

Upper Siga: An Environmental Area Existing Outside and Within the Political Vacuum of the Contemporary European Institutional Framework

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Abstract

Upper Siga constitutes a distinctive environmental and institutional anomaly within contemporary Europe. Geographically embedded along the Danube River and enclosed by the transboundary Mura–Drava–Danube Biosphere Reserve, the area forms an integral part of one of Europe’s most ecologically valuable riverine systems. Despite this ecological continuity, Upper Siga remains excluded from formal national protection regimes and is not explicitly recognized within the governance framework of the UNESCO: Man and the Biosphere Programme. This paper presents original analytical work examining Upper Siga as an environmental space existing simultaneously within and outside prevailing European institutional arrangements. Drawing on environmental sociology and political ecology, the study analyzes how political ambiguity and the absence of a clearly defined managing authority generate a governance vacuum with significant implications for environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, and sustainability. Particular attention is paid to deficiencies in environmental monitoring, the lack of coordinated transport and waterway regulation, and the resulting risks to ecosystem integrity within the Danube River basin. The analysis further highlights the paradox that, although Upper Siga lies at the geographical core of a UNESCO-designated transboundary biosphere reserve coordinated in part through the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, it remains institutionally invisible within both national and international governance structures. The paper argues that addressing this governance gap is essential not only for ensuring adequate environmental care for Upper Siga but also for strengthening the credibility and coherence of European transboundary sustainability governance.

Keywords

Upper Siga, Governance gap, Biodiversity, Transboundary, Sustainability.