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TOURISM COOPERATION PROJECTS IN THE CROSS BORDER ROMANIAN-UKRAINIAN MARAMURES. VECTORS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

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Abstract

The tourism cross border cooperation is an integrated model of this type of cooperation, as it is situated at a common point of several cross border fields of activity determined by social and economic phenomena, environmental processes, and territorial planning strategies but also by cultural manifestations.

The tourism field of activity, within regional or local cross border relations, is the strongest binding element, where it can materialize very well due to the smaller extent of the area. While stating this, we bear in mind the fact that the tourism influence is complex at an economic, social but also cultural level – the affinity based on mutual heritage from the border areas.

The tourism cross border cooperation field, involves mainly the productive use of the common tourism resources, the harmonization of transport and access infrastructure, but mostly accommodation, as well as a common policy concerning the organising of cultural events.

The nowadays project regions overlap, in most cases, the ancient historical regions, which prove their functional aspect once more, also from the complex perspective that development projects imply.

In the case of the Maramures Land, or Historical Maramures (which comprises as a cross border ethnographical and historical entity, a territory from the Maramures County – Romania and also from The Transcarpathia Region – Ukraine) the opportunity for gradual development of cross border tourism with Ukraine is granted mostly by the partnership for development projects, with funding from the financing authority of The Neighbourhood Programme Romania - Ukraine 2004-2006, PHARE Cross Border Cooperation, through the Romanian Ministry of Development, Public Works and Housing starting with January 2007. This financing instrument evolved during 2009 into a new programme – ENPI (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument).

The importance of the financing funds for the cross border tourism cooperation, but not only that, is thus becoming overwhelming, taking into consideration the large amounts of money that needs to be used from establishing proper transport and accommodation infrastructure in a cross border area to the implementation of integrated cross border tourism marketing or maintaining quality cultural relations through specific events.

The cross border partnerships for tourism development projects have insured, through the funds of the above mentioned PHARE CBC Programme, substantial tourism prospective research and integrated marketing for the Maramures (RO) - Transcarpathia (UA) region.

Key-words: projects, Maramures, Romania, Transcarpathia, Ukraine, cross border cooperation, tourism, PHARE, ENPI CBC, sustainable development.

1. The Cross Border Cooperation

The recent years' conception according to which, increasingly more, a Europe of regions must overlap a Europe of states is reflected in the more systemic, tourist, integrated and cross border approach. The need and effectiveness for the implementation of a Europe of regions, project regions in this case, which is more complex, emerges in the created context. Sometimes the E.U. funds for sustainable development may be held back in their natural and positive unfolding by some political factors, which thus become restrictive.

The consequences of this fact are manifested directly and indirectly upon the project regions. Basically, the nowadays project regions overlap in most cases, the former historical regions, (Fig. 1) the latter proving once again their functionality also from the perspective of the complex steps involved by development projects.

„The cross border cooperation within the central and east european space of the former communist countries is increasingly imposing itself in their economic, social and politic landscape, as a modern trend of changing the role of borders, from separation lines into points of convergence, of transforming the national state's periphery into economic development poles. In the same context, the internal human mobility, especially in the border areas, as well as the international one, reflects greatly the level and degree of cooperation between these states, on one side, and and between these states and the E.U. space, on the other side.”¹

The element alongside which these regions are structured is the frontier. *„Through the functions fulfilled the frontier has an evident barrier role. The contiguity involves exchanges of matter, energy, information, not even the most sealed frontiers succeeding in imposing a total interruption of cross-border interrelations.”²*

The complex problematics of cross border cooperation has evolved into trends such as the new regional movement and the reactivation of historical regions, which receive a role of

¹ Ilies Al., 2003, p.7

² Boar N., Kosinszki S., Simion A., 2010, p.1

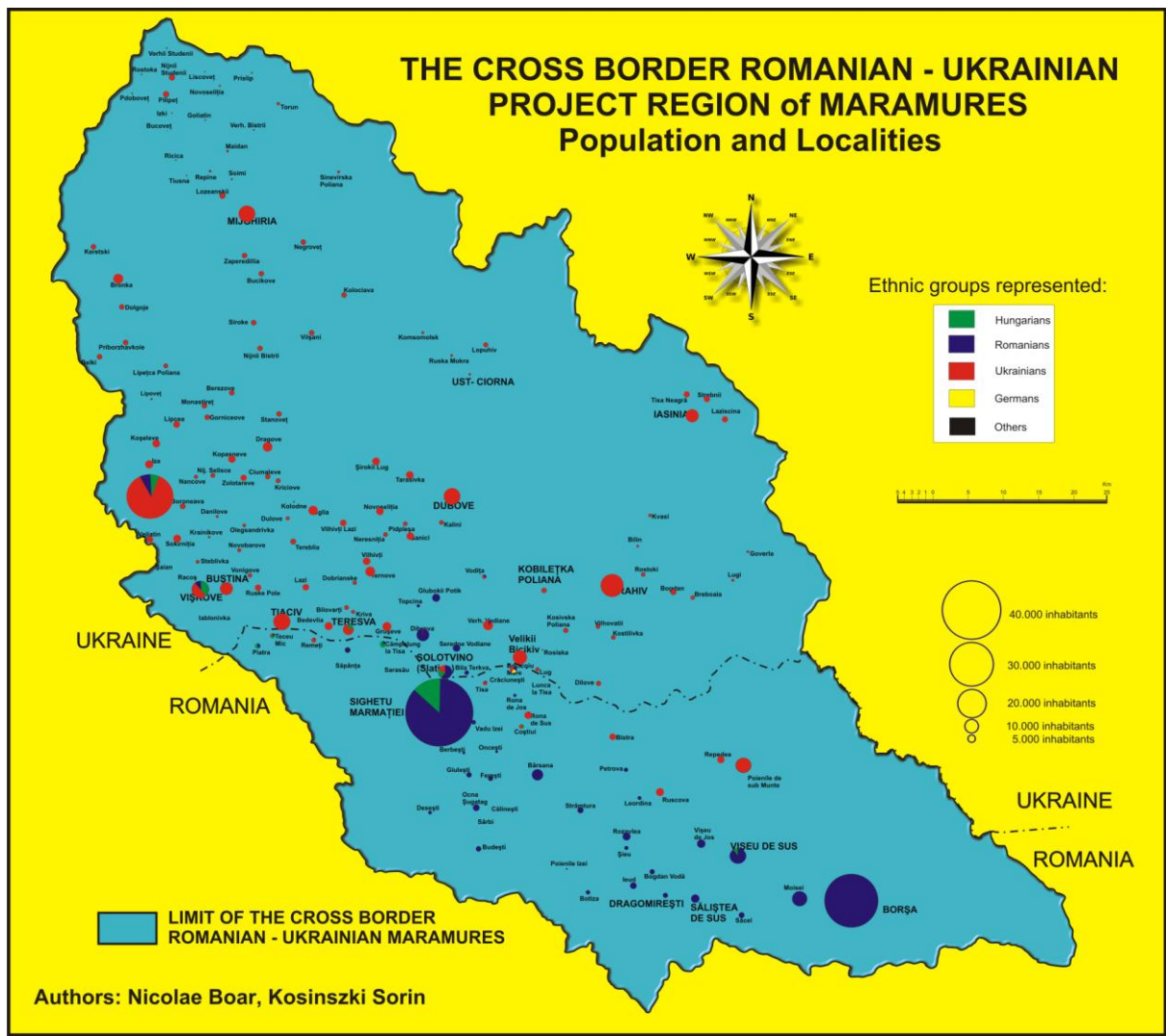


Fig. 1. The population and the localities from the cross border region of Maramures connecting bridges between the national states.³

2. The Importance of the Maramures - Transcarpathia Cross Border Project Region

In the specific case of Maramures, the chance of progressive development for cross border tourism cooperation with the Transcarpathia oblast – Ukraine was largely supported by the development projects undertaken through the proposed financing offers from the Neighbourhood Programme Romania-Ukraine 2004 – 2006, implemented in Romania by the Ministry of Development, Public Housing and Works as financing authority.

In the project region of the cross border Maramures, within the paper research, we have followed a logical line from identifying the region, to the financing funds and the

³ Popa N., 2006, sl.6

domains of cross border cooperation, out of which the tourism represents an integrative domain. We then conducted a SWOT type analysis, on the problematic of tourism from the cross border Romanian-Ukrainian region of Maramures, in order to be able to state a few strategies to follow. Within the strengths we presented the tourism resources that the two subsystems, Romanian and Ukrainian, of the cross border Maramures hold. *"Regarding the tourism resources of the two subsystems from the cross border Maramures, there is an obvious symmetry. In the high mountain sectors there is an increased potential for winter sports and trekking. In the former volcanic activity areas there are many mineral springs. We can also add the tourist sights of the limestone area from the mountains, their existence in both sectors and the tourist potential of the former salt mines...The anthropical potential is just as important taking into consideration the wooden architecture, developed throughout the whole Maramures, the folklore, folk costumes, ancient traditions and the well known Maramures hospitality."*⁴

Through euro regions and cross border cooperation financing programmes, respectively transnational, the national project regions (from each country) become cross border and transnational project regions, thus extending much the multiplying effects of the implemented projects, increasing the number of people from the target groups, institutions, local and regional public administrations, NGO-s, foundations, etc. The complexity of the cross border project regions is increased by this high number of final beneficiaries, by the multiplying effects and the increased degree of sustainability, provided the projects are conceived and implemented through a synergetic management.

Table 1. Tourism cooperation PHARE CBC projects implemented in the Maramures County
(Source of data: BRCT Suceava)

No.	Title of the project	PHARE type	Applicant	Total grant value – PHARE+national co financing, in €
1.	"Green Tourism in Cross-Border Carpathian Mountains" (Rehabilitation over 120 km of traveller's lines) shortly "Green Tourism"	2005	The Local Council of Baia Mare City	161.310

⁴ Boar N., 2005, p. 218

2.	Info Tour - A better tourism cooperation between countries	2005	CDIMM Foundation Maramures	232.070
3.	"The Tourism Bridge of Maramures" - Sighetu Marmatiei (RO)-Solotvino (UA)	2005	The Local Council of Sighetu Marmatiei Town	189.700
4.	Transcarpathian Tourism Network for the Promotion of Tourism in Maramures, Zakarpattia and Ivano-Frankyvsck Regions	2005	The Maramures County Council	482.000
5.	Cross Border Tourism Network	2005	Association for Promoting and Developing the Tourism in Maramures	215.720
6.	ECOTUR - Tourism in the Transcarpathian Area	2006	The Maramures County Council	550.000
				Total = 1.830.800 €

Once these aspects are integrated within the physical geographical and anthropical entity of cross border Maramures these territories become project regions for the implementation of cross border socio economic, tourist, environmental sustainable development projects, and also for the research sector.

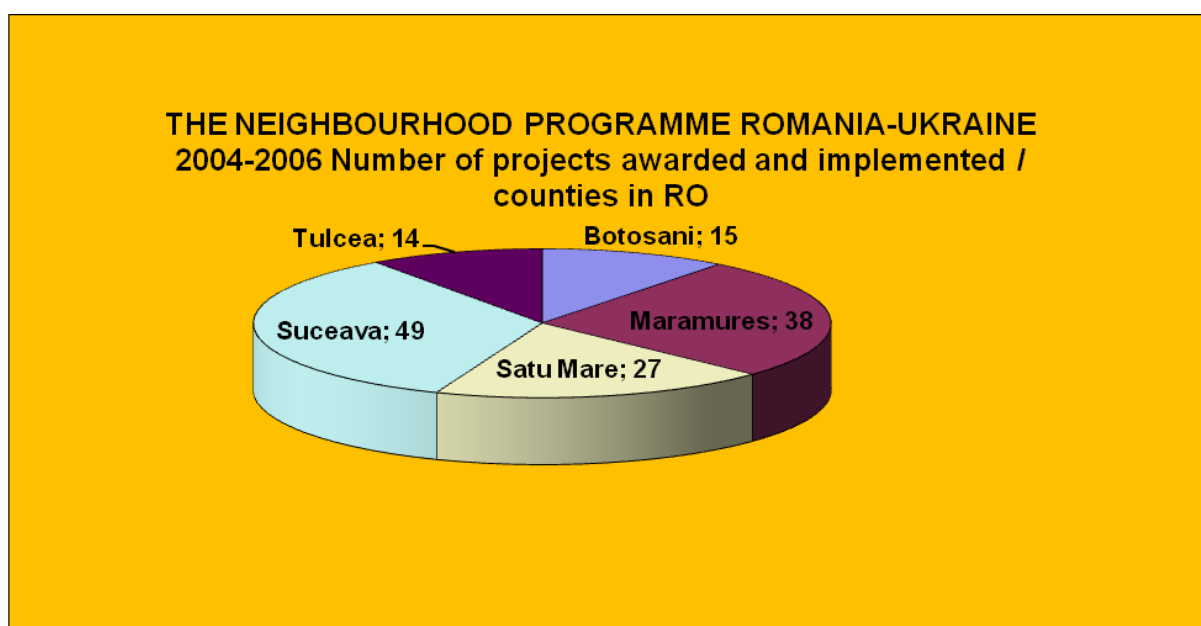


Fig. 2. The Number of Projects Implemented Within PHARE CBC 2004-2006 by Applicants from the Romanian Counties on the Border with Ukraine

Within the PHARE CBC Neighbourhood Programme Romania-Ukraine 2004-2006, the projects' applicants from the Maramures county (public administrations, educational institutions, NGO-s etc.) received financing for a number of 38 projects, the Suceava county 49, the Satu Mare county 27, the Botosani county 15 and the Tulcea county 14. From the 38 projects implemented by institutions from the Maramures county, (Fig. 2) only a number of 6 projects targeted the field of tourism cross border cooperation, totalizing an amount of 1.830.800 €.

The biggest project, from the value perspective, implemented on cross border tourism cooperation had an amount of 550.000 €. The applicant of this project called *ECOTUR-Tourism in the Transcarpathian Area* was The Maramures County Council from Baia Mare. Usually, the biggest projects, as value and as project region extension, (Table No.1) were implemented obviously by the more important institutions, such as county councils, since the management capacity of the applicant had to be supported, among other aspects, also by a minimum 10% co financing from the total value of the projects.

3. SWOT Analysis - The Perspectives of Tourism Development in the Cross Border Romanian – Ukrainian Region of Maramures

In this section of the paper we will briefly present a SWOT type analysis in order to elaborate a few strategies for the analysed Romanian-Ukrainian project region, from the tourism development point of view.

3.1 Internal Environment

a) Strengths:

- The presence of local/regional tourism brands especially of ethnographic type
- In the rural areas from the cross border Maramures we can find important natural resources, picturesque landscapes
- The presence at Sighetu Marmatiei of a specialization for the Geography of Tourism, within the Faculty of Geography, academic extension of the "Babes-Bolyai" University from Cluj-Napoca, as well as other faculties and specializations of the same university
- The presence of NGO-s with role in the sustainable development of the cross border Maramures region
- Tourist region well known at a national and international level
- Approx. 100.000 overnights/year are recorded at the accommodation structures from Solotvino (UA), for curative saline spa tourism
- The functioning of over 150 rural guesthouses in Maramures Land (RO)
- The implementation of a series of projects financed by the PHARE CBC (Cross Border Cooperation) Neighbourhood Programme Romania-Ukraine 2004-2006
- Hydro mineral resources
- Anthropical-saline lakes with curative spa potential on both subsystems of the cross border Maramures, as well as the presence of a curative salt mine in Solotvino (UA)
- Valuable natural and anthropical tourism resources in Transcarpathia (UA)

b) Weaknesses:

- The lack of consistency and real concrete results of some of the regional development projects, these resuming mostly to editing printed materials

- Extended pollution on the upper Tisa river basin, on both sides of the frontier, due to the mining activities but also to daily activities
- Depopulation by labour migration in Western Europe
- Lack of quality information and publicity materials about cross border Maramures in travel agencies or tourism trade fairs
- There isn't a precise and stable policy of synergetic management and planning instruments, but also implementation instruments of the financing projects at the level of the national development regions
- The degradation of the traditional life style in the rural areas
- Approx. 1400 people made redundant in the last years only from the salt mines personnel from Solotvino (UA)

3.2 External environment

a) Opportunities:

- The integration of the Maramures County (RO) within the Master Plan for the Development of National Tourism 2007-2026
- Romania's N.A.T.O. and E.U. member status and Ukraine's tendency to access these structures
- Availability of funds for financing the sustainable development cross border tourism activities through The Neighbourhood Programme Romania - Ukraine 2004-2006, Phare CBC (Cross Border Cooperation), ENPI CBC
- An increasing interest for the stay in the rural areas and for the curative saline spa tourism

b) Threats:

- The rural tourism networks that some of the rural tourism guesthouses from Maramures (RO) are integrated in do not market proper travel products
- The award criteria for the financing projects include some aspects that the population from the rural environment is not familiar to – the community is not aware of the role of the project; the project is not understood by its ability to generate revenue
- Complicated procedures to access the development funds
- Various negative decisions for the region issued by the political factor

„The political factor...is a very important component, because tourism, as a voluntary and non-productive activity, is the finest stability sensor of states or regions of destination. Great wars or regional conflicts have led to the decline, stop and even disappearance of tourist demand for them.”⁵

3.3 Elaborating the strategies:

a) Diversification strategy 1

- Launching cross border tourism products in the major cities of Romania and Ukraine and in the Western European countries (with the promotion of local and regional tourism brands on these markets)

b) Diversification strategy 2

"Even if geography or political science have thoroughly developed the idea of natural frontier, the cross border cooperation, reaching the environmental aspects, discovers the spatial continuity of the cross border areas, and thus the need for the integrated management of the cross border space in order to cope with the problems of pollution, soil degradation and its optimal use." ⁶

- The greening of degraded areas in the upper basin of the Tisa river, (common for the Romanian as well as the Ukrainian part), through the PHARE and ENPI CBC funds

c) Orientation strategy

- Stabilize the population by the emergence of new jobs in tourism and other related fields, in the cross border Maramures

d) Defensive strategy

- Elaborating population education programmes in the spirit of promoting the real traditional values and of protecting the natural and inhabited environment from the cross border region of Maramures (RO) – Transcarpathia (UA)

⁵ Cianga N., 2007, p. 28

⁶ Ricq Ch., 1996, p. 43-44

The cross border development of the tourism phenomenon at a regional level can mostly be done through the financing funds, taking into consideration the high amounts that need to be invested, from infrastructure to quality cultural relations. The Neighbourhood Programme Romania – Ukraine 2004-2006 was the first to provide a substantial offer for the cross border development projects from the two states, on multiple domains, starting with socio economic, cultural, environmental protection, small scale “*people to people*” and tourism activities, the Maramures County (RO) and the Transcarpathia Oblast (UA) being declared among the administrative units eligible for submitting projects.

Conclusions

The cross border Romanian – Ukrainian project region of Maramures holds valuable tourism resources in order to sustain the profile activities. It is absolutely necessary to undertake permanent actions in order to preserve these resources, to green the polluted areas, to maintain and revive the traditions, etc. The critical issues are connected to the modernization and establishment of new accommodation structures, of hotel type but especially of rural guesthouse type. These aspects must evolve in parallel with the human resources training for an increased quality of services and the implementation of integrated tourism marketing to provide revenue generating tourist flows.

To achieve sustainable development through tourism cross border cooperation projects, but not only, it is necessary to retain that very delicate balance between economic growth through the revenue from the profile activities and the protection the natural and inhabited environment, characterized by traditional houses and old wooden churches, costumes, agro-pastoral rituals, unmistakable folk music, hospitality, gastronomy - practically the tourist brands of the region.

The most important aspect to be referred to in connection with the initiation and implementation of tourism development projects and not only, in the cross border Romanian-Ukrainian region of Maramures, is the common denominator, that is their synergism for a proper functionality and a real sustainable development. The parts of the whole require careful analysis of the feed-back to adjust and change, in future, the systemic mechanisms.

Given the context of the Romanian-Ukrainian relations in cross border Maramures, we conclude that CBC financing type projects, which must become increasingly large and well focused on the key areas of mutual sustainable development, under the new ENPI financing programme (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument), are the solution to a real collaboration, with chances of success and growth in tourism, improvement of social issues and a better cultural cooperation, based primarily on the common heritage.

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