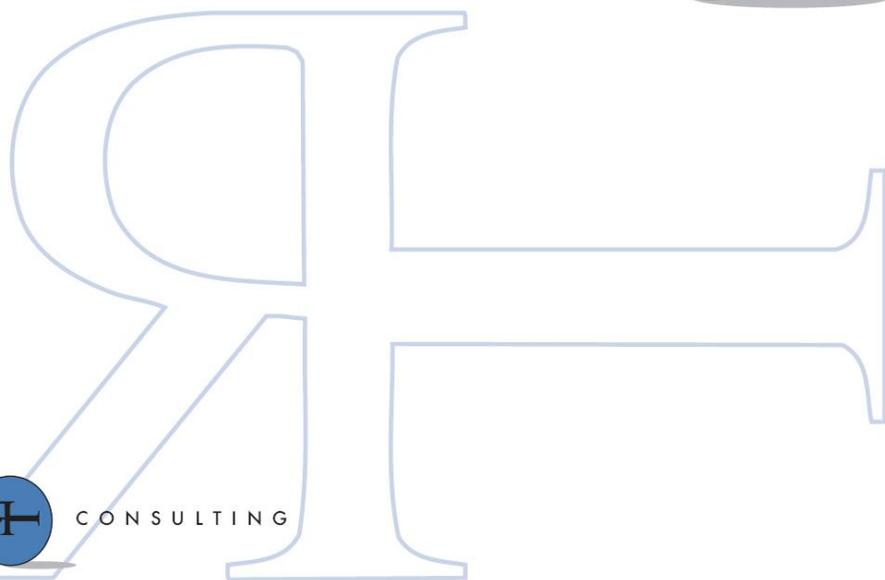


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**“Rivers of the World:
sustaining life, connecting people”**

di Gordana Plamenac

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“Rivers of the World: sustaining life, connecting people”

di Gordana Plamenac ^δ

Il turismo, uno dei settori economici in più rapida crescita nel mondo, è responsabile del 5% delle emissioni globali di CO₂ prodotte dal settore alberghiero e dei trasporti e dai servizi turistici ricreativi. Un’ottica “green” è quindi fondamentale per costruire un settore turistico più sostenibile e competitivo. Sebbene non vengano inseriti nella geografia delle principali attrazioni turistiche, i fiumi costituiscono un fattore fondamentale per il sostentamento della vita e la creazione di legami tra le persone: il turismo può contribuire al raggiungimento di questo obiettivo in qualità di catalizzatore di interesse verso lo sviluppo turistico lungo i fiumi. L’articolo prende in considerazione le strategie ed i modelli normativi di tre importanti fiumi internazionali: il Rio delle Amazzoni, il Mekong ed il Danubio, approfondendo in particolare il modello di cooperazione turistica del Danube Competence Center.

Questa realtà è riuscita a riunire al suo interno 80 rappresentanti dei 10 paesi attraversati dal fiume per portare avanti progetti transnazionali che collocano il

Danubio al centro di una politica di turismo sostenibile.

Tre sono i progetti in corso d’opera, nove quelli portati a termine tra 2012 e 2016 ed incentrati su tematiche come, ad esempio, lo sviluppo sostenibile e la promozione del turismo culturale nella regione danubiana, la mobilità sostenibile ed il cicloturismo. Il Danube Competence Center rappresenta un esempio di best practice grazie alla collaborazione congiunta multidisciplinare. Esso appare quindi come un modello di conoscenza ed esperienza trasferibile in altri contesti caratterizzati dalla presenza di fiumi (come ad esempio i già citati Rio delle Amazzoni e Mekong).

Le prospettive future vedono il ruolo centrale della creazione di relazioni forti tra le istituzioni del Rio delle Amazzoni, del Mekong e del Danubio e di partnership pubblico-private, dell’istituzione di osservatori per raccogliere dati sulle attività realizzate lungo i fiumi, dello scambio di conoscenze e di obiettivi comuni nell’eventuale possibilità di dare vita ad un’associazione dei fiumi del mondo.

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“Rivers of the World: sustaining life, connecting people”
by Gordana Plamenac ^δ

Tourism is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world and accounts for 5% of global CO₂ emissions produced by hotels, means of transport and tourist recreational services. Therefore, having a “green” approach is a matter of great importance to create a more sustainable and competitive tourism sector. Although rivers are not included in major tourism attractions, they are considered engines for sustaining life and connecting people: tourism can contribute in the achievement of this goal as a facilitator of future development along rivers.

The article relates the strategies and regulative models of three international rivers: Amazon, Mekong and Danube, offering an in-depth insight into the tourist cooperation model led by the Danube Competence Center (DCC). This organization succeeded in bringing together 80 representatives from the 10 countries crossed by the river in order to create transnational projects where the river Danube can play a central role according to a sustainable tourism strategy.

The Danube Competence Center is currently working on three projects and accomplished other nine between 2012 and 2016: some of the main themes were sustainable development and cultural tourism promotion in the Danube region, sustainable tourism and cycling tourism. DDC is considered a best practice for its multi-sectorial joined work, therefore it is a model of knowledge and experience ready to be transferred to stakeholders belonging to contexts characterised by the presence of rivers (the above-mentioned Amazon and Mekong, for instance).

In the future, some elements worth focusing on include the creation of both public-private partnerships and strong connections between institutions in Amazon, Mekong and Danube contexts, the establishment of observatories to collect data about activities along rivers, the exchange of knowledge and common goals exploring the possibility of founding an association of Rivers of the World.

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1. Tourism and rivers

Tourism, an economic and social phenomenon, proved to be one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world.

Immediate past secretary general of UNWTO dr Taleb Rifai stated that the business volume of tourism equals or even surpasses that of oil exports, food products or automobiles. Moreover today, tourism represents 10% of the world’s GDP, 7% of global exports, and 1 in every 11 jobs worldwide. In 2015 tourism was the third export-earning category after fuels and chemicals. Yet, with growth comes responsibility. Tourism is estimated to account for 5% of global CO₂ emissions, of which 40% derive from air transport and 20% from hotels and other types of accommodation. The remaining 40% of those emissions are related to other types of transport segments (cruises, cars, railway, etc.) and tourism’s recreational services. The “greening” and “decarbonizing” of the tourism sector is

crucial for building a more sustainable and competitive sector¹.

Current developments and forecasts are:

- ~ international tourist arrivals reached 1,235 million in 2016 with an increase of 3,9% over 2015;
- ~ in 2016, international tourism generated US\$ 1,4 trillion in export earnings;
- ~ the global pace of growth was slightly more moderate than in 2015 (4,5%), but in line with UNWTO’s long-term forecast of 3,8% per year for the period 2010 to 2020;
- ~ by 2030, UNWTO forecasts international tourist arrivals to reach 1.8 billion (UNWTO Tourism Towards 2030)².

International tourist arrivals reached a total of 1,322 million and showed an increase of 7% in 2017. This is far above the sustained and consistent trend of 4% or higher growth since 2010 and represents the strongest results in seven years. The current strong momentum is

¹ World Conference on “*Tourism and Future Energy: Unlocking low-carbon growth opportunities*”, 2015.

² *UNWTO Tourism Highlights: 2017 Edition*, 2017, UNWTO.

expected to continue in 2018. Based on current trends international tourist arrivals worldwide are estimated to grow at a rate of 4%-5% in 2018³.

Although world tourism map does not recognize rivers as major tourism attractions of different destinations, rivers indeed are being considered engines for sustaining life and connecting people. It is often that rivers divide banks and are the motifs for conflicts and disputes. Struggle for water dominance is strong. In view of this importance tourism is recognized as catalyzing power of future development of the life on the rivers.

Tourism connects people at different and various levels, where the ultimate goal of tourism stakeholders is promotion sales and bigger number of tourists on their destination. In attempt of reaching this goal they do not think about water and its importance for sustaining life. In this respect the conference “*nexus*”: *water, food, energy*, held in Rousse, Bulgaria, in November 2016 stands as inspiration and “eyes opening” momentum, for deeper thinking.

Speaking of “nexus” we reach the point where water is:

- ~ strategic and the most precious resource on Earth (UNESCO);
- ~ food – life pre-condition (UNFAO);
- ~ energy - hydro-electric production as condition for general development World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP/UNESCO).

In addition, geo-economic and political significance relates to the fact that rivers indeed impose:

- ~ ridging the banks;
- ~ water diplomacy;
- ~ maintaining security;
- ~ enhancing regional cooperation (transnational projects in infrastructure, transport, security, environment, climate change, education and capacity building, protection of cultural heritage);
- ~ boosting employment and establishment of SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises), stimulating private entrepreneurship, raising standard of living.

³ *International Tourism Results: the highest in seven years*, 2017, UNWTO.

Moreover, tourism and culture tremendously add-on to the quality of life on the rivers especially through:

- ~ tourism and culture as conditions for political stability;
- ~ tourism as engine for job creation and employment;
- ~ countries working together results in joined project and product development;
- ~ regional positioning and promotion added-value to each destination individual activities;
- ~ thematic international culture routes involve presence of private stakeholders;
- ~ regional tourism / culture routes offer bait for long-haul markets;
- ~ transnational projects result with new product development and ultimately raising the awareness of the region.

It is more than worth featuring the strategy, regulative models of the three international rivers:

- ~ Amazon, with a length of 6.992 km and 22 million of population, is endless green and an oxygen oasis of the world.

Amazon belongs to 5 countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. Amazon Pact from 1978, signed by 8 countries (Bolivia, Brazil, Columbia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, Venezuela) determines levels of cooperation between countries focusing on

the environment protection of this rich system of biodiversity (Amazon University in Manaus has an important role in keeping the criteria of sustainability by preserving cultural values, authenticity and indigenous communities’ languages which characterize 1/3 of South American total surface);

- ~ Mekong, a trans-boundary river in Southeast Asia with an estimated length of 4.350 km. This river runs through 6 countries (Thailand, China, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos) and 60 million people live within the lower Mekong basin. Mekong River Commission (MRC) was established in 1995 and Mekong Agreement was signed by the countries. The Strategic Plan 2016–2020 was adopted and created with support of UNWTO. The expected results of this plan are focusing on four key result areas:

- enhancement of national plans, projects and resources based on basin-wide perspectives;
- strengthening regional cooperation;
- better monitoring and communication of the basin conditions;
- leaner river basin organization⁴.

⁴ Source: *Action Document for Support to Enhanced Cooperation in Sustainable Transboundary Water Management in the Lower Mekong Region*, 2017, European Union.

~ Danube, Blue Route Of The Layered History, is the second longest river in Europe with an overall length of 2.880 km. It covers 10 countries (Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine) with a population of 100 million people. EUSDR (EU Strategy for Danube Region), signed by 10 countries, plus 4 (Czech Republic, Slovenia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Montenegro) was adopted by European Commission in 2011, covering 11 Priority Areas (PA):

- mobility (Waterways, Rail-Road-Air mobility);
- sustainable energy;
- culture and tourism;
- water quality;
- environmental risks;
- biodiversity, landscapes, quality of air and soils;
- knowledge society;
- competitiveness;
- people and skills;
- institutional capacity and cooperation;
- security.

2. Best practice model of tourism cooperation on the Danube: Danube Competence Center (DCC) and his financial structure

Established in 2010, DCC was the result of powerful vision and design thinking of the three experts, two from Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and one from National Tourism Organization of Serbia (NTO). Exploring the way of encouraging cooperation between more advanced Upper Danube and less developed Lower Danube countries in the field of tourism, culture and nature related activities, the idea of the organization such as DCC easily came across. Moreover, the collaboration among countries resulted in the reinforcement of the Pan-European spirit. This common sentiment is essential for the tourism promotion of Europe and for keeping the continent as the first tourism destination worldwide.

DCC managed to reach the membership close to 80 representatives from the 10 countries, in three sectors: public, private and NGO. This structure of DCC contributes to more successful coping with the challenges related to differences between upper and lower

Danube and as well as distinct capacities of these two parts of the Danube.

Unexpectedly fortunate was the adoption of macro strategy EUSDR (EU Strategy for the Danube Region) in 2011, brought by European Commission which provides framework for so called 11 PA (Priority Areas). Strongly involved in project development DCC successfully accomplished 12 EU projects (nine completed and three ongoing) which enhance regional cooperation, result with new regional products, harmonize tourism, thematic offers and raise awareness of the destination Danube.

In addition, transnational project development activity creates an important financial income source for DCC, along with membership fees and DCC marketing activities.

Ongoing projects are:

1. *Transdanube Pearls* (2017-2019), continuation of Transdanube project with objective to provide sustainable, socially fair, economically viable, and health promoting mobility through the identification of the Danube pearls – destinations which have largest potential to expand the network of sustainable mobility tourism offer;
2. *Green Danube* (2017-2019) addresses major challenges in the Danube transport system and provides practical solutions to be used in subsequent emission reduction strategy and for further development of safer and low emission Inland Waterway Transport (IWT) as well as for the implementation of innovative green technologies. The project will focus on emission reductions from IWT in particular in ecologically sensitive areas such as the Danube Delta. The project aims to contribute to better integrated policies and practical solutions for further development of IWT while limiting its negative impact on the Danube ecosystem;
3. *CultPlatForm_21* (2017-2019), the project plans a cooperation of culture and tourism with the aim of developing contemporary aspects of cultural routes. It is planned to discover places of history and to support existing cultural routes in cooperation with the Council of Europe. The project is looking for response to manifold themes: the development of new destinations along the Danube (tourism), the interpretation of historic places and events in a contemporary way (culture), the experience

of culture (international audience/ tourists). The project is placed in the frame of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 and the submission of the Austrian part of the Danube limes between Upper Austria and Bavaria to the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2018.

Accomplished projects are:

1. *The Roman Emperors and the Danube Wine Route* (2013-2014), the project aimed to prepare the first cultural route starting from the SE region for the tourism market by enhancing and stimulating competitiveness, strengthening internal cohesion and improving visibility and market uptake of the Route. The Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route now spreads through four countries of the Middle and Lower Danube Region, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania, encompassing 20 archaeological sites and 12 wine regions. The Route is officially certified as a European cultural route by the European Institute for Cultural Routes (EICR);
2. *The Roman Emperors and the Danube Wine Route II: The Route Going to the Market* (2014-2015), through the cooperation with representatives of tourism agencies from Croatia, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria, the project was focused on the positioning of the cultural route of the Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route on the international market. Project also aimed to establish internal communication of the Route, unified brand and improved interpretation of cultural heritage on the sites. This route is being managed by DCC as secretariat of the route;
3. *Transdanube* (2012-2014), the project aimed at the development of sustainable mobility along the Danube, including train, bus, bicycle and shipping traffic to improve accessibility and to facilitate the concept of sustainable tourism in the whole Danube region. The specific objectives of the project included improving the accessibility of regions along the Danube (along the river as well as from the river to the surrounding area) through sustainable mobility offers, demonstrated by pilot projects, that will contribute to further economic development;
4. *The Middle and Lower Danube Cycling Route projects* (2015-2016), this project is aimed at developing and promoting cycle tourism in the Middle and Lower Danube

Region (focusing on the EuroVelo 6 network). The DCC, together with the European Cycling Federation (ECF) and with partners from 4 countries (Croatia, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria), came to an agreement to work on the improvement of the cycling potential in the mentioned region by developing amendments to legal acts related to cycling, new project concepts and documentation and by organizing various field trips related to cycling development. DCC is nominated to be National Coordinating Center for EuroVelo (NECC);

5. *Iron Gate Cycling Route development* (2016), is a 228 km long route that connects Serbia and Romania, gathering various cultural, historical and natural highlights into one tourist attraction. Since the geographical position of this product encompasses 4 Roman localities and 3 wine regions included in the Roman Emperors and Danube Wine cultural route, development of this cycle trail additionally strengthens the overall touristic capacities of other products that the DCC is developing in the region;

6. *Iron Curtain Trail* (2012-2014), is a 6,800 km long cycle route that traces the Iron curtain, a border that once divided Europe into East and West, stretching from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea. At an international level, this project aimed to unite, through cycle tourism, the regions of South-Eastern Europe, with a long-distance route along European border areas and support alternative and sustainable transport through the development of the Iron Curtain Trail. At a national level, the project aimed to offer decision makers at central, regional and local levels a practical tool for supporting both the further development of the tourism potential and highlighting newly identified resources not yet capitalized from a cycle tourism perspective;
7. *Holiday 4 All* (2012-2014), is modeled on the Calypso programme. Calypso is the new name for the European Commission’s initiative, launched in 2009, aimed at creating innovative and accessible tourism products for the widest range of tourists, allowing Tourism for All. The Calypso initiative aims to open up new horizons for younger and older travellers, disabled people and low-income families, while

creating new jobs and business opportunities during quieter (low season) times of the year. It aims to allow underprivileged citizens across Europe to travel to Europe's holiday spots while, at the same time, helping local economies combat the off season;

8. *Green Technologies* (2012), development of the report showcasing findings regarding ten municipalities in the four Western Balkan countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia, all located on the Danube or on tributary rivers of the Danube. The size of the municipalities ranged from 3.000 to 130.000 inhabitants and the economic structure varies between industry, service, trade and agriculture. The report covers the following topics: waste management, energy efficiency, heating systems, industry sector, transport sector and tourism sector;
9. *Introduction of new tourism offers based on the use of natural resources and biodiversity of the Danube region* (2013-2015), the project is focused on the development of biodiversity capacities in the Middle and Lower Danube. The project

is aimed at supporting sustainable local economic development and environmental protection in the Danube communities, with the specific objective of supporting the development/introduction of new tourism offers based on the use of the natural resources and biodiversity of the Danube region.

3. DCC as leading or project partner, the activities and educational events

Successful cooperation between 10 countries leads DCC to the model of a regional cluster which eventually could become in the future a regional DMO. For the latter certain conditions should be fulfilled:

- ~ determination of the stakeholders to establish a DMO;
- ~ consultation between private and public authorities about the establishment of DMO;
- ~ development, financial, marketing and operation strategy of DMO;
- ~ existing confidence between stakeholders.

Present differences between EU (Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria) and non-EU countries (Serbia, Moldova, Ukraine) are mostly reflected to regulations, standards and criteria, infrastructure, private entrepreneurship, private initiative, level of services, etc.

DCC capacity in knowledge management, educational seminars, training courses and masterclasses debates between private and public stakeholders shows best practice example of multidisciplinary cooperation.

Setting up the organization such as DCC is not an easy task, but definitely could serve as concept model for regional destinations (in the case “Rivers of the World” on Amazon and Mekong).

The advantage of multi-sectoral joined work leads to:

- ~ high awareness of destination Danube;
- ~ creating of the regional brand;
- ~ project development as precondition for new products (the example is successful implementation of Calypso project in Serbia);
- ~ positioning of new cultural Pan-European routes with certification of EU institutions such as: Roman emperors route and Danube wine route (certified by the Institute of

Cultural Routes, under the auspices of the Council of Europe together with other 32 Pan-European culture routs);

- ~ Danube cycling Routes in cooperation with ECF;
- ~ joined promotional campaigns at long haul markets which add value to thematic marketing content, reduce overall cost of participation of public (national, regional, local) and private participation in both on and off-line marketing presentations;
- ~ the year 2018 as the year of special promotion EU – China 2018 will be an extraordinary test for Danube offer;
- ~ setting the network of observatories (as one of EU projects) along the Danube will build up the system for better and accurate statistical evidence of number of tourists in the Danube region (which currently doesn't exist as such).

In conclusion, apart from striving to DMO model, DCC stands ready to transfer knowledge and experience to potential new members along the Danube, but also to other stakeholders at other important world international rivers.

Tourism of the future sits on strong pillars of design thinking, digitalization and innovative approaches, appealing marketing content, diverse communication and easier accessibility:

- regional cooperation;
- public-private partnership (PPP);
- environmental awareness;
- sustainability (job creation).

Some DCC activities are: knowledge management, education (masterclasses) and training seminars, promotion or organizational activities, on-line marketing and social networks. And also, participation at exhibitions and trade shows such as:

1. CMT Stuttgart, Germany;
2. Fiets en Wandelbeurs, Utrecht (Netherlands) and Ghent (Belgium);
3. ITB Berlin, Germany;
4. Belgrade Night Market, Serbia;
5. Friedrichshafen, Germany;
6. London City Fair.

Not only activities but also educational events like:

- ~ *International Historic Preservation Conference* (May, 2016), was a cultural event which gathered representatives of museums located along the Roman

Emperors Route (Narona Museum (CRO), Alba Iulia (RO), National History Museum in Zajecar (RS) and National History Museum (BG) in order to discuss how to improve “in situ” presentation of cultural heritage along the Roman Emperors and the Danube Wine cultural route;

- ~ the goal of the conference *Danube Travel Trade Masterclass* (Belgrade, November 2016 – Budapest, October 2017) was to create a credible platform for a more inclusive Danube product development, where buyers, suppliers and relevant public tourism authorities meet and discuss paths to new nautical products;
- ~ the aim of ITB 2017 panel discussion, *Europe invites – Danube connects. Reaching for the new markets* (Berlin, March 2017) was to discuss potentials of the joint presentation of the Danube countries on the overseas markets, especially China, and also to mention joint products which can be marketed. The result would be to highlight the opportunity to reach greater visibility on the mentioned markets through cooperation and joint marketing efforts, which fully correlates

with the project European Commission is launching together with ETC;

- ~ in the framework of the International Danube Day, the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications of the Republic of Serbia in collaboration with the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH in the name of German Development Cooperation, organized international Conference “*Sustainable Tourism Development in the Danube Region: New Perspectives*”, 29-30 June in Belgrade. This important international event gathered tourism policy makers and decision-makers, as well as other public and private sector stakeholders from the Danube Region and beyond. The aim of the Conference was to lay the policy and strategic groundwork for the development of joint sustainable tourism products and marketing platforms in the Danube Region and beyond;
- ~ the third Annual General Meeting on Roman Emperors Route and Danube Wine Route on the occasion of 30th anniversary of the Institute of Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, "Looking ahead: 2019-2024" took place between 14th and 15th December 2017 in Belgrade (Serbia).

4. Cooperation with international organizations

DCC cooperates with:

- ~ more than 50 members coming from all 10 Danube countries including national tourism organizations of: Germany, Hungary, Serbia and regional and city organizations of Upper Austria, Bratislava, Vojvodina and other local tourism organizations;
- ~ European Cyclists Federation (Brussels);
- ~ European Institute for Cultural Routes (Luxembourg);
- ~ UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization);
- ~ ETC (European Travel Commission);
- ~ ETOA
- ~ (European Tourism Association) (London).

DCC successfully cooperates with the German Federal Ministry of Economic Co-operation and Development (BMZ), through its agency Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, but also other national donor organisations and the European institutions and organizations (EC, ETC, EICR, ECF...), UNWTO.

5. Conclusion

Looking into the future it would be important to focus on the following:

- ~ establish stronger connections between Amazon, Mekong and Danube institutions;
- ~ initiate creation of competence centers which secure public-private partnership and promotion and sales at long haul markets;
- ~ set observatories to follow up and collect evidence of different activities on the rivers;
- ~ exchange knowledge and experience;
- ~ set mutual goals;
- ~ contribute to global standards;
- ~ involve media and Internet on larger scale;
- ~ explore possibility of founding organization or association Rivers of the World;
- ~ never forget that water is the most important resource on Earth.
- ~ One thing should not be missed: “Everything is a process: rivers flow, people act”.

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