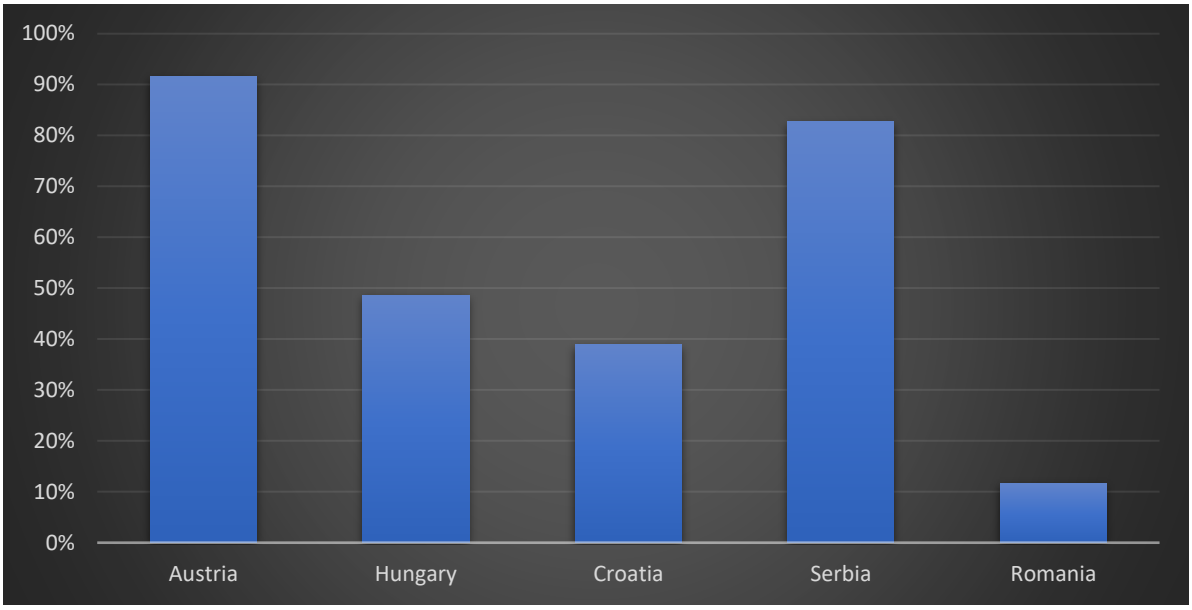
Table 35. Have you ever heard of these institutions, programmes and funding instruments? (visitors)

	Austria	Hungary	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	**Overall**
ICPDR International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River						
Yes	29,1	30,0	11,5	37,2	37,6	**31,6**
No	59,6	53,6	76,1	45,8	53,7	**56,7**
Do not know/ Not sure	11,3	16,4	12,4	17,0	8,7	**11,7**
EU Strategy for the Danube River						
Yes	33,8	23,6	21,6	50,5	45,4	**37,6**
No	52,1	56,4	66,7	32,0	46,2	**49,8**
Do not know/ Not sure	14,1	20,0	11,7	17,5	8,4	**12,6**
UNESCO						
Yes	97,2	93,8	92,0	98,7	82,7	**89,5**
No	2,8	5,4	6,3	0,0	14,7	**8,8**
Do not know/ Not sure	0,0	0,8	1,7	1,3	2,6	**1,7**
RAMSAR Convention						
Yes	53,6	54,8	21,2	60,3	30,3	**39,2**
No	42,1	40,3	63,8	30,1	58,2	**51,2**
Do not know/ Not sure	4,3	4,8	15,0	9,6	11,5	**9,6**
DANUBEPARKS The Danube River Network of Protected Areas						
Yes	47,6	30,4	25,7	47,9	39,0	**38,3**
No	37,8	54,1	63,7	35,1	51,8	**49,6**
Do not know/ Not sure	14,6	15,6	10,6	17,0	9,2	**12,1**
Natura 2000 Network						
Yes	86,1	85,5	45,5	45,8	50,8	**60,8**
No	11,8	10,1	45,5	39,6	40,3	**31,5**
Do not know/ Not sure	2,1	4,3	9,0	14,6	8,9	**7,7**
LIFE programme – the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action						
Yes	61,3	65,0	27,4	47,4	45,6	**49,1**
No	26,8	27,0	60,2	38,9	44,6	**40,3**
Do not know/ Not sure	11,9	8,0	12,4	13,7	9,8	**10,6**
Park prirode Kopački rit/Donau-Auen National Park, Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve/Gornje Podunavlje						
Yes	92,3	92,8	94,7	95,9	77,9	**86,7**
No	6,3	6,5	3,5	4,1	18,8	**11,3**
Do not know/ Not sure	1,4	0,7	1,8	0,0	3,3	**2,0**
River Conservation Fund						
Yes	13,6	24,1	33,3	39,4	79,5	**49,8**
No	69,3	54,7	55,0	34,0	16,9	**38,1**
Do not know/ Not sure	17,1	21,2	11,7	26,6	3,6	**12,1**

4.15. The level of awareness about the Danube protected areas

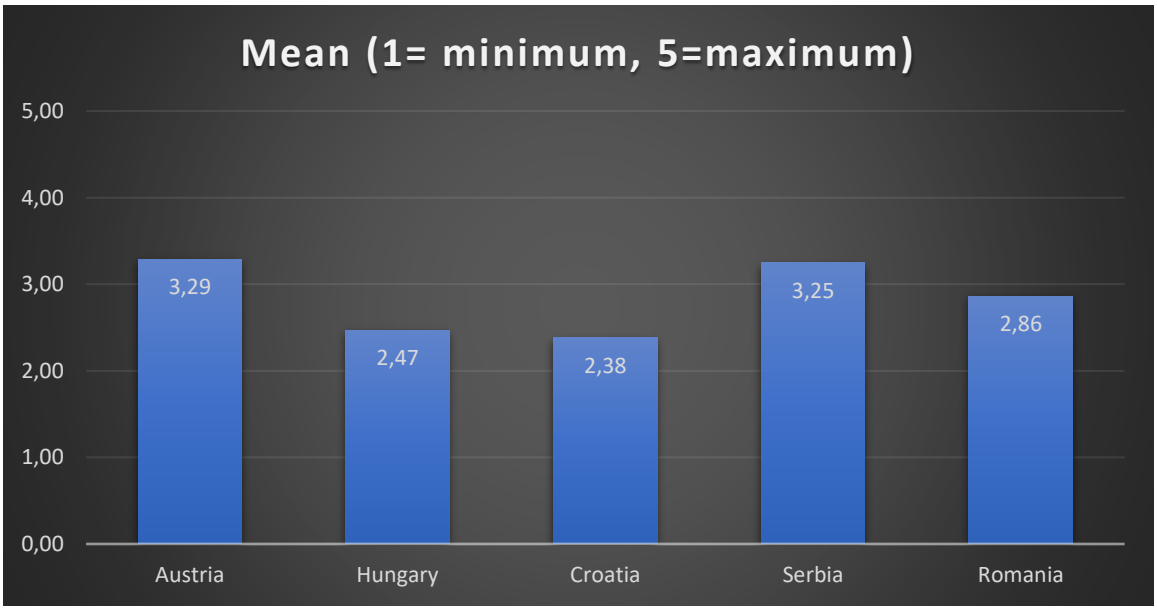
In the next question, the respondents were asked to state whether they knew any of the Danube-protected areas (Figure 61). The level of awareness was the highest in Austria (91.6%), followed by Serbia (82.7%), Hungary (65.7%), and Croatia (38.9%). It can be noted the very low level of awareness of the Danube protected areas in Romania (11.7%).

Figure 61. Do you know any protected area(s) at the Danube? (visitors)



In the next question, the participants were asked to express how well they feel informed about the Danube protected areas in their country, on a one-to-five-point scale running from „not informed at all“ to „very well informed“. From Figure 62, we can conclude in all but two (Austria and Serbia) countries the respondents feel that they are not well informed. Namely, in all other countries, the average result falls below the center point of the scale (3).

Figure 62. How well do you feel informed about the Danube-protected areas in your country? (visitors)



4.16. The level and type of support for the Danube natural islands

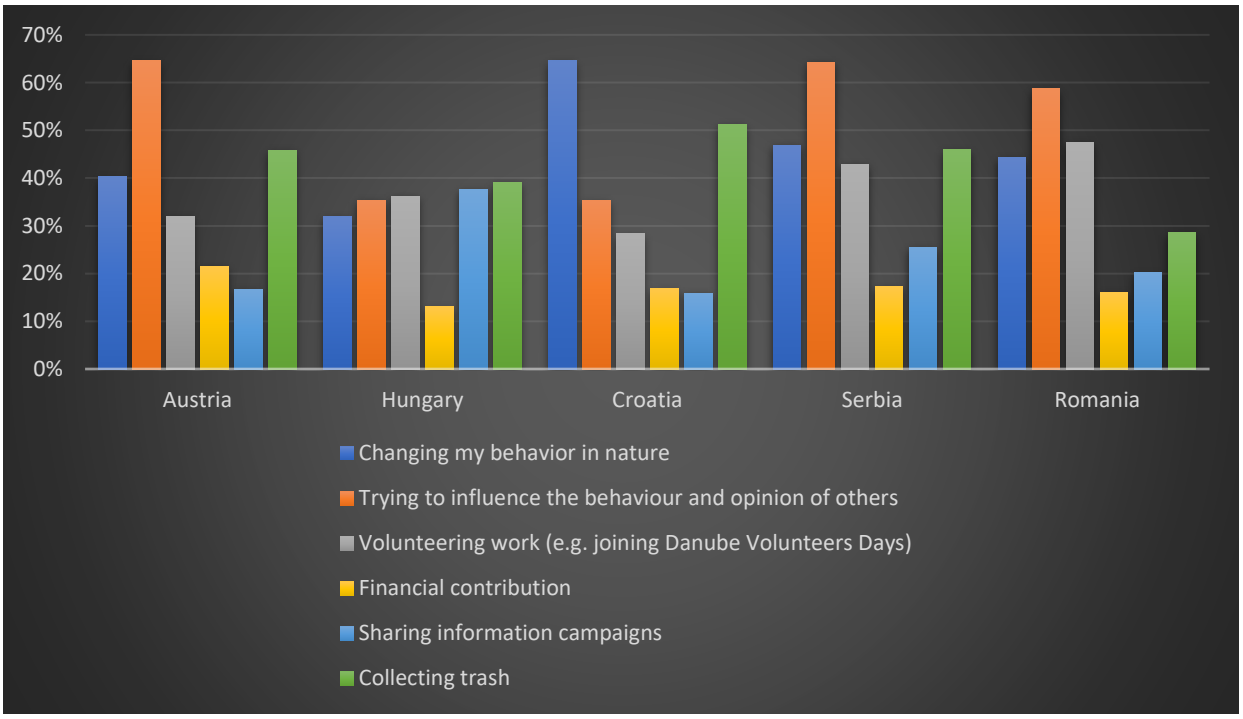
From Table 36 we can note that the large majority of the respondents support or absolutely support conservation actions for the Danube and its nature, such as natural islands.

Table 36. Are you in favour of conservation actions for the Danube and its nature such as the natural islands?(visitors)

	Austria	Hungary	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	Overall
Absolutely	30,8	48,2	32,1	42,0	39,2	38,7
Yes	57,3	48,2	62,5	47,0	43,3	49,2
Not that much	11,9	3,6	4,5	9,0	16,9	11,5
Absolutely not	0,0	0,0	0,9	2,0	0,5	0,6

In the next question, the participants were given a list of activities with which they could contribute to the conservation of the Danube and its islands: changing their behavior in nature, trying to influence the behavior and opinion of others, volunteering work (e.g. joining Danube Volunteers Days), financial contribution, sharing information campaigns, and collecting trash. In all countries except Croatia, „trying to influence the behavior and opinion of others“ was the activity chosen by more than 50% of the participants, while „changing my behavior in nature“ was chosen by more than half of the participants in Croatia.

Figure 63. How can you imagine to contribute to the conservation of Danube and its islands and nature? (visitors)



5. Stakeholders

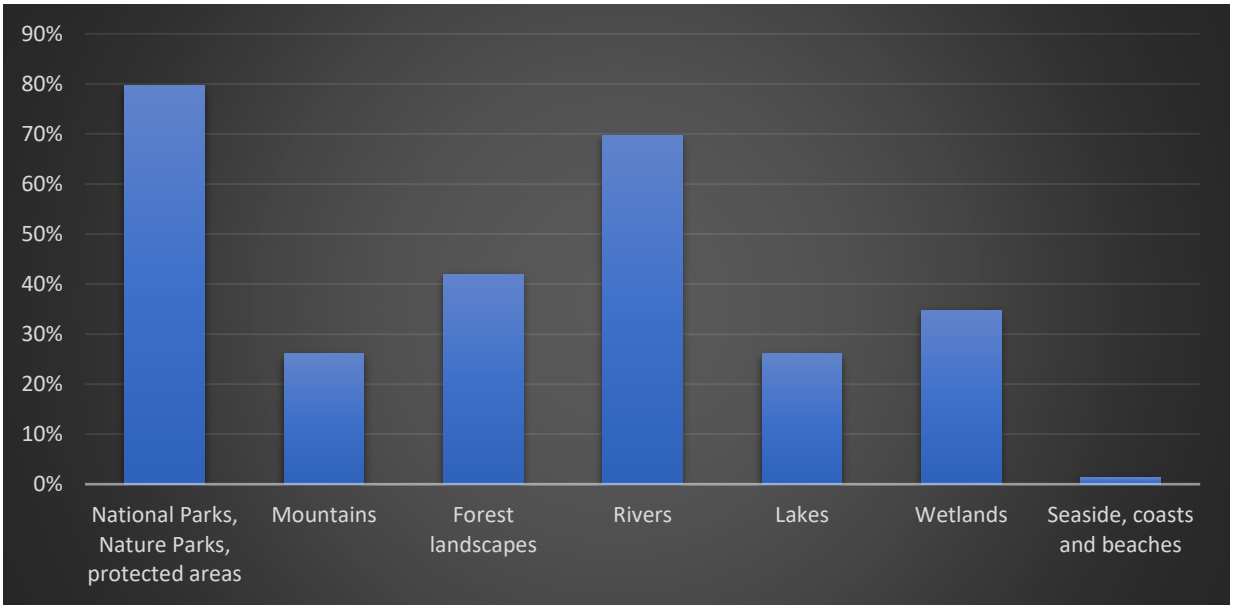
5.1. Research sample

This part of the research was conducted in a mixed way. Namely, in Hungary, Serbia, and Austria, the research was done quantitatively, that is, so that the stakeholders filled out a questionnaire. In Croatia and Romania, the research study was conducted qualitatively, that is, focus groups were conducted with stakeholders. In this report, we first present the results of the quantitative survey. Considering the small number of participants, the results are not presented per country, but collectively.

5.2. Associations related to the natural environment of the region where a person lives

In the first question in the survey, the participants were asked to think about natural landscapes in their region and to name a maximum of three ones that they are particularly proud of. It can be seen that the stakeholders are proudest of national parks, nature parks, and other protected areas, and rivers.

Figure 64. If you think of natural landscapes in your region, which ones are you proud of (choose up to 3 options)?(stakeholders)



As a continuation, in the second question, the participants were asked to list spontaneous associations that come to mind when they think about natural landscapes in their region. We can note that the Danube national parks and floodplains were most frequently mentioned.

Table 37. Spontaneous associations related to the natural landscapes in the region stakeholders)

Top five answers by frequencies
Danube National Parks (14) Danube floodplains (10) Danube (9) Forests (7) Mountains (5)

5.3. Free associations related to the Danube River

Similarly as in the second question, in the second question, the research participants were asked to state the spontaneous associations that come to their minds when they think of the Danube River. We can see that boats/ships/canoeing was the most frequent answer.

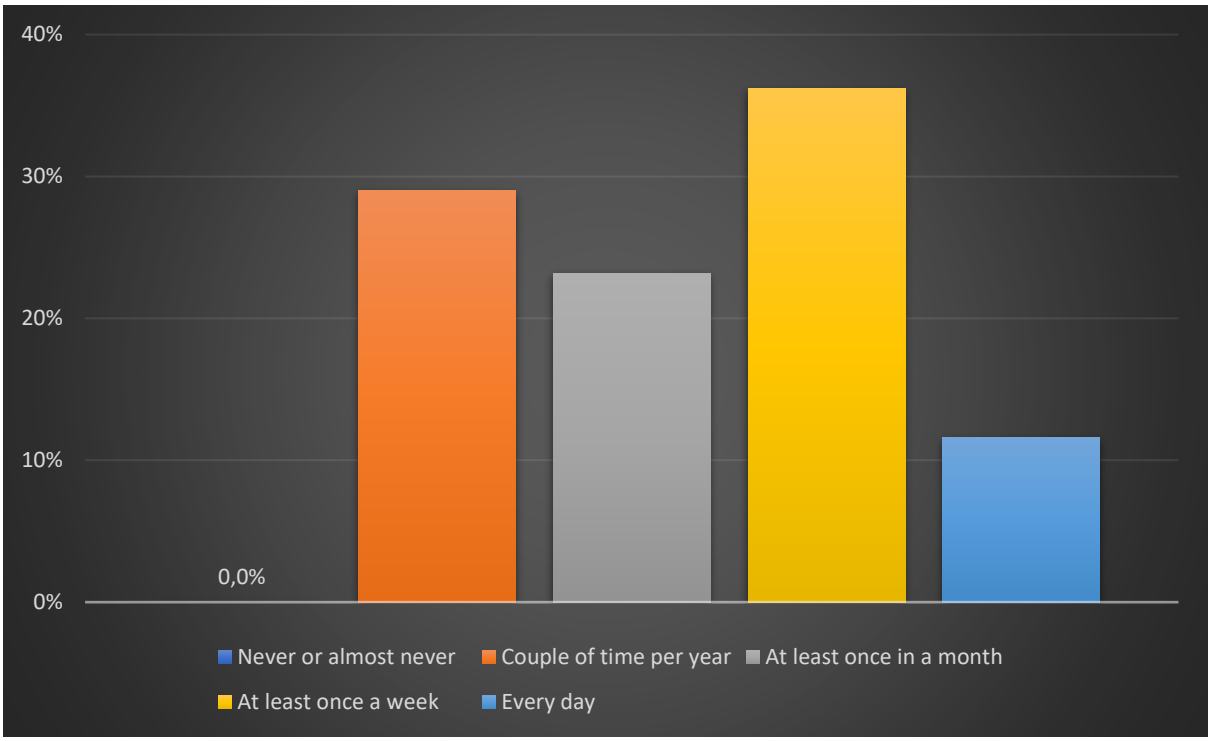
Table 38. Sponteneous associations related to the Danube river stakeholders)

Top five answers by frequencies
Boats/ships/canoeing (12) International river/connects many countries (10) Swimming/relaxation (9) Fishes/fishing (6) Beautiful (5)

5.4. Frequency of visiting the Danube area

As expected, given that the stakeholders are concerned, the frequency of visits to the Danube is very high. Thus, almost 48% of research participants visit the Danube once a week or more often (Figure 65).

Figure 65. Frequency of visiting the Danube area (stakeholders)



5.5. Assessments of the importance of individual functions of the Danube River

From Table 39, it can be concluded that ecosystems for rich biodiversity and habitats for protected species are, according to the research participants, the most important functions of the Danube River. The function of forestry (timber production) and hunting is the least important.

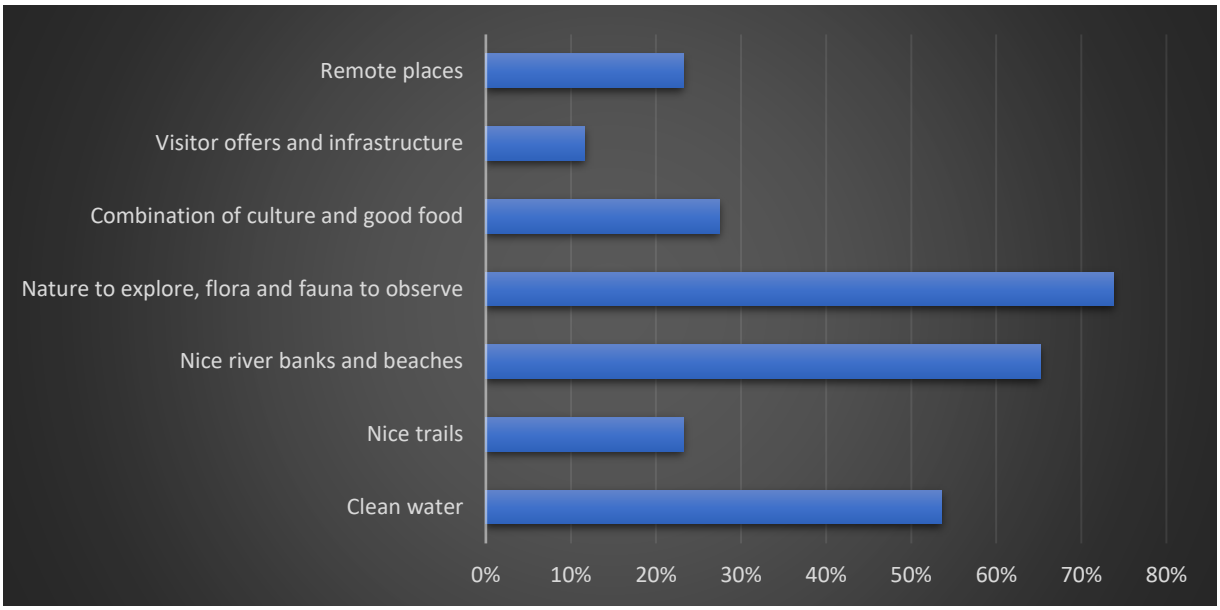
Table 39. Assessments of the importance of individual functions of the Danube River (means) (stakeholders)

	Total
Area for Recreation and sports activities	**3,90**
Ecosystem for rich biodiversity	**4,78**
Habitat for protected species	**4,74**
Source for (drinking) water	**3,42**
Source for (renewable) energy production	**3,33**
Forestry (timber production) and hunting	**2,68**
Fishing	**3,26**
Tourism destination	**3,75**
Transport route	**3,91**
Integrative and inspiring lifeline for many different countries and cultures	**4,14**

In the next question, research participants were asked to list a maximum of three things that are important to them when visiting the Danube. Nature to explore, and flora and fauna to observe

are the most important things for respondents when visiting the Danube, followed by the nice river banks and beaches.

Figure 66. Important things when visiting the Danube (stakeholders)



5.6. Assessments of the aesthetic appeal of certain forms of the river environment

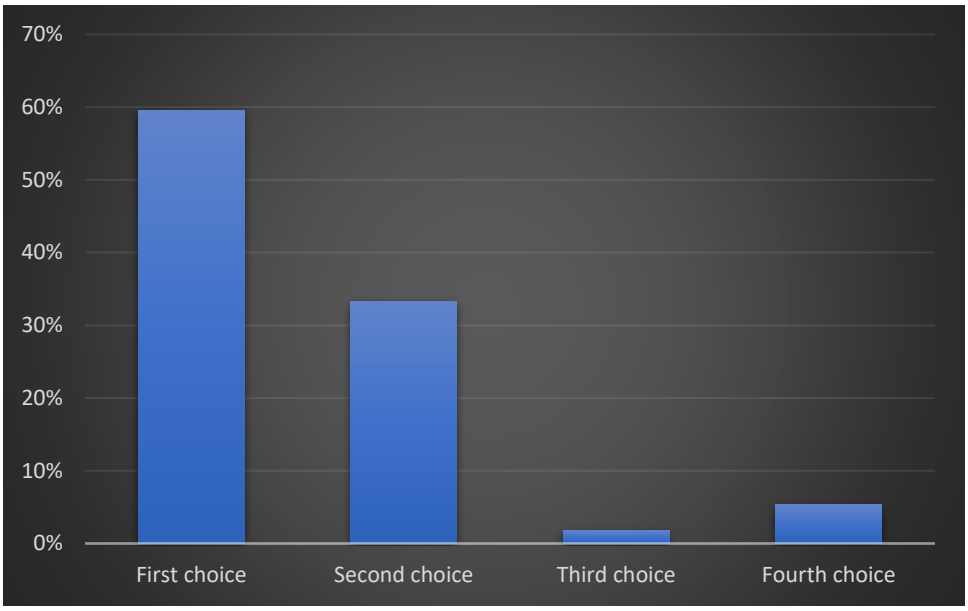
In the first question, the respondents were given a task to rank four photos with varying levels of embankment/natural value. The first photo represented an intact riverbank („wild island“), with a very high level of natural value. The second photo showed a restored riverbank with a high level of natural value. The third photo represented an embanked riverbank with a low level of natural value, while the fourth photo represented a strongly embanked riverbank with a very low level of natural value.

Figure 67. First photograph – an intact riverbank



It can be seen that the photograph of the first environment (an intact riverbank) was chosen as the first choice by almost 60% of all respondents (Figure 68).

Figure 68. First photograph – distribution of choices (stakeholders)



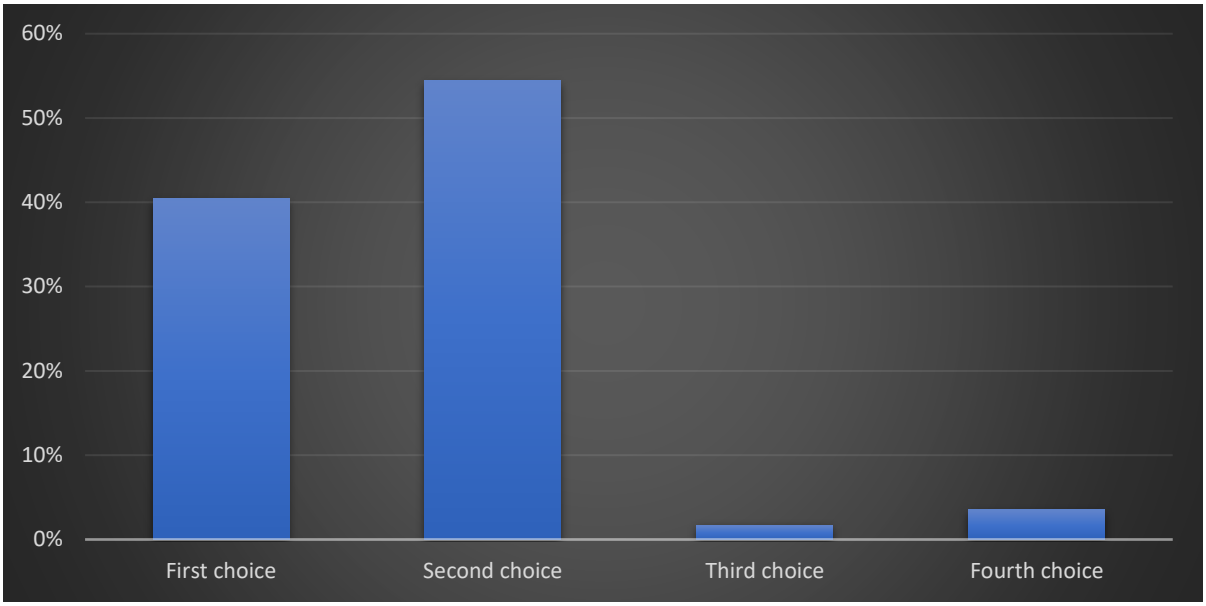
As already mentioned, the second photograph represented a restored riverbank with a high level of natural value.

Figure 69 - Second photograph - a restored riverbank



It can be noted that this photograph was chosen as the second choice (Figure 70).

Figure 70. Second photograph – distribution of choices (stakeholders)



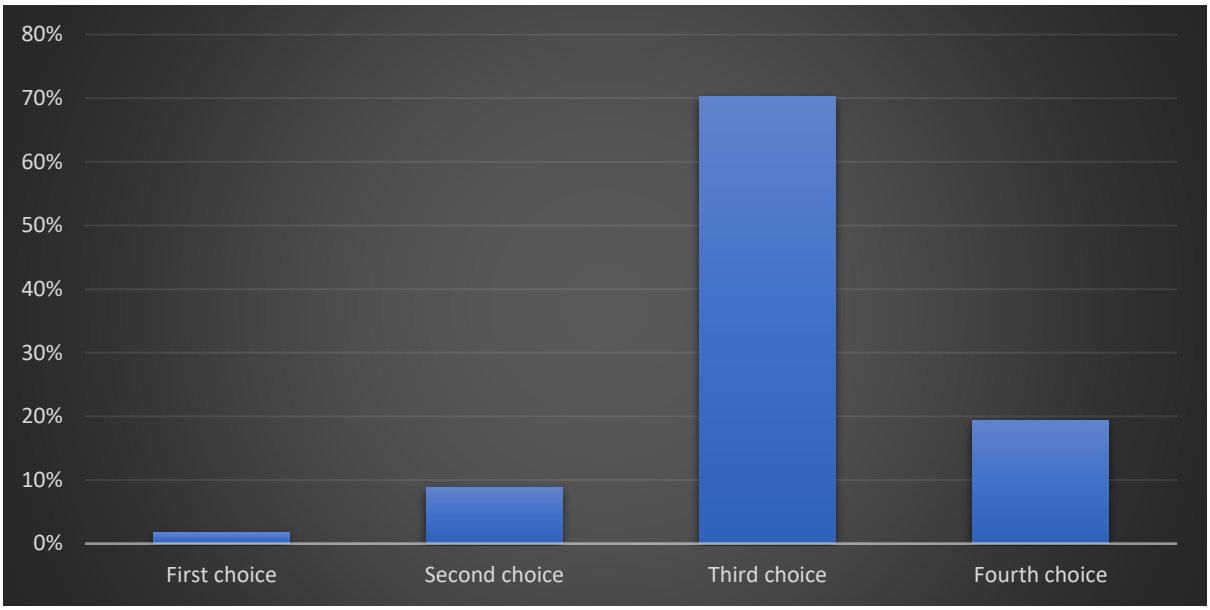
The third photograph, shown in Figure 71, represents an embanked riverbank with a low level of natural value.

Figure 71. Third photograph – an embanked riverbank



This photo was chosen as the third choice by the participants (Figure 72).

Figure 72. Third photograph – distribution of choices (stakeholders)



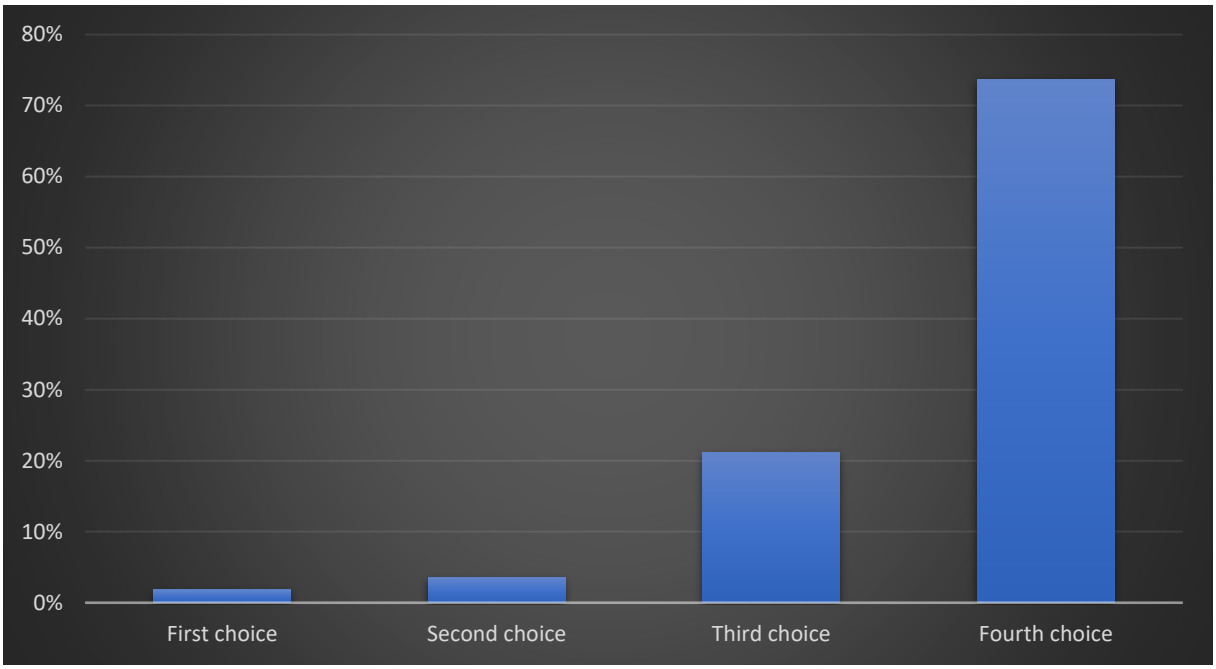
The fourth photograph (Figure 73) represents a strongly embanked riverbank with a very low level of natural value, and the negative perception of this kind of environment was confirmed in the respondents' rankings.

Figure 73. Fourth photograph - a strongly embanked riverbank



This photograph was chosen as the last (fourth) choice (Figure 74).

Figure 74. Fourth photograph – distribution of choices (stakeholders)



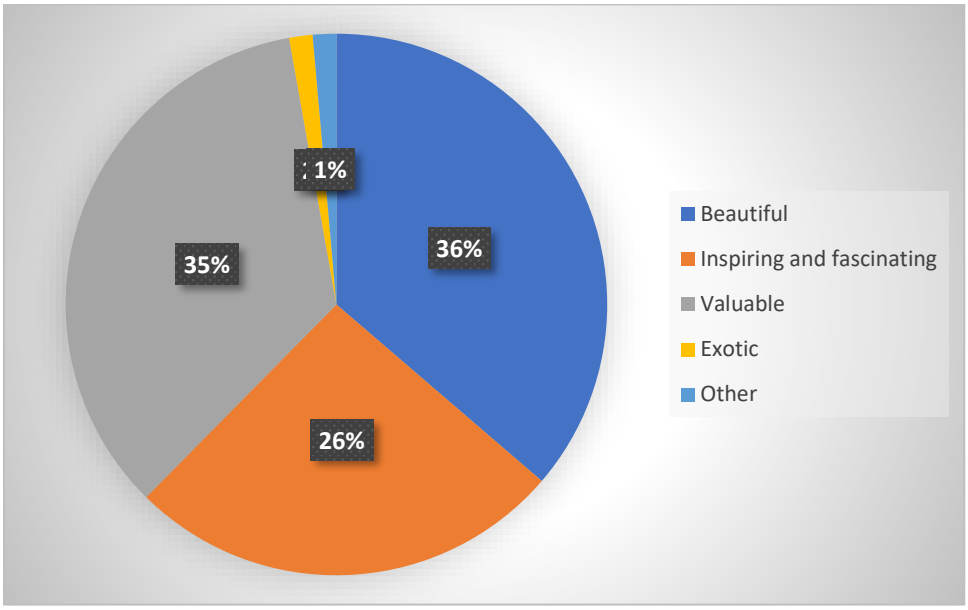
In the next survey question, respondents were shown a photograph of a river with good lateral connectivity (Figure 75), with a set of adjectives (beautiful, intimidating, inspiring and fascinating, dangerous, valuable, and exotic, with a task to choose the one among them that first comes to their mind when they see the photograph.

Figure 75. River with a good lateral conductivity



The results show that „beautiful " and „valuable" were the most frequent choices, followed by „inspiring and fascinating" (Figure 76).

Figure 76. River with a good lateral conductivity – associations (stakeholders)



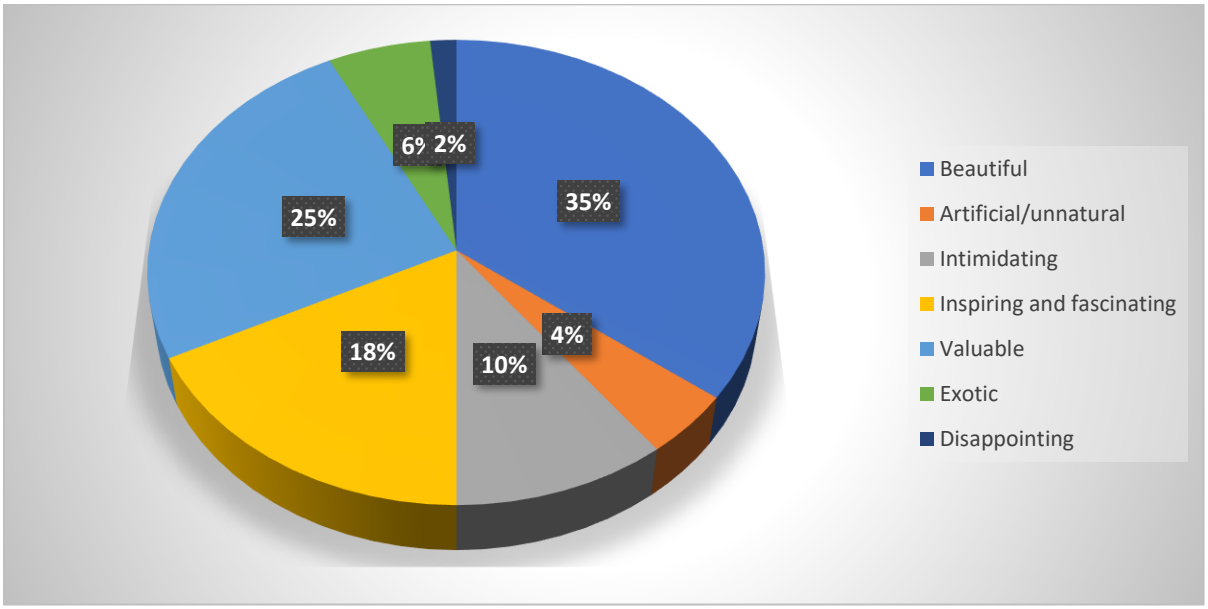
In the next survey question, respondents were shown a photograph of wild islands on the Danube (Figure 77), with the same list of adjectives as in the previous question.

Figure 77. Wild islands



As in the previous question, the most commonly chosen options were „beautiful“ and „valuable“ (Figure 78).

Figure 78. Wild islands – associations (stakeholders)



5.7. Perceptions of the concept of naturalness of the environment

From Table 40, it can be seen that, for the participants of the research study, a place with rich biodiversity and fascinating animals and plants represents the most important feature to determine whether a river is natural. Namely, the average score on the scale of importance that ranged from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important) is 4.70. The least important feature was „A place with none or few restrictions on my behavior; for unrestrained or unconfined recreation".

Table 40. How relevant are the following characteristics to determine a river as natural? (stakeholders)

	Total
A place with only natural sounds	**3,94**
A place with pure and clean water	**4,43**
A place where rivers and streams flow unimpeded, without river regulation	**4,49**
A place with little evidence of human occupation and modifications (buildings, dams…)	**3,82**
A place where natural conditions and processes exist and form the landscape	**4,39**
A place with none or few restrictions on my behaviour; for unrestrained or unconfined recreation	**2,35**
A place with rich biodiversity and fascinating animals and plants	**4,70**
A place without non-native animals and plants	**3,49**

5.8. Assessments of the importance and function of the naturalness of the river environment

When the factors that are important for the river to be assessed as natural are taken into account, it is evident that the statements that „natural rivers host rich biodiversity of characteristic animal and plant species“ (arithmetic mean is 4.72) and the statements that natural rivers promote local recreation by providing beautiful sites and landscapes (4.35) were assessed as the most important for the naturalness of the river environment. The statement that natural rivers create "green" jobs had the lowest degree of agreement (3.57).

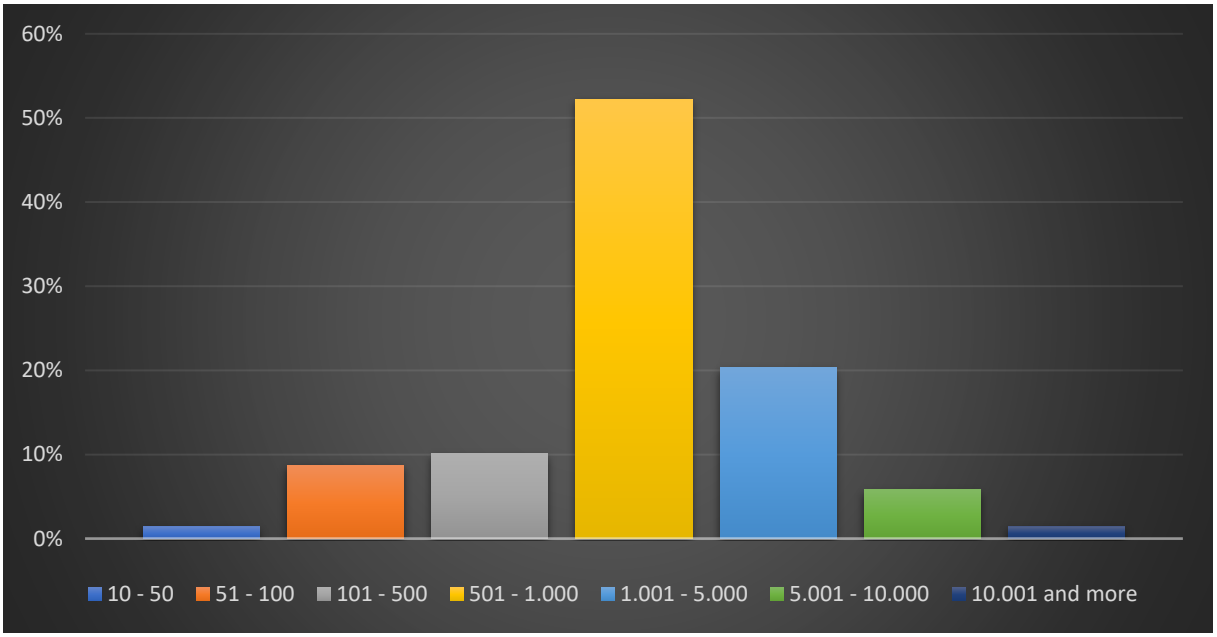
Table 41. Importance of the naturalness of the river environment (from 1 – not important at all to 5 – very important) (stakeholders)

	Total
Natural rivers host rich biodiversity of characteristic animal and plant species	**4,72**
Natural rivers help to prevent environmental pollution	**3,77**
Natural river flows contribute to prevent floodings	**4,00**
Natural rivers are important to reduce the negative impact of climate change	**4,23**
Natural rivers support and promote local tourism	**4,00**
Natural rivers promote local recreation by providing beautiful sites and landscapes	**4,35**
Natural river create „green“ jobs	**3,57**

5.9. Estimates of the number of Danube islands and the state of their naturalness

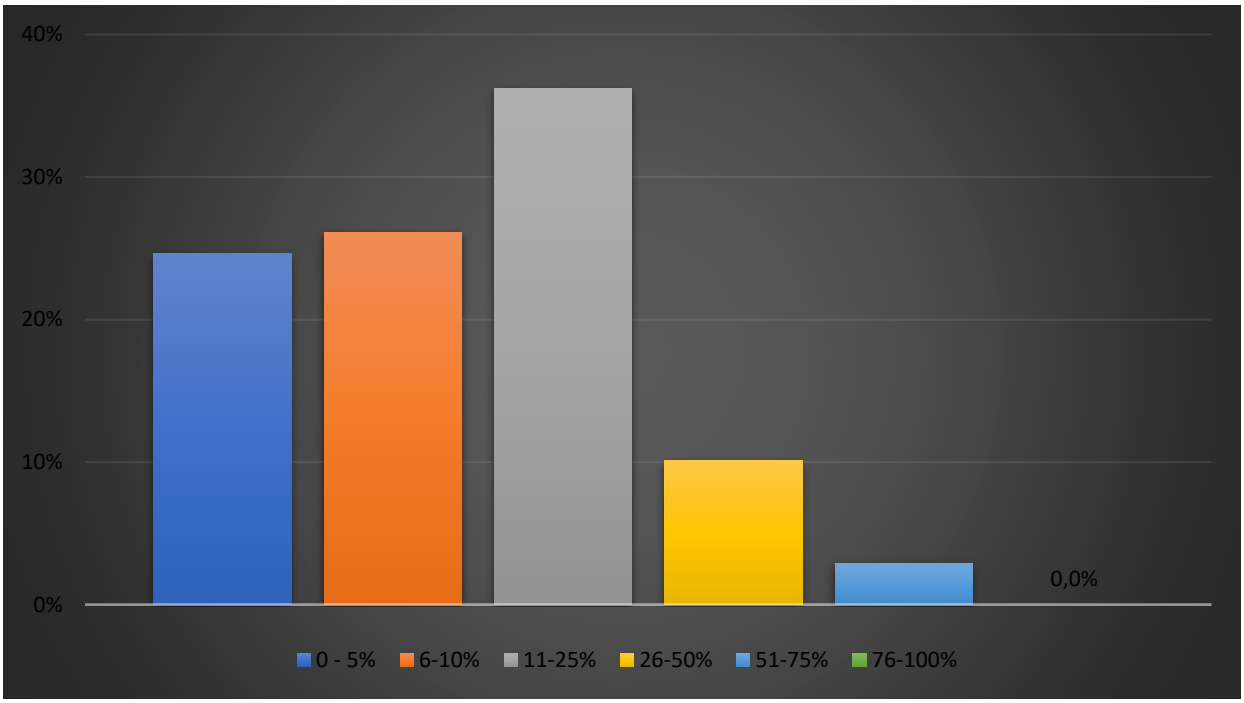
In the next question, the research participants were asked to estimate how many islands there are on the Danube River. As can be seen from the following Figure 79, the largest share was obtained by the estimate according to which there are between 500 and 1000 such islands.

Figure 79. Estimate of the number of Danube islands (stakeholders)



When it comes to the estimate of the number of natural and "wild" Danube islands, the largest share of responses estimated this share to be from 11 to 25% (Figure 80).

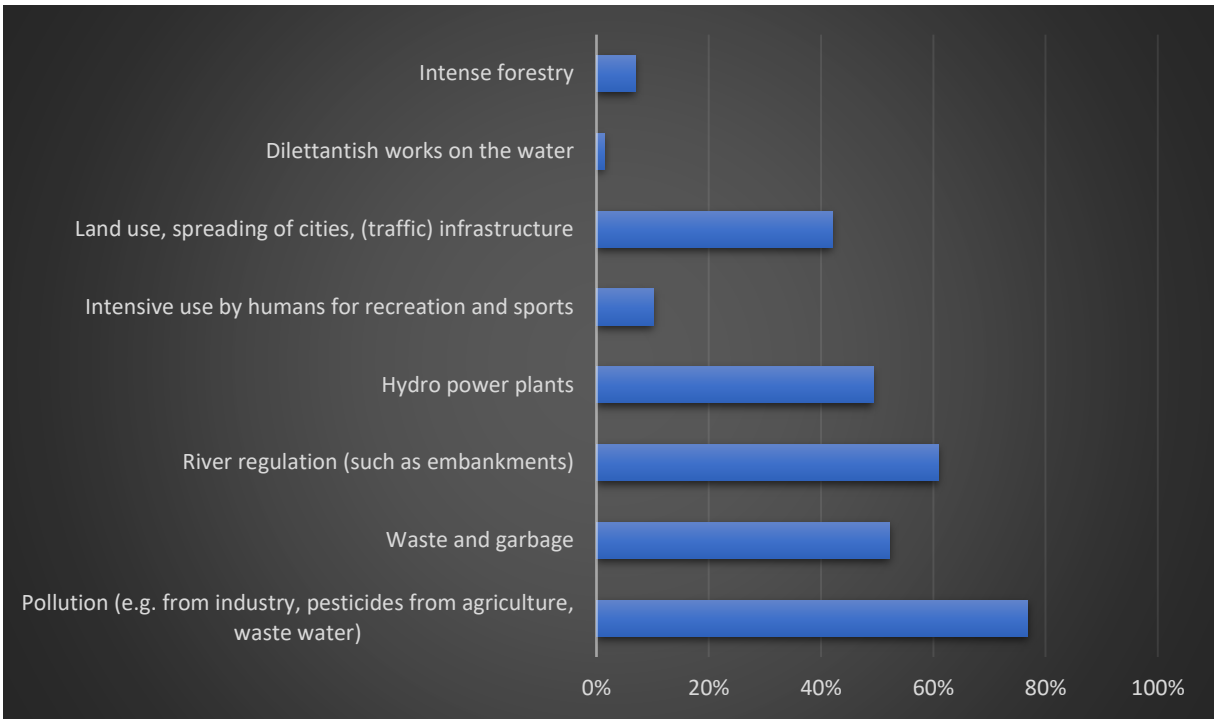
Figure 80. Estimate of the number of natural and „wild" Danube islands (stakeholders)



5.10. Assessments of threats and pressures regarding the naturalness of the river environment on the Danube

As can be seen from the following Figure 81, pollution (e.g. from industry, pesticides from agriculture, wastewater) was assessed as the most important threat to the natural environment of the Danube River. River regulation was assessed as the second most important threat, and waste and garbage as the third most important.

Figure 81. Threats and pressures regarding the naturalness of the river environment on the Danube (stakeholders)



5.11. Assessments of the importance of the various conservation and restoration measures on the Danube

In the next part of the survey, research participants were offered a list of various conservation and restoration measures regarding the Danube River. All listed measures received a high degree of support, with the protection of species receiving most choices (Table 42).

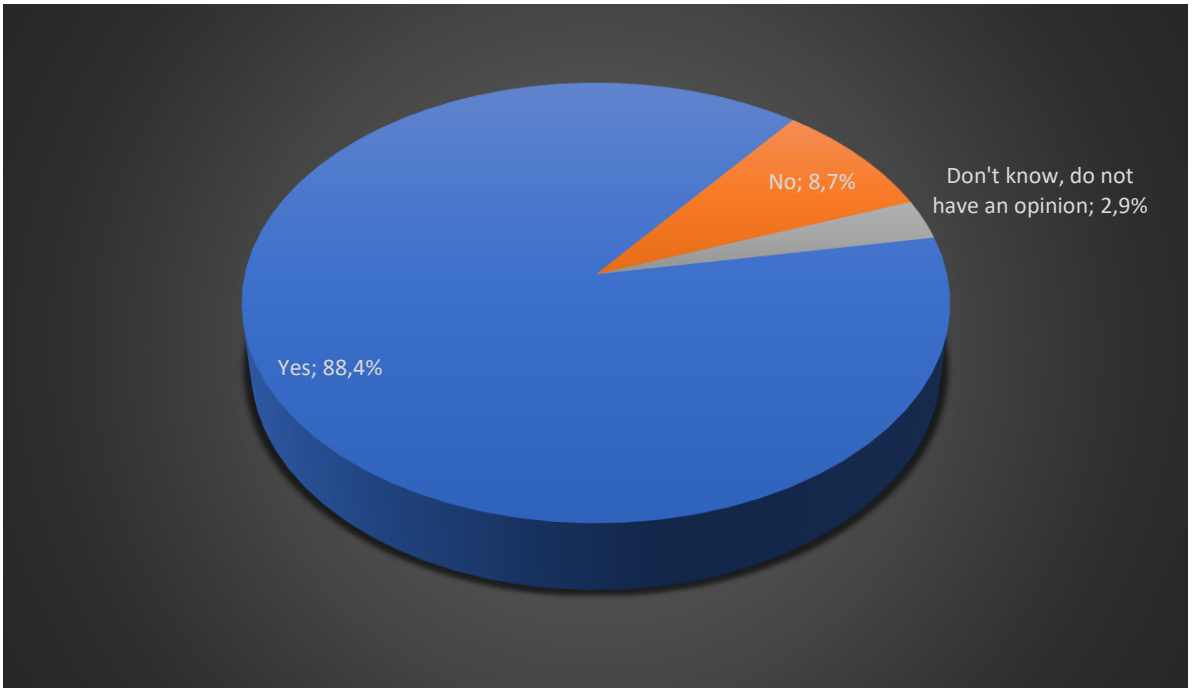
Table 42. Importance of the conservation and restoration measures on the Danube (stakeholders)

	Total
Ecological river engineering such as restoration of natural river banks, reconnection of side branches	**4,65**
Protection of species	**4,66**
New protected areas and strictly protected zone	**4,24**
Waste water treatment	**4,63**
Fish bypasses	**4,40**
Sustainable forestry	**4,25**
Sustainable tourism and nature education	**4,30**
Removal of trash	**4,60**

5.12. The level of support for the strict protection of the Danube islands

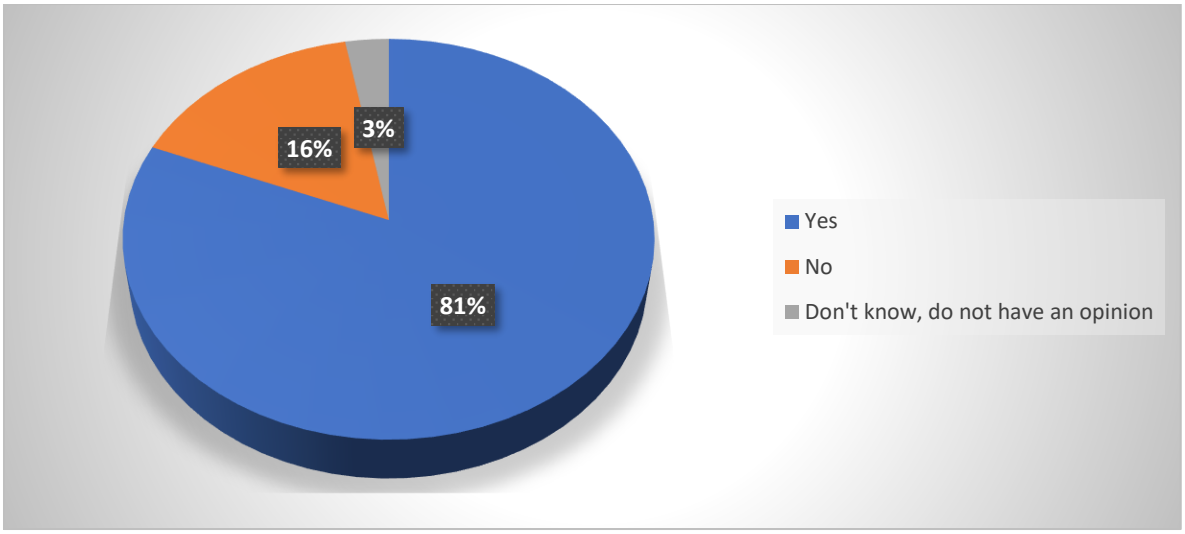
As can be noted from Figure 82, the level of support for the strict protection of the Danube islands is very high (88.4% of the respondents support it).

Figure 82. The level of support for the strict protection of the Danube islands (stakeholders)



Similarly, the participants agree that access to strictly protected islands is prohibited to better preserve their sensitive nature (Figure 83).

Figure 83. The level of support for the prohibition of access to strictly protected islands (stakeholders)



5.13. Perception of the various organizations about their duties toward the Danube protection

In the next question, the participants were asked to name a maximum of three organizations that should be in charge of the wise use and management of the Danube. From Table 43, it can

be concluded that in all countries, research participants believe that protected area administrations (national parks, etc.) should be the most important type of organization that should be entrusted with this task.

Table 43. Which organizations should be in charge of the wise-use and management of the Danube? (stakeholders)

	Overall
Waterway administrations	55,1
Protected area administrations (national parks, etc.)	85,5
Cities, local municipalities and communities	30,4
Ministries and water authorities	53,6
International organizations	30,4
Fishermen´s organizations	5,8
Non-governmental organizations	8,7

5.14. The level of awareness about various programs, institutions, and funding instruments related to the Danube protection

When it comes to the level of awareness about various programs, institutions, and funding instruments related to the Danube protection (Table 44), the largest number of stakeholders are familiar with UNESCO as an organization, as well as with protected areas on the Danube in their own country. A significant number of stakeholders (92.4%) have heard of the Natura 2000 Network.

Table 44. Have you ever heard of these institutions, programmes and funding instruments?

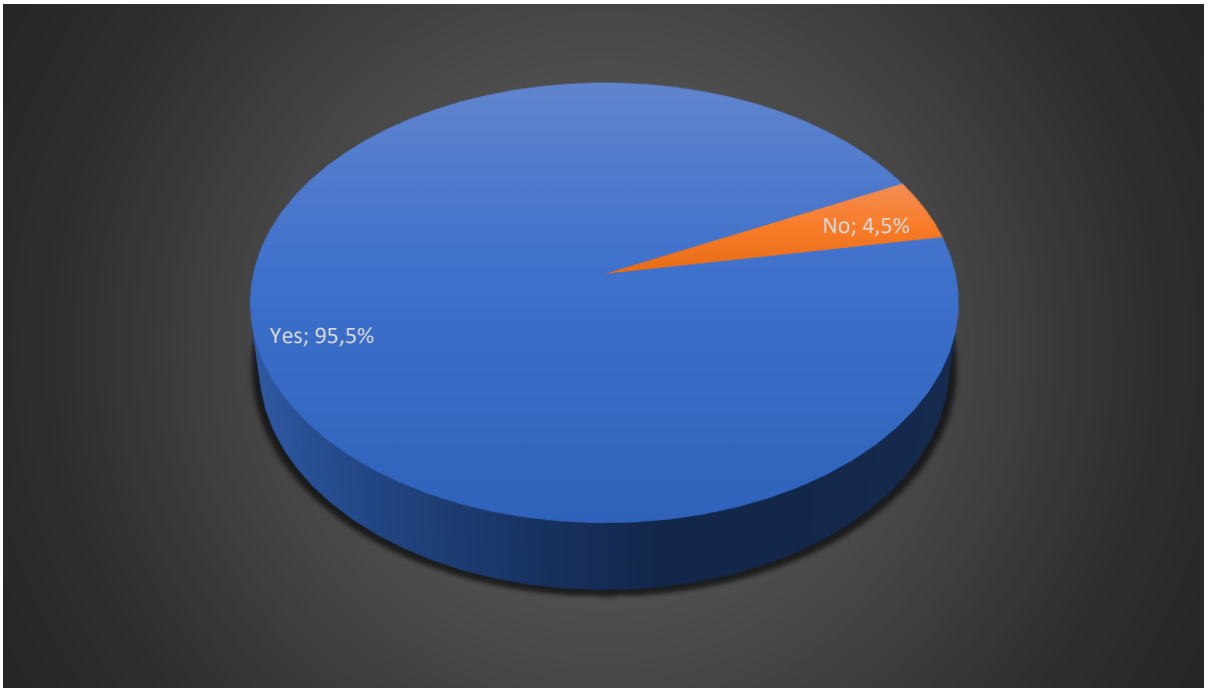
	Overall
ICPDR International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River	
Yes	58,2
No	35,8
Do not know/ Not sure	6,0
EU Strategy for the Danube River	
Yes	70,1
No	20,9
Do not know/ Not sure	9,0
UNESCO	
Yes	100,0
No	0,0
Do not know/ Not sure	0,0
RAMSAR Convention	
Yes	69,2
No	27,7
Do not know/ Not sure	3,1
DANUBEPARKS The Danube River Network of Protected Areas	
Yes	62,7
No	29,9
Do not know/ Not sure	7,4
Natura 2000 Network	
Yes	92,4
No	6,1
Do not know/ Not sure	1,5
LIFE programme – the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action	
Yes	86,6
No	9,0

Do not know/ Not sure	4,5
Park prirode Kopački rit/Donau-Auen National Park, Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve…	
Yes	98,5
No	1,5
Do not know/ Not sure	0,0
River Conservation Fund	
Yes	31,3
No	52,3
Do not know/ Not sure	16,4

5.15. The level of awareness about the Danube protected areas

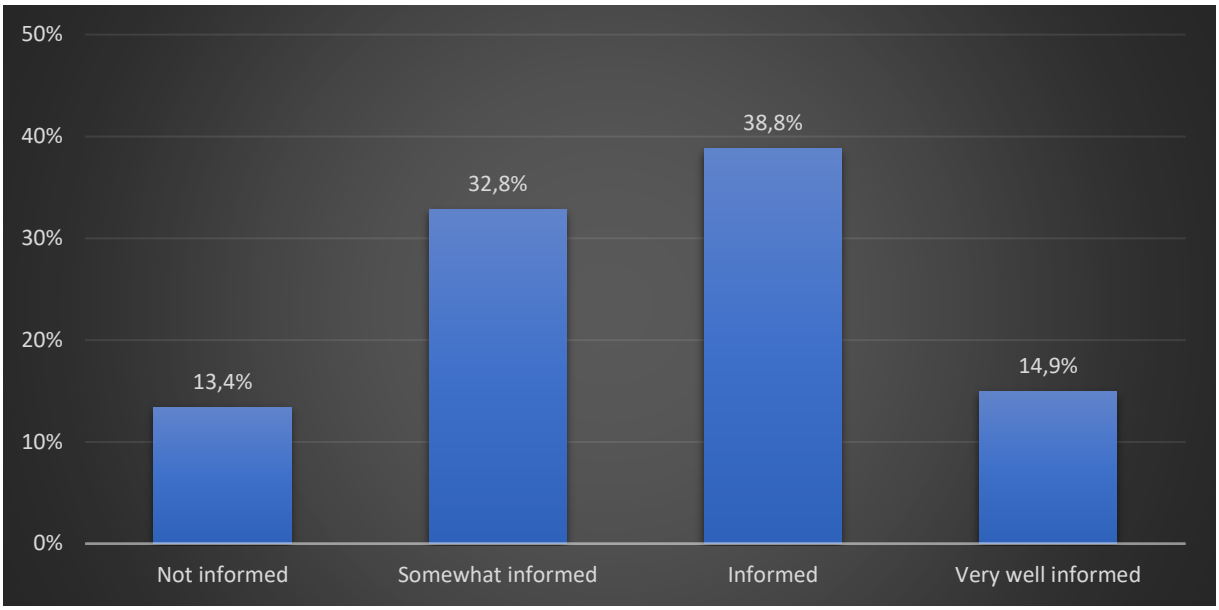
In the next question, the respondents were asked to state whether they knew any of the Danube-protected areas (Figure 84). The level of awareness was as high as 95.5%.

Figure 84. Do you know any protected area(s) at the Danube? (stakeholders)



In the next question, the participants were asked to express how well they feel informed about the Danube protected areas in their country, on a one-to-five-point scale running from „not informed at all“ to „very well informed“. From Figure 85, we can conclude that the respondents are divided between those who feel that they are not well informed and those who feel that they are informed.

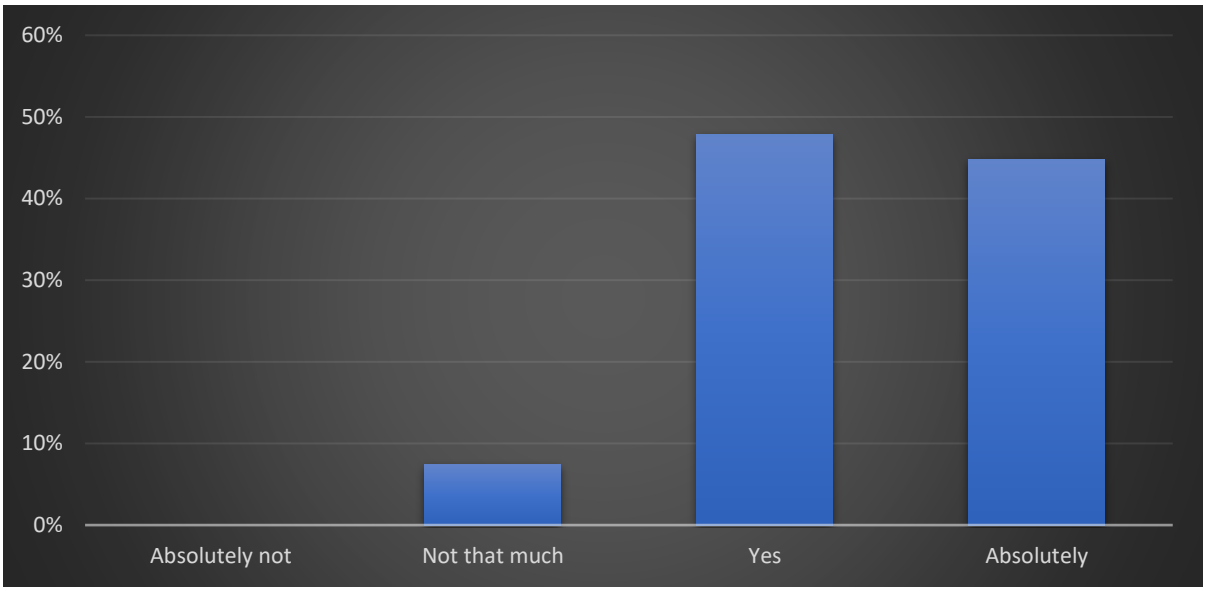
Figure 85. How well do you feel informed about the Danube-protected areas in your country? (stakeholders)



5.16. The level and type of support for the Danube natural islands

From Figure 86 we can note that the large majority of the respondents support or absolutely support conservation actions for the Danube and its nature, such as natural islands.

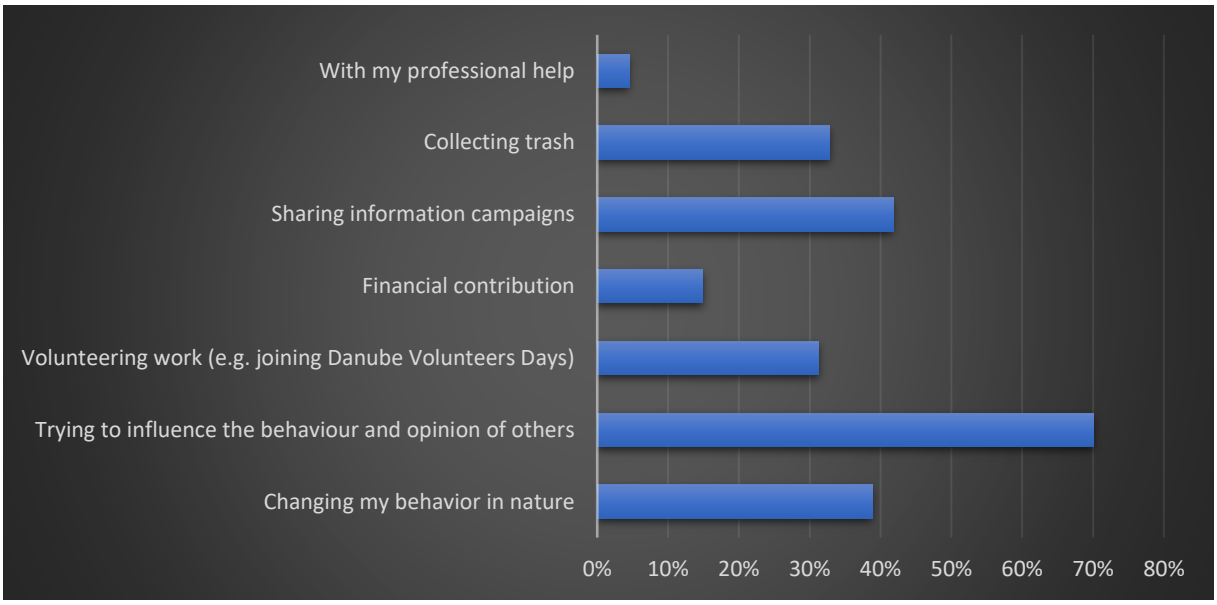
Figure 86. Are you in favour of conservation actions for the Danube and its nature such as the natural islands? (stakeholders)



In the next question, the participants were given a list of activities with which they could contribute to the conservation of the Danube and its islands: changing their behavior in nature,

trying to influence the behavior and opinion of others, volunteering work (e.g. joining Danube Volunteers Days), financial contribution, sharing information campaigns, and collecting trash. As can be seen from Figure 87, „trying to influence the behavior and opinion of others“ was the most frequently chosen activity.

Figure 87. How can you imagine to contribute to the conservation of Danube and its islands and nature? (stakeholders)



5.17. Focus group - Croatia

FOCUS GROUP (JULY 7, 2023 - KOPAČKI RIT NATURE PARK)

PRESENT:

1. Željko Pavić and Krunoslav Vukelić (moderators)
2. Vlatko Rožac (PP Kopački rit)
3. Matej Marušić (DANUBEPARKS)
4. Two representatives of Belje
5. Two representatives of Croatian Forests
6. One representative of the Biology Department of J. J. Strossmayer University in Osijek
7. Representative of the Fishing Community
8. Two representatives of Croatian waters
9. Two representatives of the Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure (Waterways Administration)

Fokus group started at 10:00 am.

At the beginning, the moderator introduced the participants to the implementation methodology and duration of the focus group. He encouraged them to freely express their views and opinions because the attitudes of the stakeholders is important for the project. The focus group started with an introductory presentation of the project held by Vlatko Rožac, which introduced the participants to the basic goal, duration, and activities within the project. Immediately after the presentation, the participants had no additional questions.

The moderator asked the participants to introduce themselves and to briefly explain the link of their own organization to this project, i.e. why their organization is one of the stakeholders of the project, and what the participants did. The representatives of Belje stated that they are not directly connected with the area covered by this project, but they have activities and cooperate with PP Kopački rit. The representatives of Croatian Forests stated that they are partners in this project and that they directly carry out forest restoration activities. The representative of the Department of Biology stated that those in the field in which they operate are interested in such projects and their effects. The representative of the fishing community said that fishing is an important topic within the project and that he is a resident of this area, that is, part of the local community. The representative of DANUBEPARKS said that their activity is also directly related to the protected area. The representatives of Croatian Waters stated that water management is clearly related to this area and the goals and activities of the project, and the representatives of the Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure (Administration for Waterways) said that they also have a clear direct interest in the management of waterways. when it comes to projects like this.

The moderator asked the participants what consequences (positive or negative) the implementation of this project will have on the work of their organization, that is, the activities being done or planned. The representatives of the Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure came forward and stated that a possible problem for them is the issue of the surface of the island, i.e. the possible impact on the waterways that they regulate. The representative of the Fishing Community asked for an additional explanation of what the term conservation would mean and how it would affect existing activities, especially fishing. Vlatko Rožac answered that additional fishing restrictions would be introduced in some areas covered by project activities. It was also emphasized that the disputed issue of the state border on the Danube is not being discussed at the moment, but that activities are being carried out jointly without entering into the aforementioned issue. The representative of the Croatian Forests asked

which area was covered by the activities and what the individual categories of protection meant, to which he received the requested clarification from Vlatko Rožac. The representative of the Department of Biology asked what was included in the project activities, the forests or the area as a whole, and they gave him an additional explanation of the project activities. The representatives of the Ministry asked for an explanation of what can and cannot be done in the protected sub-area covered by the project and emphasized that there is already a water meter in that area (Siga Island). Belj representatives asked what will be done on the island, which is part of the project area in Croatia, and Vlatko Rožac explained that forest conversion will be done. Matej Marušić emphasized that the important final goal of the project is the preservation of biodiversity, with a view to the spawning of fish facilitated by the Danube islands by providing suitable migration corridors, as well as an important nesting habitat for some bird species. He also emphasized the European regulation that requires 30% of the surface to be under some kind of protection. A representative of Hrvatske šume mentioned finances as a possible problem, because the extraction of timber entails large financial costs that they, as a commercial company, have to bear. The timber does not have a particularly high market value, and the extraction and transportation costs are extremely high. The moderator asked the representative of the Department of Biology what consequences these activities will have on research activity, and the representative answered that interesting areas of research are definitely being opened. He also stated that they are interested in monitoring, but Vlatko Rožac replied that it had already been resolved through a public tender where the most favourable offer was chosen. The representative of the biology department also wondered whether additional pollution might occur as a result of some activities on the project. Vlatko Rožac answered that this problem is solved by the conditions of nature protection, and the supervision of their compliance is carried out by the public institution Kopački rit Nature Park.

The representative of the Fishing Association agreed in principle with the need for restoration, but emphasized that this would introduce additional restrictions when it comes to fishing and swimming. He also mentioned the problem of the border area, where there is already a significant degree of movement control by the police. He stated that he sometimes has the impression that the area is overprotected and suggested some possibilities of compensation for the local community. When asked by the moderator what types of compensation would be considered, he stated that he would think about it. The representative of Belj stated that from the communication aspect, the issue of protection should be emphasized more, even when it is not visible to the local community and visitors. Namely, even when visitors cannot visit a part of the protected area, the very awareness of its existence indicates care for the environment and

the special nature of the protected area. She also emphasized that the Danube is very poorly used, that is, that it is not promoted in terms of branding the region and the tourist activities that take place there. The representative of DANUBEPARKS emphasized that one of the advantages of the project is the networking and sharing of experiences among foreign partners, which can help because one learns from other people's mistakes, but also from the positive examples of some western countries whose Danube waterways are in a worse condition, but have started with protection and restoration earlier. The representative of Belj agreed with that and stated that European regulations require an increase in protected areas, so it should be adapted to that. The representative of Hrvatske vode emphasized that it is necessary to clarify what protection means at all and that relying on natural processes is wrong because they do not necessarily bring positive results just because they are natural. She emphasized the need for active intervention in order to achieve certain desired goals. She also stated that the restriction of access to space for the local population is also not necessarily always good because human action does not have to be negative. Vlatko Rožac agreed that the concept of protection does not include only passive observation of nature and cited examples from the activities of PP Kopači rit that include active intervention in natural processes in order to preserve flora and fauna (e.g. treatment of animals). Vlatko Rožac emphasizes that a balance must be found between nature protection and the existing use of space, and that project activities are just as much an idea. The other focus group participants also agreed with this concept of nature protection. The representative of Hrvatske vode pointed out that in the future the issue of the state border and ownership/jurisdiction over the islands should always be resolved, as this is the only way to establish quality protection. She also stated that Hrvatske vode should have stronger jurisdiction over water courses in protected areas, such as, for example, the maintenance of embankments, which is extremely important for the course of the river itself. Other participants also cited examples of removing stones from riverbanks that led to stronger erosion because it was thoughtlessly believed that such an action was harmful and made no sense. Matej Marušić stated that, as a rule, such removals are done with a plan and that the environmental consequences that occur are assessed.

The representative of Croatian forests stated that nature cannot be "frozen", that is, that restoration does not mean that such a state can be permanently protected without additional activities, that is, by leaving nature to its own devices. An example of invasive species was given, and that it is necessary to constantly carry out activities to remove them in that area. Vlatko Rožac explained that it is indeed a continuous process that will not end with this project, but must continue in the future, that is, it must be sustainable. The moderator's next question

was about the consequences of project activities on the local community. The representative of Belj stated that it seems to her that the area is already under a high level of protection and that she does not think that these activities will have major consequences for the local population and their daily life. Vlatko Rožac pointed out that, in fact, nothing personal has changed, that is, it is an area that can hardly be exploited for tourism anyway. Even if it were possible, he stated that it is questionable how profitable it would be in view of the potential number of visitors, the ratio of invested and received, and what can be seen in the example of some other activities and investments. But he also stressed that all activities should not be viewed exclusively through the prism of immediate financial benefits, because the protection of natural and cultural heritage is a goal in itself that does not depend on short-term financial profitability. Therefore, he believes that protection is a better and more logical solution than increasing the degree of exploitation. The representative of Croatian forests also stated that the existing level of protection is already high and that he does not think that much will change when it comes to the conditions and daily life of local residents. The representative of Hrvatske vode asked if the restoration planned by the NATURAVITA project also refers to an increase in the amount of water in the area itself, to which Vlatko rožac answered in the affirmative, that is, he emphasized that the goal is not only to increase the flow of water, but that it and stays in that area because it brings ecological benefits. The representative of the Department of Biology noted that the name "protection" might not be the best, to which Vlatko Rožac said that it was only the name that was used in the name of the presentation. The other stakeholders also emphasized once again that the concept of project activities is now clearer, that is, what the concept of restoration and conservation actually refers to. The representative of Croatian Forests stated that the ambiguities surrounding the concept of protection appear because this topic is not present enough in the education system, even in the higher education system.

Vlatko Rožac stated that the bed of the Danube is being dug, that is, that the depth of the river bottom is increasing. The representative of Hrvatske vode mentioned that the possible reasons for this may be different, and that the ban on sand extraction is not necessarily related to it. Increasing the depth of the Danube also leads to an increase in the depth of the surrounding groundwater, which has negative consequences for the ecosystem due to the unavailability of water. The representative of Hrvatske vode also asked how many areas of the Republic of Croatia are currently under protection, that is, whether the requirements and criteria of the European Union are met. Vlatko Rožac replied that the share is much smaller than what is needed, that is, that the criteria are not currently met, that is, that the Republic of Croatia is a fraction of the requested percentage of the territory under protection. Vlatko Rožac also told

the participants that the influence of hydroelectric power plants on ecological processes on the Danube is significant because the Danube has no sediments after the dams at the hydroelectric power plants and that erosion increases in the part of the flow after the dams, that is, the course of the Danube deepens also because of the hydroelectric power plants. The representative of the Fishing Association stated that it is easy to protect the area under the karst because there is no human exploitation of the space there anyway, while in more fertile areas, such as Slavonia and Baranja, it is much more difficult to achieve a balance between protection and exploitation. The other focus group participants also agreed with the above. The moderator asked if there were any additional questions and comments, and the focus group participants did not state them. Vlatko Rožac and Željko Pavić thanked everyone for their participation, and Vlatko Rožac mentioned that another focus group will be held in the final phase of the project. The focus group ended at 11.40 am.

Main conclusions of the focus group:

1. The participants did express some concerns about the project activities, but no significant problems that could threaten them arose. For instance, a possible problem is the issue of the surface of the island, i.e. the possible impact on the waterways. Additionally, the representative of Hrvatske šume mentioned finances as a possible problem, because the extraction of timber entails large financial costs. The representative of the Fishing Association agreed in principle with the need for restoration, but emphasized that this would introduce additional restrictions when it comes to fishing and swimming. He also mentioned the problem of the border area, where there is already a significant degree of movement control by the police.

2. There was a high degree of consensus about the meaning of nature protection. It was concluded that there is a need for active intervention in order to achieve certain desired goals, and that the the concept of protection does not include only passive observation of nature, i.e. that a balance must be found between nature protection and the existing use of space.

6. Schoolchildren

This part of the research was conducted in Croatia, with 35 schoolchildren attending the fifth grade in a local elementary school. A modified survey questionnaire was used.

In the first question of the survey, the students were asked to indicate what come(s) first and spontaneously to their minds when they think of natural landscapes in Slavonia and Baranja. From Table 45, we can note that Kopački rit park of nature was most often mentioned.

Table 45. Spontaneous associations related to the natural landscapes in the region (schoolchildren)

Top five answers by frequencies
Kopački rit (8)
Wild animals (6)
(beautiful) nature (5)
Rivers (Drava and Danube) (5)
Birds (5)
Fields (5)

In the second questions, the students were asked to provide an answer to a question „What is an island“ in a free form. The most frequent three answers were all related to the concept of a mass of land surrounded by water (river, sea, or ocean).

Table 46. Answers to the question „What is an island?“ (schoolchildren)

Top three answers by frequencies
A part of the land surrounded by water (12)
A place surrounded by the sea or ocean (5)
A land surrounded by the sea or river (2)

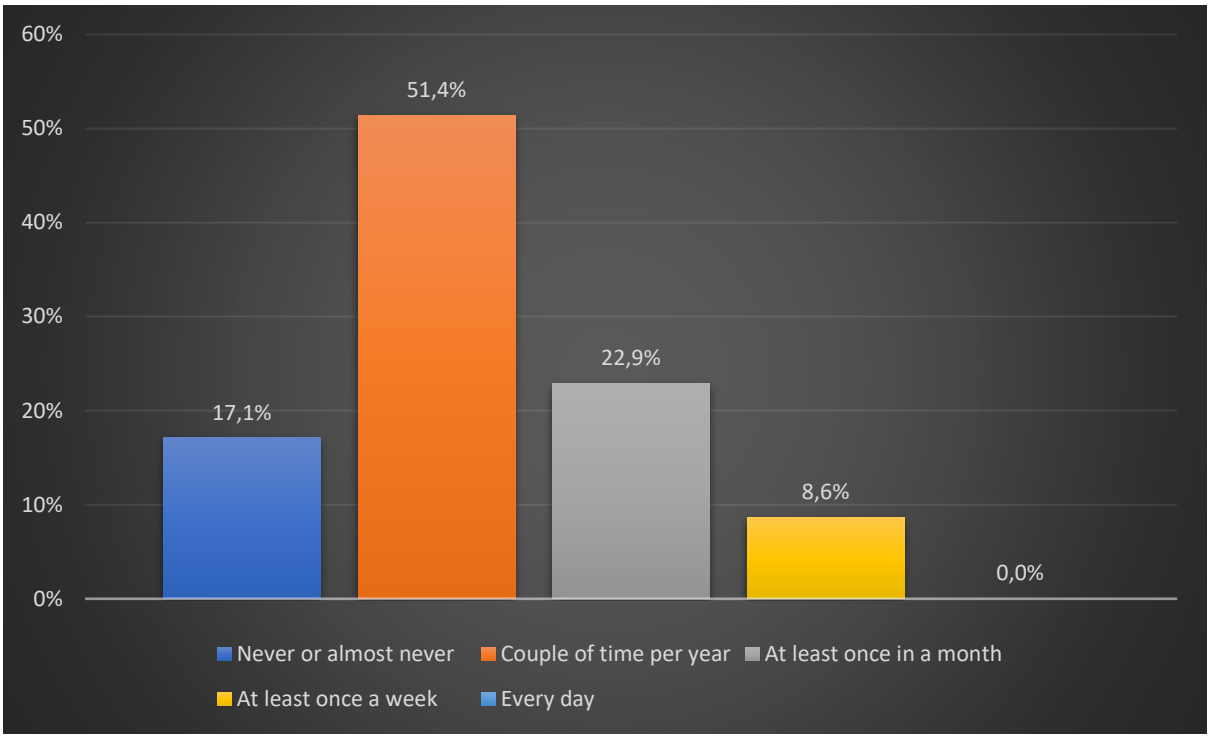
In the next question, students were asked to indicate what spontaneously come to their mind when thinking about the Danube River. The top three associations were: Vukovar, size/length/depth, and fish/fishing (Table 47).

Table 47. Spontaneous associations related to the Danube River. (schoolchildren)

Top three answers by frequencies
Vukovar (5)
Size/length/depth (4)
Fishes/fishing (4)

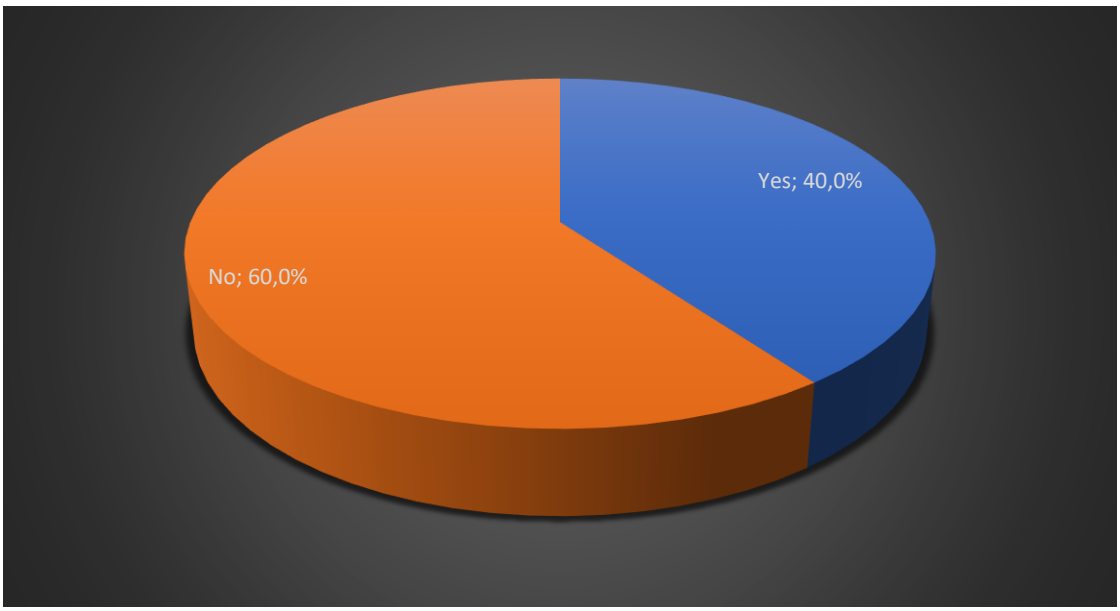
From Figure 88, we can conclude that about 31% of students visit the Danube once a month or more often.

Figure 88. Frequency of visiting the Danube area (schoolchildren)



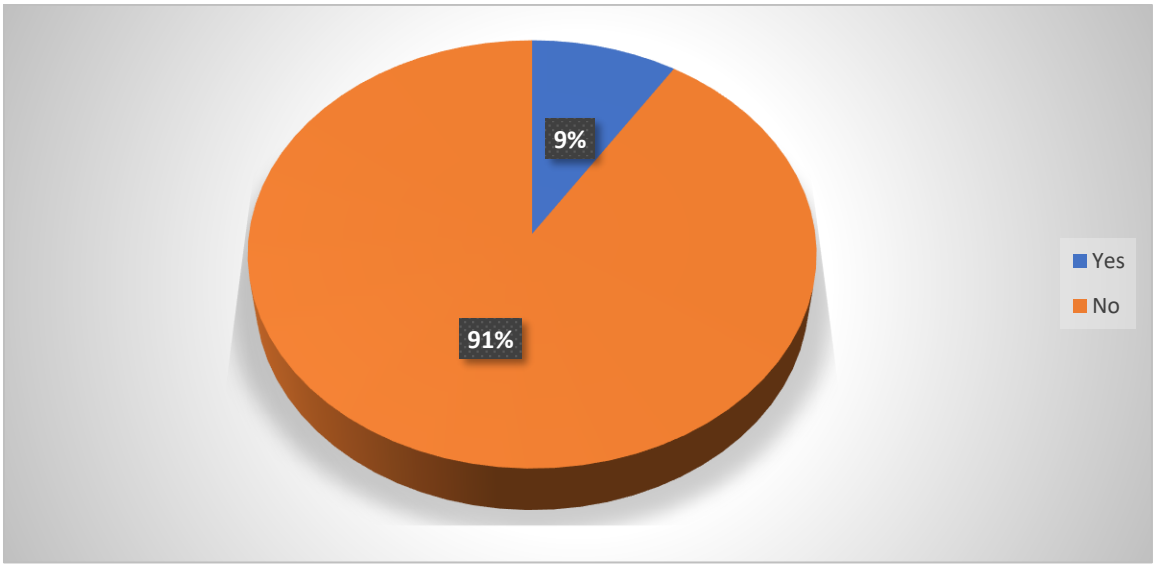
From Figure 89, we can see that 60% of the students have never heard about the Danube islands.

Figure 89. Familiarity with the existence of the Danube islands (schoolchildren)



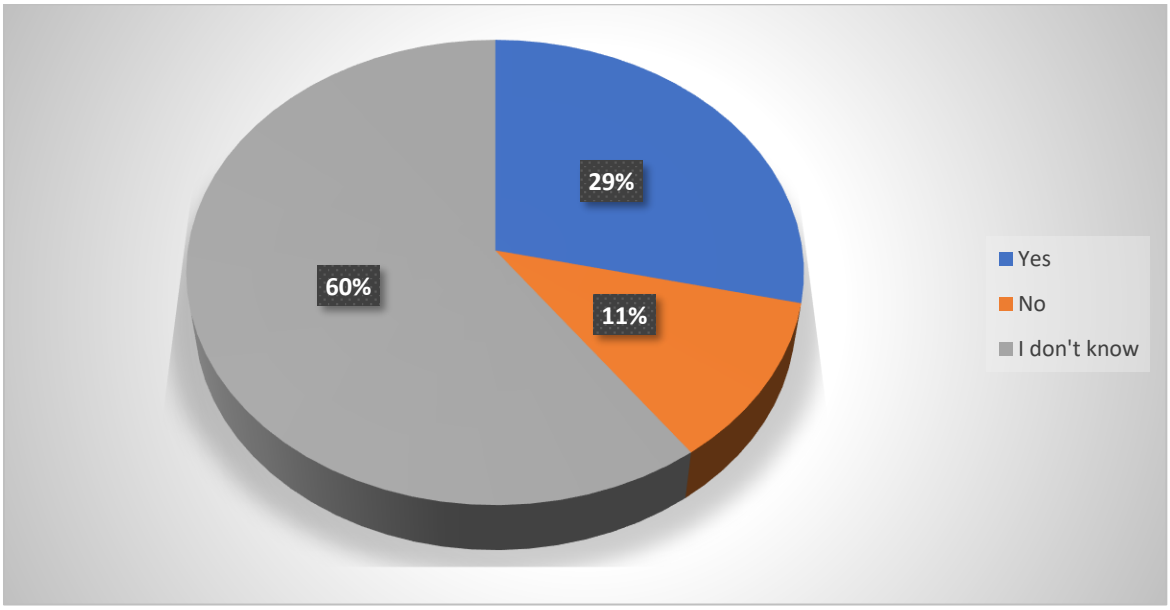
Only about 9% of the students visited some of the Danube islands (Figure 90).

Figure 90. Have you ever visited some of the Danube islands? (schoolchildren)



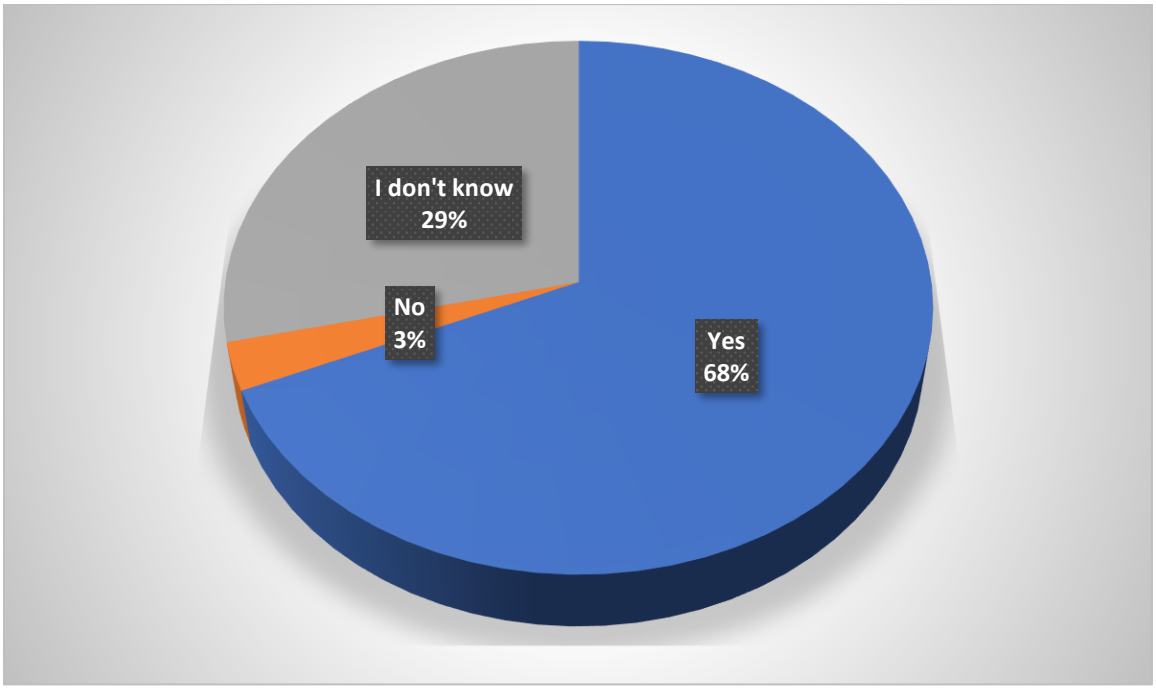
About 60% of the students could not tell whether the Danube islands were endangered. Additional 29% believe that they are endangered, while 11% do not agree with this statement (Figure 91).

Figure 91. Are the Danube islands endangered? (schoolchildren)



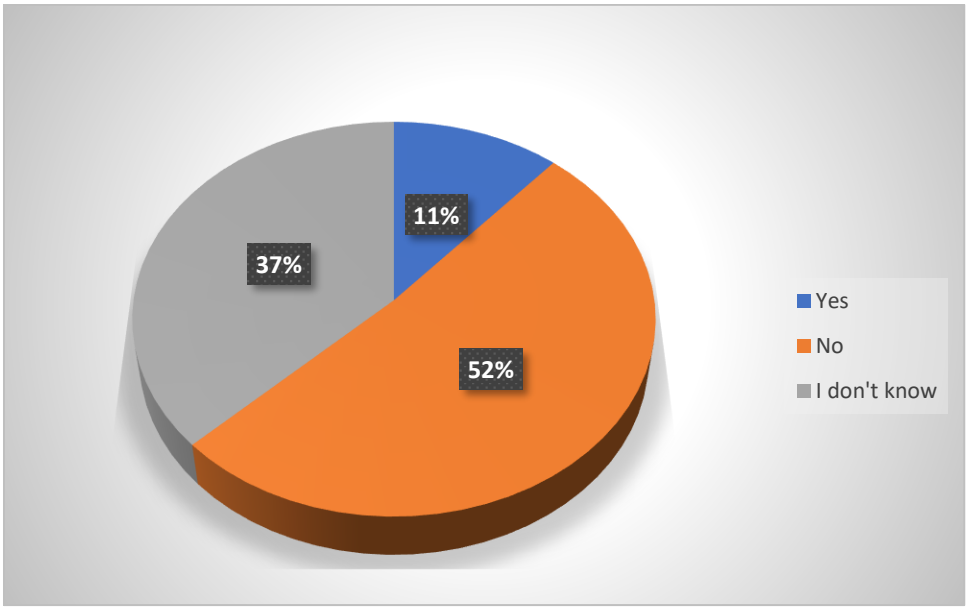
On the other hand, 68% of the students agree with the statement that man threatens the Danube islands (Figure 92).

Figure 92. Does man threaten the Danube islands? (schoolchildren)



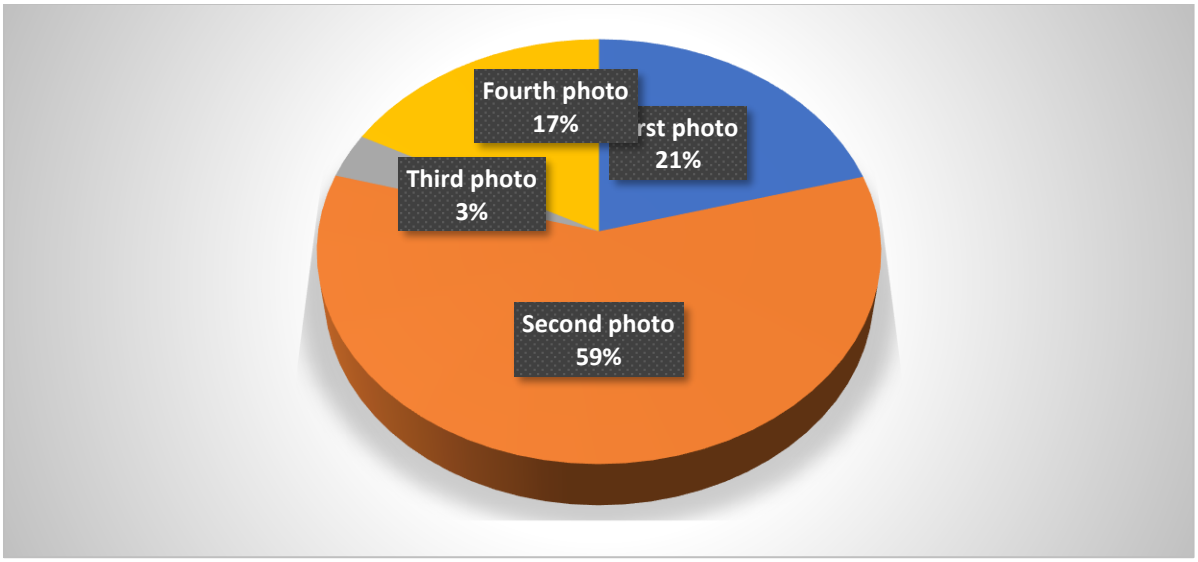
Most of the students. i.e. 52% of them, did not agree with the statement that nature endangers the Danube islands (Figure 93).

Figure 93. Does nature threaten the Danube islands? (schoolchildren)



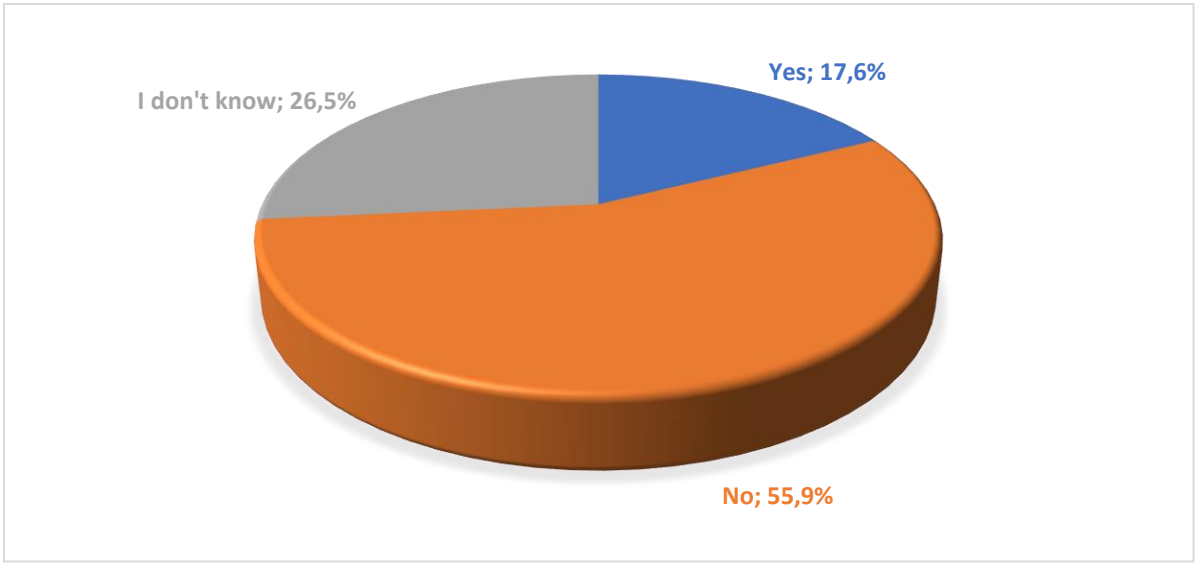
In the continuation of the survey, the students were asked to choose a photograph that they like the most among the four photographs that were used in the other types of research as well (among the general population, visitors, local population, and stakeholders). The photographs showed decreasing levels of embankment/natural value. From Figure 94 we can conclude that the second photograph, which showed a restored riverbank with a high level of natural value, was chosen as the most appealing by 59% of the students.

Figure 94. Preference of the photographs (decreasing levels of embankment/natural value) (schoolchildren)



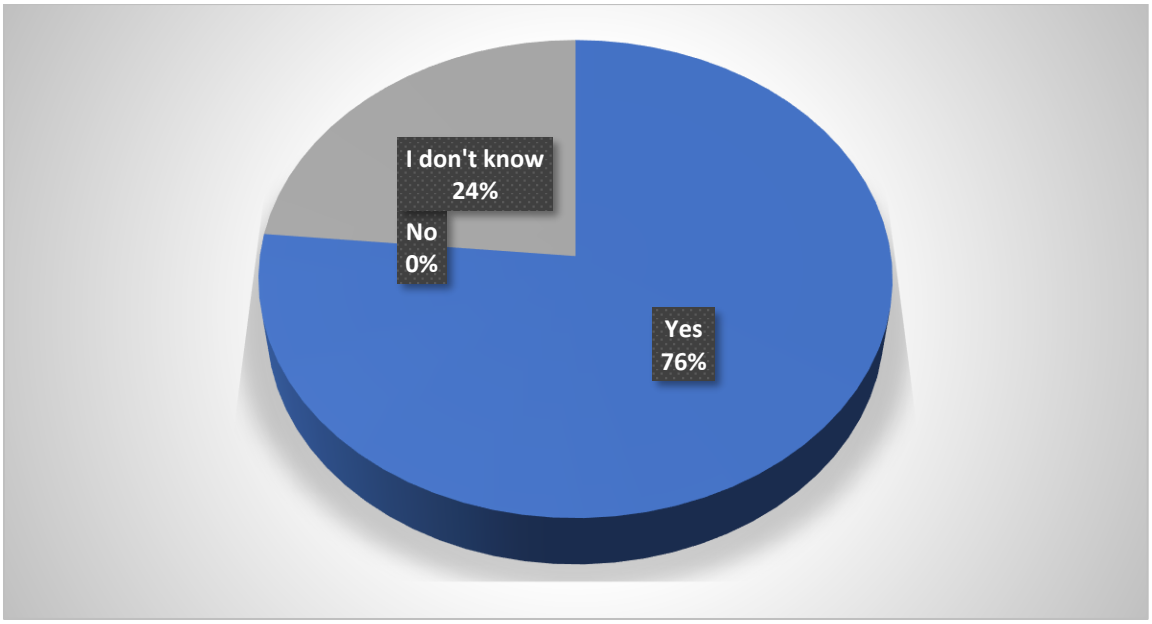
Most of the students (about 56% of them) think that people should not have access to the Danube islands (Figure 95).

Figure 95. Should people have access to the Danube islands?



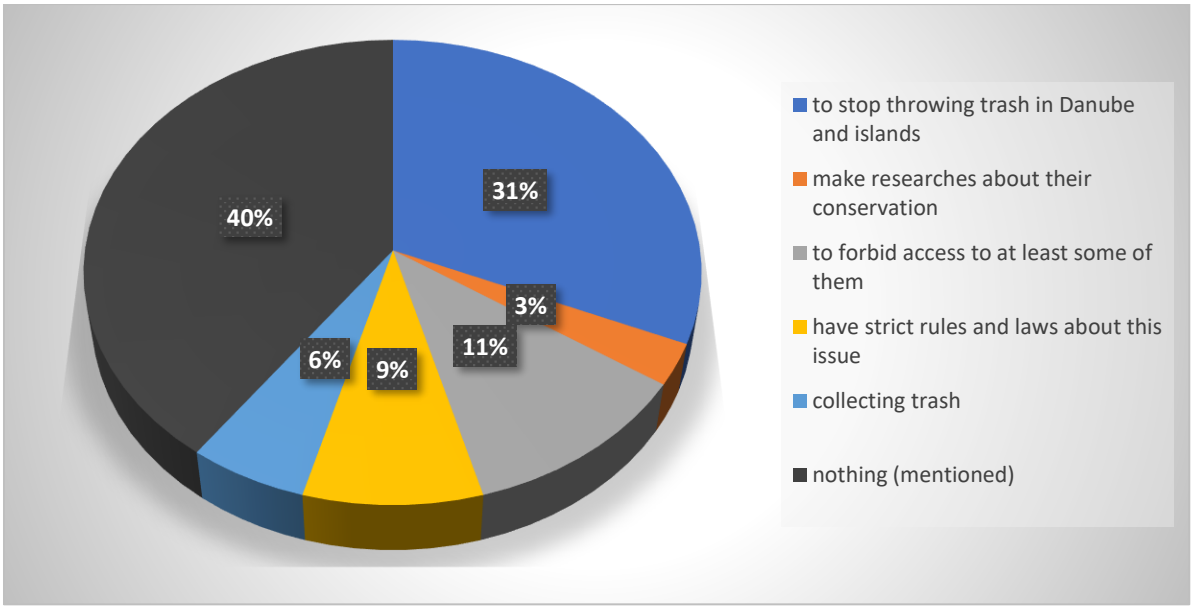
Similarly, 76% of the students agree that the Danube islands are important for the wildlife preservation (Figure 95).

Figure 96. Are the Danube islands important for the wildlife preservation?



In the last survey question, the students were asked to state what they personally could do to protect the Danube islands. This was an open question, and 40% of the students stated that they would do nothing. About 31% of the students mentioned that they could stop throwing trash, i.e. stop polluting the Danube (Figure 96).

Figure 97. What you could do personally to protect the Danube islands?



7. Summary of the results and conclusions

In most countries, when thinking about natural landscapes in their region, people are proudest of national parks, nature parks, and other protected areas. In comparison to the general population and visitors of the protected areas, protected areas are more often mentioned as a source of pride by the stakeholders and local population.

Ecosystems for rich biodiversity and habitats for protected species are, according to the research participants, the most important functions of the Danube River. This function is most often highlighted by the stakeholders. Protected areas as an area for sports activities and recreation, tourism, as well as for forestry, fishing and hunting, is the most important for the local populations in comparison to the other population types.

Nature to explore, flora and fauna to observe are the most important things for the research participants when visiting the Danube. Compared to other populations, nice trails are most important to visitors of the protected areas and the local population, whereas a combination of food and culture is the most important for the visitors.

Generally speaking, the participants expressed the highest level of aesthetic preference for riverbanks with higher levels of natural value. This preference is particularly emphasized in the upper course of the Danube, that is, in Germany, Austria and Slovakia.

When shown a photograph of a river with good lateral connectivity, for the general population in four countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, and Serbia) the most commonly chosen option was „inspiring and fascinating“. „Valuable“ was most often chosen in Austria, Germany, and Slovakia, while in Romania beautiful was the most frequent answer. Value dimension of the river was more often emphasized by the visitors to the protected areas in Austria, Germany, and Slovakia. Overall, the positive associations were much more frequent than the negative ones.

When shown a photograph of wild islands on the Danube, for the general population in six countries (Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia) the most common answer was „beautiful “, and the second option was „inspiring and fascinating“, while only in Croatia this order was reversed. In Austria, both options received the same number of choices.

A place with rich biodiversity and fascinating animals and plants represents the most important feature to determine whether a river is natural. A place with none or few restrictions on the behaviour (the place for unrestrained or unconfined recreation) was the option that, in

comparison to other population types, was most often chosen by the local populations. A place where rivers and streams flow unimpeded, without river regulation, as an option was the most commonly chosen by the stakeholders.

The statements according to which "natural rivers host rich biodiversity of characteristic animal and plant species" and that "natural rivers promote local recreation by providing beautiful sites and landscapes" are assessed as the most important for the naturalness of the river environment. There is a high degree of consensus between all the population types regarding these statements.

In all countries, pollution (e.g. from industry, pesticides from agriculture, wastewater) was assessed as the most important threat to the natural environment of the Danube River. Waste and garbage are the most often mentioned as a threat by the members of the local populations in or adjacent to the protected areas. Compared to other populations, river regulation is most often perceived as a threat by the stakeholders, and by the participants who live in the upper course of the Danube (Germany, Austria, and Slovakia).

All conservation and restoration measures on the Danube, especially ecological river engineering, restoration of natural river banks, reconnection of side branches; protection of species; wastewater treatment; and removal of trash, received a high level of support in all countries and all population types. Stakeholders were the strong supporters of ecological river engineering, restoration of natural river banks, and reconnection of side branches, while removal of trash was a somewhat stronger concern for the local populations than for the other population types.

When asked about their contribution to the conservation of the Danube and its islands, the respondents most often mentioned changing their behavior in nature and trying to influence the behaviors and opinions of others. Volunteering work was acceptable for 30-40% of the respondents, and collecting trash also received a high level of support, especially among the local populations.

When asked to express how well they feel informed about the Danube protected areas in their country, the respondents generally stated that they are not well informed. The members of the general population feel the least informed. There is a relatively high degree of awareness of the existence of the Danube protected areas, RAMSAR Convention, DANUBEPARKS The Danube River Network of Protected Areas, Natura 2000 Network, and LIFE programme – the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action.

Overall, the main research conclusions are as follows:

1. There is a high degree of support for the Danube conservation measures, and for the strict protection of the Danube islands and the prohibition to access strictly protected islands to better preserve their sensitive nature.

2. There is a pronounced difference between the countries in the upper course of the Danube (Germany, Austria, and Slovakia) and the rest of the countries that participated in this research study. Namely, the participants from the countries in the upper course of the Danube prefer less river regulation, and more often see river (over)regulation as aesthetically unappealing and as a threat to nature.

3. Local population supports the conservation measures in the least extent, in comparison to other population types, and more often sees the protected areas as an economic (forestry, fishing) or recreational resource.

4. Stakeholders perceive river (over)regulation as the stronger threat in comparison to the general population, visitors, and local population.

5. All population types in all countries feel that they are not well informed about the protected areas on the Danube in their respective countries, even though there is a relatively high level of awareness of the existence of various institutions, programs and funding instruments related to the protection of the Danube.

Annex 1 – Questionnaire

LIFE WILDisland is a Danube-wide EU funded project, aiming to preserve the nature and biodiversity on the most natural, beautiful and valuable islands, implemented in cooperation of different sectors (protected areas, navigation, forestry, hydropower) from 8 Danube countries. We kindly invite you to participate in the following multilateral survey in order to help us better design our activities for river and island conservation in the Danube region. https://wildisland.danubeparks.org

Taking part in our survey, you get the chance to participate in our awards programme. More about them at the end of the questionnaire!

All your answers will be used anonymously. The personal data of the participants will be processed exclusively in accordance with the regulations on the protection of personal data, for the purpose of conducting research.

1.1 If you think of natural landscapes in your region, which one(s) come(s) first and spontaneously to your mind?

_____

1.2 If you think of natural landscapes in your region, which ones are you proud of (choose up to 3 options)?

- National Parks, Nature Parks, protected areas
- Mountains
- Forest landscapes
- Rivers
- Lakes
- Wetlands
- Seaside, coasts and beaches
- Others……_____
  ___

2.1 What does spontaneously come to your mind when you think of the Danube River in your region?

_____

2.2. How often do you visit the Danube river and/or its floodplains?

a. Every day
b. At least once a week
c. At least once in a month
d. Couple of times per year
e. Never or almost never

2.3. How important do you consider the following functions of the Danube river?

Function	Not important at all	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
Area for recreation and sports activities	1	2	3	4	5
Ecosystem for rich biodiversity	1	2	3	4	5
Habitat for protected species	1	2	3	4	5
Source for (drinking) water	1	2	3	4	5
Source for (renewable) energy production	1	2	3	4	5
Forestry (timber production) and hunting	1	2	3	4	5
Fishing and angling	1	2	3	4	5
Tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5
Transport route	1	2	3	4	5
Integrative and inspiring lifeline for many different countries and cultures	1	2	3	4	5

2.4. When visiting the Danube, what is most important for you (choose up to 3)?

a. Clean water

b. Nice trails
c. Nice river banks and beaches
d. Nature to explore, flora and fauna to observe
e. Combination of culture and good food
f. Visitor offers and infrastructure
g. Remote places
h. Other (please specify):_____
i. I never visit the Danube, so I do not have activities there

3.1. Please take a look at the following photos and rank them by how much they fascinate you. Which kind of sites are most beautiful for you? (give the ranking 1 = most attractive to 4 = least attractive)

A



B



C



D



3.2 How relevant are the following characteristics to determine a river as natural?

Statement	Not important at all	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
A place with only natural sounds	1	2	3	4	5
A place with pure and clean water	1	2	3	4	5
A place where rivers and streams flow unimpeded, without river regulation	1	2	3	4	5
A place with little evidence of human occupation and modifications (buildings, dams…)	1	2	3	4	5
A place where natural conditions and processes exist and form the landscape					
A place with none or few restrictions on my behaviour; for unrestrained or unconfined recreation	1	2	3	4	5
A place with rich biodiversity and fascinating animals and plants	1	2	3	4	5
A place without non-native animals and plants	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5

3.3 Please note your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Do not agree at all	Do not agree	Neutral	Agree	Completely agree
Natural rivers host rich biodiversity of characteristic animal and plant species	1	2	3	4	5
Natural rivers help to prevent environmental pollution	1	2	3	4	5
Natural river flows contribute to prevent floodings	1	2	3	4	5
Natural rivers are important to reduce the negative impact of climate change	1	2	3	4	5
Natural rivers support and promote local tourism	1	2	3	4	5
Natural rivers promote local recreation by providing beautiful sites and landscapes	1	2	3	4	5
Natural river create „green“ jobs	1	2	3	4	d5

4.1. Islands are beautiful and valuable elements of the river ecosystems. How many islands do you think exist along the course of the Danube river (on its length of approx. 3,000 km)?
10 – 50
51 – 100
101 – 500
501-1,000
1,001 – 5,000
5,001-10,000
>10,000

4.2 How many of these Danube islands can be considered as untouched (by human interventions), being natural and “wild”?

0 – 5%
6-10%
11-25%
26-50%

51-75%
76-100%

4.3. What is the first word that comes to your mind when you see the photo below?

a. Beautiful
b. Intimidating
c. Inspiring and fascinating
d. Dangerous
e. Valuable
f. Exotic
g. Other (please specify):_____



4.4. What is the first word that comes to your mind when you see the photo below?

h. Beautiful
i. Intimidating
j. Inspiring and fascinating
k. Dangerous
l. Valuable
m. Exotic
n. Other (please specify):_____



5.1. In terms of ecology, many sections of the Danube river are not in optimal condition. To your opinion, what are the three main threats and pressures?

a. Pollution (e.g. from industry, pesticides from agriculture, waste water)
b. Waste and garbage
c. River regulation (such as embankments)
d. Hydro power plants
e. Intensive use by humans for recreation and sports
f. Land use, spreading of cities, (traffic) infrastructure
g. Intense forestry
h. Other (please specify):_____

5.2. How important do you consider the following conservation and restoration measures on the Danube river?

Measure	Not important at all	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
Ecological river engineering: Restoration of natural river banks, reconnection of side branches	1	2	3	4	5
Protection of species	1	2	3	4	5
New protected areas and strictly	1	2	3	4	5

protected zone					
Waste water treatment	1	2	3	4	5
Fish bypasses	1	2	3	4	5
Sustainable forestry	1	2	3	4	5
Sustainable tourism and nature education	1	2	3	4	5
Removal of trash	1	2	3	4	5

5.3 The Danube islands (900 in total) host last remnants of wilderness, 80% of some bird's populations, and we can even find virgin forest stands there. Would you support the strictly protection and non-intervention management of the 147 most natural islands along the Danube?

a. Yes
b. No
c. Don't know, do not have an opinion

5.4. Would you agree that the access to these strictly protected islands is prohibited to better preserve their sensitive nature, also in your area?

a. Yes
b. No
c. Don't know, do not have an opinion

6.1. Which organizations should be in charge of the wise-use and management of the Danube? (please select the maximum of three organizations)
a. Waterway administrations
b. Protected area administrations (national parks, etc.)
c. Cities, local municipalities and communities
d. Ministries and water authorities
e. International organizations
f. fishermen´s organizations
g. NGO's
h. other (please specify):_____

6.2 Have you ever heard of these institutions, programmes and funding instruments?

	Yes	No	Do not know/Not sure
ICPDR International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River	1	2	3
EU Strategy for the Danube River	1	2	3
UNESCO			
RAMSAR Convention			
DANUBEPARKS The Danube River Network of Protected Areas	1	2	3
Natura 2000 Network	1	2	3
LIFE programme – the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action	1	2	3
Park prirode Kopački rit/Donau-Auen National Park, Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, to be changed in each country			
River Conservation Fund			

6.3 Do you know any protected area(s) at the Danube?

No
Yes (give the name which comes first to your mind)

6.4 How well do you feel informed about the Danube protected areas in your country?

a. Very well informed
b. Informed
c. Somewhat informed
d. Not informed
e. Not informed at all

6.5 Are you in favour of conservation actions for the Danube and its nature such as the natural islands? Would you be willing and interested to support the conservation work?

a. Absolutely
b. Yes
c. Not that much
d. Absolutely not

6.6. How can you imagine to contribute to the conservation of Danube and its islands and nature? (more than one answers possible)

a. Changing my behavior in nature
b. Trying to influence the behaviour and opinion of others
c. Volunteering work (e.g. joining Danube Volunteers Days)
d. Financial contribution

e. Sharing information campaigns
f. Collecting trash
g. Other (please specify):_____

7. Demographic questions (in order to examine possible difference of attitudes, awareness and experiences)

7.1.What is your gender?

a. Male
b. Female
c. Other/Diverse

7.2. What is you age?

a. Under 20

b. 20-29

c. 30-39

d. 40-49

e. 50-59

f. 60-69

g. 70 and above

7.3 Please enter the postal code of your home place or its name:
_____

7.4. What is your educational level?

a. Elementary school or less

b. Secondary school

c. University degree

f. Other (please specify):_____

8. Thank you for your participation! Your answers contribute to better design conservation actions for the nature along the Danube!

Would you be interested and/or willing to be informed by the activities of the Danube-wide LIFE WILDisland by the newsletter (only 2 times a year by e-mail)?

After that, we would contact you by e-mail again in 2 years to repeat this survey, in order to evaluate how the perception of you and other participants has changed?

If you agree to participate you get the opportunity to enter project award programme:

1st round:

2 x 2 persons - entrance ticket and boat tour
2 x 2 persons - tour of the exibition of PEC Tikveš
10 x gift bag

2nd round:

2 x 2 persons - full day trip in Nature Park Kopački rit (with included entrance tickets for boat tour and PEC Tikveš)
20 x gift bag

By participating in the research/survey, you agree to the fact that the Organizer processes and collects your personal data (e-mail address).

Participants may at any time request access to their personal data, as well as request their addition, correction and deletion, or may withdraw their consent for their further processing by sending such a request to the Organizer at the following e-mail address: osobni.podaci@pp-kopacki-rit.hr. The participant accepts that the use of any of the aforementioned rights may result in the impossibility of further participation in the research.

a. Yes

Provide your email, please:

c. No

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